

Ezekiel

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Ezekiel 1:1-3:21

The vision and the man

1:1-3

Ezekiel was a priest who must have grown up during the years of Josiah's religious reforms, a younger contemporary of Jeremiah.

He must have known of Jeremiah's word that captivity was inevitable and imminent. He himself was taken into captivity with Jehoiachin in 598 BC (and some 10,000 others of the more prominent citizens—II Kin. 24:14-17), bringing to a halt any aspirations he may have cherished of serving in the temple. He lived there for at least another 22 years (29:17) and had ministry to the elders of those in captivity (81; 14:1).

Five years into that captivity, and in the (probably his) thirtieth year (11:11; cf. Gen. 7:11), the time when otherwise, he would have been eligible for priestly service, he saw this vision of God, received the word of God and the hand of God was upon him, setting him apart as a prophet.

1:4-28

The vision would have removed any suggestion that the throne of God Was destroyed or that it was far removed from their situation in captivity. The vision was of 'the likeness of the glory of the LORD' (1:28), and included a figure seated on 'something like a throne' (1:26). But the vision came with dynamic representations of mobility and of service to the Lord by four living creatures or cherubim (10:9). These creatures were of one action with seeing wheels, all under the direction of the Spirit, all in service to the word which came from the throne.

Judean captives would have entered Babylon from the North, and that would be the direction home again. Also, the Babylonian gods were thought to live in the North (Isa. 14:13).

The cherubim support the throne (cf. Psa. 18:10). They are first mentioned as guardians of Eden, then as creatures over the place of atonement and embroidered on temple hangings. 'They symbolized the presence and unapproachability of Jehovah' (Westminster Dictionary p. 99). Cf. seraphim in Isa. 6. See also Rev. 4. Their appearance is predominantly human but the faces suggest that they represent all living creatures. There being four relates to the world having 'four corners'—i.e. the whole world.

'Man is exalted among creatures; the eagle is exalted among birds; the ox is exalted among domestic animals; the lion is exalted among wild beasts, and all of them have received dominion, and greatness has been given them, yet they are stationed below the chariot of the Holy One' (Midrash Rabbah Shemoth § 23, quoted in Ellison p. 24).

'The wheels show that it is a chariot throne. Cf. Dan. 7:9. The platform above the creatures relates to the glassy sea in Rev. 4:6.

'Since God made man in His own image, He deigns, when He appears to man in symbolic form, to appear to him in 'a likeness as the appearance of a man'' (Ellison p. 25).

2:1-3: 11

Ezekiel, also a servant of that word, must stand in God's presence and is enabled to do so (2:12).

'it should be noted and pondered that, so far as we have any record, it is not to man prostrate and weak before Him that God gives His prophetic message, but to man standing on his feet and strengthened by the Spirit. There are times and seasons, when the child of God will be found prostrate before the Lord, but when he is to be God's 'fellow-worker," he is to stand upon his feet. 'It is man erect, man in his manhood, with whom God will have fellowship and with whom He will speak" (A B Davidson). God's service is a willing and rational service, not the service of automata' (Ellison p. 26).

He is given a scroll to eat which include the denunciations he is to proclaim to stubborn Israel. The word is not a sugar coated pill. Rather, the sweetness may derive simply from the fact that God was pleased to speak to their situation directly-though its entail would be painful.

The earlier part of the book (chs. 1-24) relates to the time between 598 BC and the final captivity in 586 BC and is largely denunciatory-because of the intransigence of the hearers. They fondly expected to be repatriated to their homeland before very long, as those still in Jerusalem still blithely trusted that their enemies, and God's judgements, would soon evaporate. Ezekiel had a similar task (in Babylon) to Jeremiah (in Jerusalem-Jer. 28:1-4) during this period.

After prophecies concerning the nations, the latter part of the book (chs. 33-48) relates to the period when the temple had been razed to the ground and Israel's king deposed; the tone then is markedly full of promise. The prophecies in these two sections are all dated, and in order.

He will experience the rebellion and transgressions, the impudence and stubbornness of the exiles-they are not yet humbled by their experience. He must not be dismayed by this; he has been equipped with determination to match that of the rebels. He must receive the word in his heart and hear it with his ears, and speak it whether it is heard or otherwise.

Cf. Paul's unceasing anguish (Rom. 9:2) which was not inconsistent with the joy he knew and commanded for others (Phil. 4:40). Paul wanted to know both the power of Christ's resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering (Phil. 3:10).

3:12-21

Ezekiel is now caught up, by the Spirit, in the very mobility of the throne of God and his great serving creatures. Yet, he went 'in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me' (3:14). The vision did not preserve him from the pain but equip him for it.

Seven days of sitting was the period prescribed for mourning (Gen. 50:10)—mourning the passing of his old being (?) or for the captives. It is also the period of consecration of a priest.

For a prophet to be a watchman may appear in Isa. 52:8 and almost certainly in Jer. 6:7 but was not common. This role is more prominent for Ezekiel (here and at 33:1-9). Important part of priest's role was to see that the law was known and kept. The singular 'you' emphasises the personal nature of this task.

'Jeremiah was a prophet who happened to be a priest; Ezekiel was a priest who happened to be a prophet' (Quoted by Ellison p. 30).

In the nine remaining weeks, it will be helpful if the following chapters are read before each Tuesday night:

3:22-7:27 Abominations in Israel, and her judgement

8:1-11:25

12:1-16:63

17:1-24:27

25:1-32:32 Prophecies against the nations

Note that this surrounded by statements re fall of Jerusalem: 24:2 and 33:21

33:1-35:15 Promise of hope, after Jerusalem's fall

36:1-39:29

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40:1-48:35

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Ezekiel 3:22-7:27

Abominations in Judah, and her judgement (1)

Immediate opposition to the word of God (3:22-27)

Seven days or more (3:16) after the vision by the river Kebar and his being given the role of watchman, Ezekiel is led to a plain (or valley) and sees again the glory of the LORD. He must return to his house and be bound and mute. This proves not to be a frustration of his call to be a watchmen but the occasion of it.

His being bound and silent were 'not to prevent the exercise of his vocation, but, on the contrary, to make him fitted for the successful performance of the work commanded him' (Keil p. 65—quoted in Taylor).

OR—'You ... they will tie with ropes' (NIV, rather than RSV). Already, the appearing of a prophet among the captives is not welcomed.

His message will be heard by some and not by others. As earlier in the chapter, no-one will be able to rely on their national heritage. The warning is out and must be delivered and each person will have to answer for themselves.

The inevitable fall of Jerusalem (4:1-5:4)

Symbolic action by a prophet had long been used by both true and false prophets (e.g. I Sam. 15:27f; I Kin. 11:29ff; 22:11; 11 Kin. 13:14-19). It is probable that, though intended for communication, they came to be superstitiously regarded as bringing about the action they represented (cf. Jer. 28:10f).

Whatever, when Ezekiel, now known to be a prophet, begins to make a drawing of Jerusalem and represent it as coming under seige, his-or God's-point would communicate clearly. It perhaps substituted for words when words would not receive a hearing.

So Isa. 20:2f; Jer. 19:1f, 10f.

Jeremiah came under persecution for a like action (Jer. 19:1-20:2).

Then, he must lie on one side and then the other for 390 plus 40 days (or possibly concurrently). This time roughly fits the period between 1:1 and 8:1—i.e. 14 months. So, this early period of Ezekiel's ministry is spent in largely symbolic actions occasionally explained. It is God this time who has (symbolically-by his word to Ezekiel) bound the prophet. What the people bind, God's binds—a representation of their being in exile, and what they refuse to hear, God silences.

Is Ezekiel literally bound and dumb; or did he have a sickness causing these phenomena; or was he figuratively curtailed and silenced? His dumbness is

mentioned again in **24:27; 29:21; 33:22**, but in other passages he is shown speaking normally (14:4 17:2f, 12; 19:1; 20:3—unless this is the suspension of dumbness mentioned in 3:27). Visitors to him expected him to talk normally (8:1; 14:1-4; 20:1). What is important is that God determined when he could socialise and when he could speak.

Again, it seems preferable to see the action as symbolic—i.e. Ezekiel is lying down when seen by the people and so as to communicate the word of God while they refuse to hear. In fact, he also does numbers of other things during this period—like bake bread.

The meaning of the periods is variously explained but the general meaning is clear. Israel had been apostate and under the judgement of God for a long time. Judah would share this fate for a lesser time but just as certainly.

Ellison offers (with diffidence) the explanation that 40 years is less than the actual period of Judah's captivity but reminiscent of the 40 years in the wilderness. The 350 additional days suffered by the North is roughly the period from the apostasy of Jereboam (931 BC) to the days of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel's limited food and water during this period illustrates the prolonged siege and captivity, and the pollution that would result from having to use defiled materials.

Shaving of head and beard was a sign of mourning. His hair represented what would happen to the captives; the action emphasises that the whole process was under the hand of God. Cf. 5:12.

Prophets used symbolic action in the New Testament period (Acts 21:11), but the whole duty of the church is to live by the vision of God which has come to us in the face of Christ. It is by our worship of God in holiness and love for one another (and all people), that others will know that we are his servants. It is this particularly that constitutes our witness when the world stubbornly refuses to hear the word of God.

The reason for this judgement (5:5-17)

Whether during, or at the end of the period of symbolic action, these explanations are given.

The presence of Jerusalem was so arranged by God as to influence the world, but it became more wicked and turbulent than surrounding nations (cf. Jer. 2:10-13) in that they sinned against a greater light and prosecuted their sins with greater vigour. V. 7 should read (with NIV, 'You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you'. Cf I Cor. 5: 1.

Jerusalem is mentioned because it was from here that its kings led them astray, it was here that they had defiled the temple and it was Jerusalem that would shortly fall (5:11). But the whole country—including the already dispersed Northern tribes re encompassed in what Ezekiel has to say.

Israel was clearly unable to grasp the severity of what God was about to do—he had never done anything like it before. He says: ‘I, I myself am coming against you’ (5:8)—without pity, to spend his anger and fury on them—words aroused by jealousy (5:13; cf. Exod. 20:5; Deut. 32:15-25). Their cannibalism is said to be occasioned by God himself (cf. 11 Kin. 6:28f; Jer. 19:9; Lam. 4:10).

The idolatry which aroused God’s Jealousy (6:1-14)

The mountains of Israel, and the ‘high places’ on them—are identified as the place where idolatry flourished.

Terrible loss of life would occur and their works would be wiped out (6:5-6). By these judgements, Israel would know that God was the LORD (6:7).

But those spared—but scattered among the nations—will remember the Lord—‘when I have broken their whorish heart’ (6:9—Ellison). They will loath themselves but will know also that God is the LORD.

One way or another, idolatry would fall. It seems that Ezekiel is to rejoice in this. ‘Alas’ may more usually be translated ‘rejoice’ (25:6) or perhaps ‘Aha’. If this is the case, it would be in the spirit of Psalm 2.

A lament for Israel—but Israel shall acknowledge the LORD (7:1-27)

There are three sections, each concluding with the assertion that Israel will know her Lord. He will catch them in the midst of their sins so that they know the reason for their suffering (vv. 4, 9).

Pride and violence, abundance, pre-eminence and arrogance characterise their behaviour (vv. 10-12, 24). But they will be unable to maintain their lives (v. 13)—the thing they felt so sure of. Their confidence will evaporate under the rod of God.

They will throw their silver and gold into the streets as a useless thing; it had been their stumbling block—perhaps because it was what they used to deck their gods (19-20). They will seek help from prophet, priest, elders and king (vv. 26-27) but none shall have any help to give (so Jer. 18:18).

God will avert his face to permit the profaning of his treasured place—the temple (v.22). Clearly, Israel’s coming to know the LORD, is dependent on judgement coming. So it is at the cross, when the Father averted his gaze from the Son—his temple—the terrible judgement which led to our knowing the Lord.

Ezekiel 8:1-11:25

The departure of the glory of the Lord from Jerusalem

What a daughter of Eli had feared when she named her son Ichabod after the capture of the covenant box (I Sam. 4:21-22) now, in fact, occurs—or is prophetically prefigured.

8:1

Elders have come to see Ezekiel, which may indicate that they now respect the word which comes from Ezekiel. Cf. the elders in Jerusalem who are seen as apostate (8:10-11). Elders also seek Ezekiel's counsel in 14:3; 20:1.

8:2-18

While they watch, Ezekiel is taken by the Spirit to see a further vision of God and also, visions of what was transpiring in Jerusalem—the Jerusalem which was now so inappropriately seen as the centre of God's actions.

The idolatry which necessitated judgement (chapter 6) is now identified, and so are the idolators.

By a doorway leading (from the *king's* palace) into the temple courtyard, the altar gate, is an idol 'that provokes to jealousy' (8:3). This may be an image of the Canaanite goddess Asherah like the one Manasseh placed, and removed, but which Josiah had to finally removed (11 Kin. 21:7; 11 Chron. 33:15; 11 Chron. 23:6).

But also there is the glory of the God of Israel—as he had seen It in the plain. **But is this the glory** that should be over the ark of the covenant? If so, the glory of God is already departing from Jerusalem (8:6), but is confronting this sacrilege.

Ezekiel then becomes privy to the secret idolatry (of animals) of seventy elders—the symbolism probably suggesting the majority of elders remaining in Jerusalem—including two prominent elders, one of them from a family who had helped in the reforms of Josiah and been friendly to Jeremiah.

Women outside the temple precincts are involved in worship of Tammuz, a Sumerian god of vegetation which included fertility rites. (See reference to this in Isa. 17:10f.)

Priests also are idolatrous; they turn their backs on the temple while in the altar court and worship the rising sun (so in Josiah's day—II Kin. 23:11). This is the place from whence they once made petition to God to spare his people (Joel 2:17). There are only 25 of the priests who are doing this but they are elders (9:6).

These idolatries are exacerbated by violence in the land (perhaps idolatry always leads to violence—cf. 7:23; 9:9). Holding the branch to one's nose seems to be part of false worship.

9: 1 - 11

God's presence is about to leave Jerusalem (8:4; 9:3; 10:4f, 19; 11:22-23). The glory of God rises from the throne to the threshold of the temple as if to transact some business. A terrible judgement must be released on Jerusalem, but first, protection is provided for those who are God's people—those who lament the defilements in Jerusalem (cf. Amos 6:6). Judgement then begins at the sanctuary (cf. I Pet. 4:17).

Ezekiel's lamentation for Jerusalem cannot stop the action because the sin of Jerusalem is clear (cf. Gen. 18:22ff; Amos 7:1-6): they have ceased to trust in the LORD, they have given their worship to other gods, and they have given way to (or winked at, or legalised?) violence.

Ezekiel's forehead may be hard (3:9) but his heart is of flesh (11:19; 36:26).

The Lord's preservation of his own in the context of judgement is reminiscent of the Exodus. (Note that in Rev. 11:8, Jerusalem is called Sodom and Egypt.) The six executioners and the scribe who shares the work of destruction anticipate the seven plagues of Revelation.

10:1-22

All that Ezekiel has seen of Jerusalem's sins and of the Lord's judgement has been in the context of knowing the glory of the Lord. This now comes to the fore again. Again, the glory of the Lord leaves the cherubim and moves to the threshold of the temple. Burning coals from among the wheels under the throne of God are needed—presumably to purify the city (cf. Isa. 6:6-7), and these are provided to the linen **clad scribe by one of the cherubim**.

But Ezekiel does not describe the spreading of the coals; he is absorbed by the glory of the Lord and its moving about the temple, and by the majesty of the cherubim which he now recognises as the same as the living creatures seen in Babylon. The glory of God returns to be above the cherubim and moves to the East gate of the temple—4.e. the exit.

11:13-21

Still as part of the vision, Ezekiel is shown 25 men outside the temple entrance who are advocating continued hostility towards the Babylonians.

This is the most likely form of 'wicked counsel' for which they are condemned. Their not building houses (*RSV* and *NIV* margin) would be saying that attention should be focussed on hostilities; i.e., we are meat in the pot—i.e. unless we fight.

He must prophesy to them (how, if this is still part of the vision, is not told to us). The Lord knows what is in the minds of these militarists—they already have blood on their hands and self protection rather than trusting the Lord is their only recourse. They are the ones who made Jerusalem a pot and their victims the flesh. They will be taken from this pot and dealt with at the border of Israel (so II Kin. 25:18-21).

Somehow, Ezekiel knows that Pelatiah has died in Jerusalem and he laments this; why he does this when he has seen the evil of this man, seems strange. It may be that he still holds hope for every living person in Jerusalem. He must see that God's hopes for

Israel are now in Babylon. It is the exiles who have sanctuary from God—contrary to the view held in Jerusalem (111: 15).

From Babylon, the exiles will be regathered, with one heart, to be the people of God. The detail of this will be considered later. For now, we see that, before the glory of the Lord moves out of Jerusalem, the promise of a wholistic renewal has been given.

Then, Ezekiel, sees (again in vision) the glory of God departing from Jerusalem, and, as part of the same vision, he is brought back to where he is in Chaldea. All of this is then shared with the exiles.

Ezekiel 12:1-16:63

The vision of chapters 8-11 mostly concerned the temple. Now the situation of king and the prophets are raised. What God had given had been **perverted and must therefore come up for review.**

The unfaithful prince (12:1-20)

12:1-16

Ezekiel must dramatise Israel going into captivity (vv. 1-7). It is an oracle in particular concerning the prince. Ezekiel prefers not to see him as king-perhaps for the same reason that Solomon is called prince after he had been rejected by God (I Kin. 11:34).

Cf. also 21:25.

He will flee but be captured, blinded and die in captivity. Destruction will close in behind him—this will be the doing of the LORD (vv. 8-14) and both those who perish and those who survive in captivity will know that God is the LORD (vv. 15-16).

The prophecy occurs about 590 BC, two years before the revolt of Zedekiah (11 Kin. 24:18-20; 11 Chron. 36:11-14). The fact of his deportation (in 586 BC) is recorded in 11 Kings 25:4ff.

12:17-20

In a further message, Ezekiel must eat and drink as those in Jerusalem will do—fearfully and awaiting their doom. This is further to the light rations described in 4:9-12.

Prophets and prophecy (12:21-14:11)

12:21-28

The popular proverb concerning God's word never changing anything will soon be very inappropriate. All that God has said will close in on Israel. Cf. 11 Pet. 3:4.

The prophecies doom by Isaiah and Micah had not yet taken effect and although some prophecies of Ezekiel's were of short term fulfilment, they felt able to distance themselves from any threat of the doom being intended for them.

'Micah and Isaiah had spoken as though the Assyrian invasions of Judah were the judgements of the Day of Jehovah instead of their foreshadowing, even as the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was a foreshadowing of the second coming of Christ in judgement. Instead of recognizing that the grace of God had caused a postponement of the worst, they believed that the worst had come and had proved much easier than expected' (Ellison p. 54).

The captivity did, in fact, curb the tendency to false prophecy (Zech. 13:2-6).

13:1-16

The true prophets—Ezekiel and Jeremiah, were two among many who were regarded as prophets by the people.

Jer. 23:9-40 is a commentary on false prophets. Note that doctrinal orthodoxy, the test usually applied today, is not an adequate test of truthfulness. See Ellison pp. 51ff.

The false prophets (a term not actually used until the NT) expect a fulfilment of their word-but not of God's (vv. 1-7). The false prophets will be unheard, excommunicated, and exiled (vv. 8-9). These prophets had given blessing to a fortification project. Their 'whitewashing' will be washed away and the fortifications broken down-again, all so that they will know that God is the Lord (vv. 10-16).

13:17-25

Certain women were practising idolatrous rites-with a view to protecting their own lives. They would be called sorcerers today. But in the false counsel they gave, the wrong people have died, the righteous been discouraged and the unrighteous encouraged. The Lord will nullify their influence.

Female prophetesses mentioned by name are Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Noadiah, but this section may show that prophetesses were common. Their low social status may have kept them from having any greater influence than maintaining these superstitious rituals.

14:1-11

Certain elders of Israel (same as 8:1?) who still cherish idols (even though there is no record of any such activity in in captivity), wish the comforts of a word from God. They are typical of many in Israel (vv. 4,7).

The Lord warns them to repent. **None-the-less, if they appear before him, he will answer them** with judgement-again so that they will know he is the LORD (vv. 1-8). Prophets who are deceived (that is false prophets who cannot endure to have nothing to offer) are deceived by the LORD and both prophet and enquirer will be destroyed. All this is with a view to the purifying of the people-the promise of chapter 11 is briefly repeated (vv. 9-11).

'The false prophet does not create a generation that does not know God, but is created by it, and he is one of God's instruments of judgement on that generation' (Ellison p. 58).

The appropriateness of Judah's punishment (14:12-15:8)

14:12-2 3

The prayers of Moses, Samuel, David and Elijah had saved the nation in previous eras. But not now even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in the city. Like Abraham's Lot, only the righteous themselves would be saved.

These three men were all known as righteous men who had delivered others by their intercessions (if the well know Daniel is in fact in view). But in fact, these men saved precious little. Figures who had greater effect are Abraham and Moses-but the

occasion does not warrant citing them. (The point of Abraham's petition was that if Lot had not influenced 10 men in Sodom, there was little lasting hope for the city—Ellison p. 60.)

Presumption on national identity was at an end. This would be true for any nation and especially for Jerusalem (vv. 12-21).

'Righteousness' must, in the Old Testament, always be righteousness by faith (cf. 33:13—in which chapter this matter is dealt with more fully).

The Lord is speaking to the righteous or to the prophet—those who weep for the pollutions in the land (so 9:4). They are promised that there will be survivors—whose lives will be vindication enough of all that God had done and consolation to those who had wept (vv. 22-23).

15:1-8

The people of Jerusalem have no more usefulness nor future than a charred remnant of a vine clipping.

For Israel as vine, see Gen. 49:22; Deut. 32:32; Hos. 10:1; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21—usually used to illustrate the lack of expected fruit. Here it is cited to show that Israel does not have natural superiority among the nations. In its charred state, it will no longer bear fruit but be burned.

Jerusalem, queen and harlot (16:1-63)

16:1-34

Israel's history is now likened, pathetically, to an abandoned new-born child, but brought into life by God. When the child is grown, God pledges his troth to her, enriched her greatly so that she becomes famous—only to trust in her riches and use her beauty for prostitution—to a degree that made Philistines blush (v. 27).

Israel's parentage, defacto, is the Semitic (Amalekite) and non Semitic (Hittite) elements in Canaan at the time of Abraham and the conquest (Josh. 24:14f).

Is this why Moses and not Abraham is looked back to as the founder of Israel's religion?

Israel's unfaithfulness is often likened to adultery, but here, worse—prostitution.

16:35-43

Judgement will come on her in the most painful way—from those who she hoped would care for her.

16:44-52

In devastating allegory, Israel is shown to have family ties to damn her, yet she is worse than her relatives, including Sodom—with her damning pride, excess of food, prosperous ease and carelessness of the needy. Israel should be ashamed.

Jerusalem was worse than Samaria in that she went further in religious apostasy and in that She did not heed the warning of Samaria's downfall (Jer. 3:6-13).

The daughters of the respective cities are probably the dependent cities round about them.

16:5 3-63

Yet this shame will not be bitter and hopeless; rather, it will be followed by restoration-together with her 'family'. God gave to Israel the fruits of her breaking covenant, but, would both remember his covenant made with Moses, and make a new covenant which would include these renewed family from the nations.

Ezekiel 17-23

The treachery of Zedekiah (chapter 17)

In symbolic language, Ezekiel describes the folly of Zedekiah's being planted alongside rich streams—by the Babylon overlords—only thereafter to turn (now as a vine ailing chapter 15 and showing the contingent nature of Israel) to Egypt to be watered and tended. This is described in terms of Zedekiah breaking a covenant made with God. In fact, it had been made with Babylon, but probably under oath to his God. This covenant was also in conformity with the purpose of God as announced by Jeremiah (11 Chron. 36:13).

The king of Babylon felt most provoked by the action of Zedekiah and dealt with him harshly (11 Kin. 25:6-7). However, God would pick another king—another tip from a cedar—and plant him in the land. He would become a great tree. Jesus sees in this imagery the nature of his own kingdom which would provide a lodging place for the birds of the field—the nations of the earth would find their safety and home, not in Babylon, but in him (**Mark 4:30-32**).

The prophecy could be dated 588 BC, the time of Zedekiah's revolt. The prophecy may then be necessary because the captives were using this news as reason to think that their captivity will be short-lived.

The end of presumption and the accepting of personal accountability (chapter 18)

Here is a clear statement of personal accountability. It is not a person's parents or past that can justify them, but only their present choice of what is right.

This point had already been made in Deut. 24:16. The statement in Exodus 25:5 and 34:7 and Deut 5:9 that the iniquity of the fathers will be visited on the children is never made a matter of Israel's law. And it is the visiting of the iniquities on those who hate God.

Israel had many covenantal blessings which came with their birth and their heritage as members of Israel. But it had never been intended that this should be the basis of presumption; rather, of gratefulness. Here we see the presumption of Israel come to full flower and God's unequivocal statement that each person will have to make his own calling and election sure (so Matt. 22:14; 11 Pet. 1: 10).

What is this righteousness? It is the righteousness they have done and they shall live because of it (v. 22). It is to this end that God wants the people personally to repent—to cast their transgression behind them (v. 21). But the doing righteousness is also described as 'getting a new heart and a new spirit' (v. 31). So the righteousness which Israel is to do is to turn and receive a new heart from God. This had already been promised (111: 19) and been described as the new or everlasting covenant in (116:60, 62).

Clearly then, the promise that none of their transgressions will be remembered (18:22) is not because they deserve this but because they now trust in God—as revealed in their change of behaviour.

It seems that pessimism had spread among the remaining population in Israel because of the judgement and they thought there was no value to pursue righteousness.

The sins to be avoided in Israel are listed again in v.6-9 starting with idolatry and moving to the abuse of marriage, abuse of the poor man, abuse of property, and of those who had a claim on his generosity.

Ezekiel had been called to see the sin as Israel as clearly as any prophet, but he did so in the light of God promising a thorough restoration—with a few who remained in Jerusalem, and for those in exile who saw the point of their judgement.

A lament for the princes of Israel (chapter 19)

The status of Judah's kings after Josiah is suspect; here, two of them are called princes. After Josiah died, his youngest son, Jehoahaz reigned—but only for three months before he was taken captive to Egypt.

When Jehoakim died, his son, Jehoiachin was made king. Within three months, he surrendered to Babylon (598 BC).

To highlight Judah's pomposity, these two brief reigns are likened to young lions set up by their mother. But the first was swamped by Egypt and the second captured by Babylon.

God gathering the true worship of Israel (20:1-44)

The Lord had sought Israel's fidelity in Egypt, in the wilderness—for two generations, and in the promised land. In each case, his people had turned to idols. But in each case also, the Lord acted for the sake of his name so that his name would not be profaned (vv. 9, 14, 22). But though the nation had been preserved, they still gave themselves to idols—all over the country and to the extent of child sacrifice.

With Israel's evil thoroughly catalogued, God says: 'I will be king over you' (v. 33); he will gather them from captivity and bring them to judgement whereby he would purge the evil from them i.e. those who would not repent. He would bring them within 'the bond of the covenant' (v. 37) and they would know that he was the Lord. For the rest (v. 39), they could serve their idols but the Lord would have his true people (v. 40). God's holiness would be among them and the nations would see this.

These things are rehearsed for the elders who come to hear the word of God. They will not be given a word until the judgement has fallen.

The Lord's sword (20:45-21:32)

Ezekiel has seen a vision of the destruction of Jerusalem. He is to express dismay and then to explain why he is so disturbed. God's fury will be satisfied in his destruction of Jerusalem (v. 17).

The king of Babylon will be the agent of this. Zedekiah—the vile wicked prince must remove his turban of office. There will be no king until he comes whose right it is. This interprets Gen. 49:10.

The Ammonites who seek to help in the destruction of Jerusalem and to ally themselves with the conqueror would gain nothing but God's judgement for their trouble (28-32).

Jerusalem-the city of blood (chapter 22)

Violence was now endemic in Jerusalem—if not literally, then in the lifestyle which destroyed life. Idolatry is destructive of all true community. Beginning with idolatry, all other manner of law breaking emerged. This was evident in its princes (v. 25), its priests (v. 26), its officials (v. 27) and its prophets (v. 28) and all the people (v. 29) and none could be found to change the drift not even Josiah and Jeremiah.

The unfaithfulness of political dependencies (chapter 23)

Once again, Israel's history is likened to adulterous liaisons. Both Samaria and Judah have played the harlot, but Judah more insidiously (v. 14). The Lord will turn her lovers against her (v. 22); she will drink her sister's cup (v. 32); she will be given up to the methods of judgement of the oppressor (v. 24). The North lusted after Assyria and was judged by her. Judah saw this but still lusted after the Assyrians (v. 12) and then with the Babylonians (vv. 16f). They pursued this with great eagerness (v. 40). **But there would be and** end to lewdness in the land (v. 48).

The earlier use of adultery imagery (chapter 16) served to reveal the corruption of Israel's religion; here it exposes the true nature of her reliance on other nations. Ancient peoples considered their gods to be in charge of all of life and conceived of them battling among themselves for supremacy. This was reflected in the wars on earth. For Israel's ambassadors to attend on foreign kings, was effectively for them to subject the Lord to this debacle among the gods.

Instances of these false liaisons abound in Israel's and Judah's histories. This included Hezekiah's showing of his riches to the king of Babylon (I I Kin. 20).

Ezekiel 24-32

Prophecies against the nations

Beginning with Jerusalem (chapter 24)

The warnings we have already read concerning Jerusalem now become fact. It is nearly ten years since the capture of Ezekiel, King Jehoiachin and 10,000 others—598 BC to 588 BC—and the siege which will bring Jerusalem and Zedekiah to their heels begins.

In the section we read next week, an escapee from this fall—in the tenth month of the twelfth year of captivity (586 BC) comes to Ezekiel to tell him of the actual fall of Jerusalem (33:21).

Firstly, Ezekiel represents the action of God concerning Jerusalem with the imagery of a rusty pot (representing the unabashed bloodlust in Jerusalem—22:6) in which the pieces of meat are unceremoniously removed (the siege). Then the pot itself is melted in the fire—to remove the rust that had not been attended to previously.

Secondly, Ezekiel's wife dies. His mourning must remain private. When asked about the meaning of this, he is to explain that the delight of their eyes, the temple will be removed and they must not mourn its passing.

Is this because they should heed the vision of the glory of the Lord leaving the temple—but still well in control? The language may suggest their illicit trust in that temple.

Ellison suggests it is for the instruction of Judean residents, who, if they show mourning at Nebuchadnezzar's reprisals against Zedekiah's rebellion, will appear as fellow rebels and share his fate. Outward mourning may even have been forbidden. Knowing that this had been foreseen in Ezekiel's bereavement would have been encouragement for them to recognise God's hand in all of this—'You will know that I am the Lord'.

The accountability of the nations (chs. 25-32)

At this point in the book, Ezekiel (or his editor) introduces all the prophecies which came to him, during the period of the siege and just after it, concerning the nations around Israel.

The nations in focus are, firstly, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia—nations who had earlier joined in the rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar (except perhaps the latter) but withdrawn in time to save their skin, and then obsequiously, punished Judea to prove their new loyalty.

Tyre and Sidon were great traders, though on the wane at this time. The truly great traders were the Babylonians. While the prophecy against Tyre and Sidon stands as it

does, it may be intended as a suggestion of the greater sins and judgements of Babylon-whose situation it was still inappropriate to write about.

Lastly, Egypt and her allies are spoken of. They had been a major stumbling block for Israel in the last days of her kingship.

These nations did not have the law in the sense that Israel did but are accountable for the light they did have. This included 'natural law' (as in Rom. 1:20-32; 2:13-14) and especially the witness of Israel among them.

It is significant that it was always the Lord GOD (*Adonai Yahweh*) who spoke to the nations—the same as for messages to Israel. It is God who has revealed himself to Israel in covenant (*Yahweh*) with whom the nations have to deal. What God has done in that nation is a witness to the others and so they have the greater responsibility for having the greater light available.

There is little indication of whether ambassadors were sent to these nations with the following messages. It may be that the message is concerning these nations. However, the message was always available for them because God ordained Israel as his light to the nations. Israel, hearing and benefiting by these messages would convey the truth of the messages to the nations anyway.

The sins of the nations (chs. 25-32)

The Ammonites and people of Tyre gloated over the fall of the Lord's temple (25:3; 26:2); Moab said Judah was like any other nation-denying its election by God (25:8); Edom acted vengefully against Judah (25:12); Tyre also was arrogant in the 'beauty' of her fleet and the trade they secured (27:3, 11; cf. Israel in 16:15); her heart was proud and blasphemous in her economic brilliance and success (28:2-5, 9), and she became violent (28:16) and unjust (28:18).

The king's claim to be 'a god' (28:2) uses *el* rather than *elohim*, suggesting that he is claiming to represent god rather than be god. **Egypt was the only ancient** monarchy to claim deity (see Ellison p. 108).

Egypt thought they owned the Nile (29:3, 9) and were proud (30:6; 31:10; 32:12) and ostentatious (32:2).

The judgement of the nations (chs. 25-32)

Ammon and Moab would become prey to Arab tribes. Edom would finally fall to an Israelite John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC).

Tyre would be destroyed and never rebuilt (26:14); the city, its prince and its king are all lamented. It was subdued by Babylon in 573 BC.

The word for 'lament (*qinah*) means a funeral dirge, so that Ezekiel, in the dirge, is not lamenting but taunting the king.

Because this yielded no booty for Babylon-God's payment for their services in discharging his will—he gave Egypt over to them and so the attention turns to Egypt.

Egypt who had been a 'leaning post' for Judah—and not even a reliable one (29:6-7)—will become so weak that it will no longer be a 'leaning post' for anyone.

The ransacking of Egypt (as far as we know *is* concerned) happened under Cambyses the son of Cyrus in 525 BC. From here, it was subject to constant in-fighting until Alexander the Great took it (332 BC) and the Ptolemies ruled and Hellenised *It* The Romans took it In 30 BC. Since then, it has been ruled by Arab, Turk, Fatimid and Saracen, Mamluk, Ottoman, Turk and Albanian.

The lamentation over Egypt describes her sharing Sheol (the abode of the dead in the Old Testament) with all the other nations who had fallen, including some who were soon to fall. They were the uncircumcised—a term of shame in Israel. It may also suggest that for them—those not under the elective purpose of God—there would be no rising from the grave. By contrast, for Israel, national resurrection was certain.

The healing of the nations (chs. 25-32)

The LORD would deal with all of these nations so that they would know that God was the LORD (25:5, 7, 11, 17; 26:6; 28:22-24, 26; 29:6, 9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25-26; 32:15), just as for Israel (24:27). In effect, his judgements were for the healing of the nations because they could not prosper unless they acknowledged the word by which they had their life and vocation.

But this healing of the nations does not come by a separate salvation for each nation. It is Israel who will be raised from the dead. In her salvation lies the salvation of all peoples (John 4:22).

Ezekiel 33-35

From the beginning of Israel's history, it had been clear that the blessings on the nation were dependent on the obedience of individuals and clear steps had been prescribed to keep this point before the people. It is clear that, neither by instruction or by warning or by executing punishment, had Israel's shepherds kept her people aware of their privilege and responsibility. God had now come to do this himself.

Each person must make his or her own calling and election sure (cf. Matt. 22:14; 11 Pet. 1:10).

Ellison calls these first two sections two aspects of Ezekiel's recommissioning.

Heeding the warnings (33:1-9)

After these many warnings, to Israel and the nations, Israel in particular (the people of the prophet) is told that the reason for a sword 'coming upon' a land is that they will see it coming, be warned, and so, not fall—that is, if they heed their posted sentries. The message must be heeded by Ezekiel but is addressed to the people. They have had the services of Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel in Babylon and these have been faithful. Those who hear have their own blood on their own heads.

So Jonah.

Dropping excuses and repenting (33:10-20)

In chapter 18, Israel was told that each person (not their parents) must answer for their own sins and that none, in fact, need stay in their sins. They should get themselves 'a new heart and a new spirit'. This is summarised here.

'Then the temptation had been for the exiles to see themselves so caught up by the entail of the past that effort on their part was useless. Now, as with dull foreboding they waited for the end of all hope, their fate seemed so evil that the doing of God's will seemed to offer no hope of improving it' (Elision p.118).

Israel has wallowed in self pity. They have suffered for their sins but claim no ability to change so as to avert disaster. This is not so: God has 'no pleasure in the death of the wicked'. If they desire and do righteousness in the present, they will live. 'None of the sins that they have committed shall be remembered against them; they have done what is lawful and right, they shall surely live.

This cannot be justification by works; rather, it is repentance—a turning from idols to God (1 Thes. 1:9), and they have every incentive to repent because no past sins will ever be recalled. A new heart and a new spirit is at the same time a gift and a responsibility. So on the day of Pentecost: 'Save yourselves...'

In fact, however, Israel is complaining about the injustice of God.

Phoney hearers (33:21-33) With the fall of Jerusalem, the restriction on Ezekiel's speech is lifted (cf. 24:27).

Even until now, optimism-or confidence born of adeptness at getting their own way-is mixed with the fatalism noted above. Nothing Israel can do will avert the doom now failing. The reason for this certainty is the on-going commitment of Israel to her evil deeds. 'Its proud might will come to an end'.

A fuller picture of the exiles at this point is given in Jer. 40-43.

They had earlier built their confidence on the temple (Jer. 7:4); it is now pushed back to their origins in Abraham (Ezek. 33:24).

So, although Ezekiel may now speak freely, he should not expect a congregation (the gathering to hear the word of the Lord—cf. Gen. 49:10). They come as an audience-to be entertained. But they will finally know Ezekiel is a prophet.

No time indication is given for chaps. 34-39. They may be a summary of much fuller teaching.

Shepherds—false and true (34:1-10)

Israel's shepherds were their prophets, kings, priests, wise men and elders. The general history of Israel's kings seems to be in view here. Their 'force and harshness' were not for correction but for personal gain. Consequently, Israel is now scattered. The only true shepherding would have been to show Israel her covenant God and his law and to lead her into the ways of blessing (Jer. 3:15-20; 50:6-7).

Ironically, they had been both harsh and licentious—harsh where it had to do with their own well-being, licentious in letting the nation be sated with permissive idolatry.

The Lord would act to bring them to account and cancel their service, and, rescue his sheep.

God—the true shepherd (34:11-22)

The prototype king of Israel was the one who taught Israel to call the Lord their shepherd (Psa. 23). This shepherding, the Lord now does. God says that he 'will feed them with justice' (v. 16).

The manner of this is probably described in the following section.

The image changes and sheep are distinguished from sheep—the strong from the weak.

The true king and a lasting covenant (34:23-31)

The doer of this shepherding will be the Davidic King—that is, he of whom all kingship was the anticipation (i.e. David's 'lord'—Psa. 110; Matt. 22:43-45; also Isa. 55:3).

God's covenant with Israel had, from the first, proclaimed peace (Lev. 26:6; Num. 6:26; 25:12; cf. I Kin. 2:33), but when the Lord proclaimed peace, Israel was for war—with God. The Lord would secure peace for his people however, in a covenant of peace.

This **will** be dealt with more fully In 37:26.

Covenant as broken has been mentioned several times in chapters 16-17, and also God remembering his covenant and establishing his covenant with Israel, an everlasting covenant (16:59-62), and God bringing Israel into the bond of the covenant (20:37).

It is clear to us, as to the Spirit who inspired this prophecy, that Jesus Christ would be the Lord who would come to shepherd his people (John 10: 1-18, 25-29). It is clear also that the Prince of peace (Isa. 9:6) would secure a peace which could not be shaken by hostile forces (Isa. 54:10; John 16:33).

Edom's hatred and doom (35:1-15)

Mt Seir is Edom's symbolic eminence, but the greatness of this place and people will be for nothing because they spoke with derision and covetousness of what God had put aside as his inheritance—his people inheriting his promised blessing.

See Ezek. 25:12-14; also Jer. 48.

Mt Seir may be chosen as a way to identify Edom because Esau was sent away for the fatness of the earth (Gen. 27:39) and this is what Mt Seir is—4 to 5 thousand feet high and craggy. Her hatred of Judah was implacable since the days of Amos. It may be symbolic of all who chose the lust of the flesh instead of the Lord's portion and those who hate election over against living by the work of their own hands hate his people (so Ellison).

The Lord is about to announce in some detail the plans to give Israel a future and a hope (Jer. 29:11), but in this (and the following) chapter, he shows that what God does he does in the sight of all peoples.

Ezekiel 36-37

This must be one of the most remarkable passages in the Old Testament. A people who had been polluted, judged and had no hope are now told that their Creator, their Covenant Head, would restore their land to them, purify their hearts, be God to them, reunite them under their one King and secure them in his blessing forever. More than anything else, God would no longer be profaned among the nations—in fact, his people and the nations and even the hills and valleys of Israel would know that he was the Lord. He would be among them as their God and they would be his people.

The mountains of Israel-Israel's inheritance (36:1-15)

The Lord is pictured coming with 'hot jealousy' against the nations—especially Edom (v. 5) who have gloated over possession of Israel—the land the Lord had promised Abraham he would give to his descendants.

The previous chapter showed God's wrath against Edom; this passage shows the action as it will be experienced by Israel.

The land has had to be enemy to Israel (Ezek. 6; cf. Num. 13-32), but will again become her abode. The land itself will know that God is the Lord. In fact, many captives returned to Israel in 536 BC and others in the next century.

The land's causing the people to stumble (v. 15) may be a reference to the prosperity which caused her trust in her riches.

Israel had hardly ever fully possessed the land that God gave to her. For example, the Philistines' cities were made to pay tribute in David's day, but never again since then. God would give her what she had refused to possess.

The Christian understands that the creation is as yet still not free to yield her full increase—even to God's people (Rom. 8:18-25). But believers are persuaded that this is certain and rejoice in hope. The inheritance being 'reserved in heaven for us' (1 Pet. 1:3-9) does not need to preclude the fact that our inheritance is a new heaven and a new earth.

Old Testament solidarity of race based on being of the earth (adam from adamah). (It is the Greeks who base the unity of the race on being of one spirit.) So fate of man and the earth from which he comes are linked.

God's name profaned by his judgements (36:16-21)

God's name was not only profaned by sin but by the seemingly failed promise of God. As noted already, this had been a constant dilemma throughout Israel's history (20:9-10, 14, 22; 22:16). Our salvation is that God has concern for his holy name—the name as revealed in Exodus 34:5-7.

God's sanctifying of his own name—in Israel's salvation (36:22-38)

This is the prayer we first pray in the Lord's prayer—'Hallowed be your name'. It is hallowed in us

and for display to the nations. There is an inevitable public aspect to salvation.

The salvation will be physical, sin forgiving, moral and affectional, a work of God's Spirit and with a view to the communion of God with man.

Ezekiel sees the gospel through the imagery of the law and its ceremonies.

A new heart is first mentioned in 11:19. Because of revolt against God, Israel's heart had become stony and unable to respond to grace. But grace renews the organ of response to grace.

Repentance will be total-God will have removed all **ground for self-trust and self-glorifying**.

The land will be like Eden and the people as numerous as a flock of sheep in Jerusalem ready for an offering to the Lord.

Prophetic work-resurrection (37:1-14)

All that God has promised now becomes the charter of the prophet. Israel has lost hope (37:11), but the prophet is asked if these bones can live. He must speak to what has no life-and he must speak to the Spirit to do his bidding-which is God's bidding. Israel's salvation is a resurrection from the grave. Israel being Israel is not a matter of mere lineage but a matter of knowing that her whole life is of God. This resurrection will make that point.

The bones are of the slain-in battle, perhaps because of the Lord's judgements, but an army to be raised up-presumably to do baffle for God.

The 'rattling' In v. 7 should rather be translated earthquake.

That these verses apply to ourselves as the church is clear from I Pet. 2:9; 1 Cor. 10: 1. But there is reason to believe that literal Israel is not excluded from future blessing—as a people (Rom. 9-11).

'Breath', 'wind' and 'spirit' are all translations of ruach.

The new union, the restored king, and the new covenant (37:15-28)

Israel was a people united by promise. Their laws were for the securing of that union—in solicitous care of one for another. The shame of their disunion under the judges was put aside in David's gathering the nation as one people-but this soon fell apart over the private agenda of Solomon's son.

The purpose of God could not be fulfilled with a disunited people. His plan for the fulness of time is the unity of all things (Eph. 1:10), effected in Christ, through his death (Eph. 2:13-14), and witnessed to by the unity and concern of his people for one another (Eph. 4:11-3).

This union would not come without the King who would secure it (37:22). The linking of this with an end of their idolatry (37:23) suggests that idolatry and disunity go together.

Concerning the coming king, cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-4; etc.

The covenant of peace (34:25) or everlasting covenant (16:6G-62), coming again under the bond of the covenant (20:37), have been mentioned before. Here it is linked with the establishment of God's sanctuary among his people. This, from the beginning, has been the **unique feature of the people of God-God** is among them (Exod. 33:15-16; 34:8-9).

Ezekiel 38-39

These chapters appear to point beyond the immediate need for restoration of Israel to their land, because, at a time when Israel is settled in unwalled villages (38:11; cf. Zech. 2:4), these assembled tribes from North, East and South of Israel, under the direction of '**Gog**' ready themselves to attack God's regathered people.

Attempts to make verbal links between 'chief prince' (rosh) with Russia and Meshech with Moscow and Tubal with Tobolsk (as in the Scofield Reference Bible) are out of character with the context as all the names relate to places at the time of the prophet.

38:1 -13

The fact that little is known of these fringe tribes may suggest that the whole picture is symbolic of nations gathering against the people of God. The general style of these chapters is apocalyptic—i.e. by symbolism, they expose the true situation concerning God and his people and God and his enemies.

These nations are entirely at God's disposal (38:4; cf. 29:3-5), are held in readiness for a long time (38:8). The prophecies of restoration will have been fulfilled but these new aggressors will descend like a locust plague (cf. Joel 2:1 -11). Other nations will see the opportunity to add their greed to the pool and to join in the attack (38:13).

Re Israel as centre of the earth; cf. Ezek. 5:5.

That this picture is taken up in Revelation (16:12-16; 20:7-10) shows that the picture is significant for all peoples. Far from a general softening in attitude of world powers to the people of God, they will always see them as spoil. Their evil intent will be retained obstinately to the end. But this will accomplish nothing, **and therefore, need not bring dismay** to the people of God.

The sixth bowl of wrath poured out on the earth makes way for this great demonically inspired assembling. But it is the day of God Almighty. Christ calls us, in this day, to stand clothed (probably meaning to be alert-as on guard duty) so as not to be ashamed. The implication is that we will need to stand in justification—in, anticipation of vindication—when such an assembly of world powers seems to make Christ's cause seem so impotent. (So Eph. 6:10-18.) Psalm 2 had already made it plain to the church that Christ's kingdom would brook no rivals.

'Clothed' raises the nature of the clothing-in white raiment—signifying their being washed in Christ's blood but also representing our corresponding practical deeds (Rev. 7:14; 19:8).

3 8:14-23

Again, the Lord would display his holiness to the nations in the saving of his people in the presence of their enemies. The demonstration of his power would be like the days of the exodus-when no other nation could deny the power of God in the election and saving of his people. So God will be known by all the nations. This matter is taken up in Revelation 20:7-10.

The great shaking in the land of Israel (v. 19) signifies earthquakes (cf. Isa. 24:18-20; Joel 3:16; Hag. 2:69).

3 9:1 -2 0

This second chapter adds little that is new but amplifies the earlier account.

Gog's army will be decimated and then devoured by vultures (cf. Isa. 34:6f; Jer. 46:10; Zeph. 1:7-9; Rev. 19:17-21). Israel will acknowledge that this is the day of which the prophets spoke and will know 'the Holy One in Israel'.

Israel will have firewood in plenty for seven months-in the weapons of their enemies, and seven months of cleansing the land of remaining dead bodies-which had to be buried just outside their territory.

The birds being summoned after the clean up operation is described simply suggests that there will be plenty of work for the former and plenty of food for the former.

3 9:21-24

The local situation has been the captivity; the reason for this had been Israel's treachery.

Breaking now with the eschatological language, Ezekiel affirms his purpose, that in restoration, and in the mercy that stood behind it and the jealousy of God for his own name, Israel will bear their shame (preferred reading, and consistent with 6:9; 16:21; 20:43; 36:31). Cf. NIV, RSV, 'forget their shame'.

The vision of the new Jerusalem (chapters 40-48)- Introduction

These chapters describe a temple so perfect in symmetry that none need have any fears about the perfection of God's plan for his people. No longer is the temple polluted and the Lord absent (cf. Ezek. 8:1-11:25 with 43:5). The Lord is again enthroned among his people. It is the centre of Israel's renewed life-duties and priviledges are prescribed and territory assigned, and from the temple flows a river of life to the barren places of the earth.

This vision is the basis of further visions given to John and recorded in *Revelation*.

Ezekiel 40-48

The vision of the new Jerusalem

These chapters were written some thirteen years after chapters 33-39 and are strikingly different in style (NBD p. 363). But they are a necessary conclusion to a book which has witnessed the closure of priestly worship in Jerusalem, the judgement on its pollutions and the departure of the glory of the Lord from the temple. Ezekiel is to note carefully all that he sees, and, to tell Israel the detail (40:4).

The chapters should be read by us as an assurance that the Lord will perfect the worship of his people and will live among us as our God-in the age to come (as Revelation makes clear), but in the present also.

The temple (40:1-42:20)

This temple is so perfect in symmetry that none need have any fears about the perfection of God's plan for his people. Many aspects of the description are absent; its purpose is symbolic of perfection and restoration. Neither the temple of Zerrubbabel or of Herod conformed to these specifications. The Lord is the temple-together with his people. In *Revelation*, the whole city of God is the dwelling of God and it needs no temple (21:22).

The presence of the Lord (43:1-12)

For a third time, the glory of the Lord is seen-first in Babylon, then in Jerusalem (to destroy it), and now to re-inhabit the holy city forever. Israel should therefore put away their idols. No longer is the temple polluted and the Lord absent (cf. 8:1-11:25 with 43:5). The Lord is again enthroned among his people.

Jesus has come and 'tabernacled' among us (John 1:14). He is head over all things for the church (Eph. 1:22). In the holy worship which, by grace, we offer, unbelievers will have to acknowledge that God is among us (I Cor. 14:25). All of this is so in the light of the consummation when all ambiguity will be removed (Rev. 22:3-5).

The altar and its offerings (43:13-27)

With the cleansing of the altar, the Lord will accept the regular offerings of Israel. This altar had been polluted with idolatry, but now there is true worship re-established for the people.

Worship is essentially God's gift and may never be offered apart from atonement. But given that atonement, we may offer spiritual sacrifices to God (I Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15-16; cf. Rom. 15:16; Phil. 2:17).

Those who may come to worship (44:1-27)

The Lord had entered by the Eastern gate and it was now not to be used, except for the king to eat his sacrificial meals (and for the exception noted in 46:12). With the Lord present, there is to be no more profanation of the temple specially by uncircumcised people coming to worship.

Levites will be restricted in their service—in view of their earlier straying after idols. Only the priests (of Zadok) would be able to offer full service, and they are to maintain the distinctions between what is clean and unclean.

Apportioning of the inheritance, especially regarding the prince (44:28-46:24)

Land is assigned for the temple, and the priests, and the prince—especially so that, having his own lands, he will not repress the people by exacting heavy taxes. To the contrary, in fact, he is to bring offerings which are for the whole nation—to make atonement for them (45:15-16, 22-25), on sabbaths (46:1), at their annual festivals (46:9) and for the daily offerings (46:13). He is to be with the people in their offerings (46:10).

The prophecy is given in terms appropriate to the times. In fact, Christ is with his people in their worship. Far from exacting tribute from the people, he is their Shepherd (John 10) and provides a sacrifice to make atonement for the people—but once for all.

The river of life (47:1-12)

From the temple entrance flows a river which deepens as it flows bringing life and healing and food—even to the Dead Sea.

‘Blessing, fertility and water are almost interchangeable Ideas in the Old Testament’ (Taylor; p. 278).

Cf. Psa. 46:4; 65:9; Isa. 33:20f.

In the consummation, this river will bring the life to the creation which God had intended from the beginning (Gen. 2:10; Rev. 22:1-2).

In the present, the river of God is the Holy Spirit flowing from the presence of God bringing life to the world (cf. John 7:39).

The apportioned inheritance (47:13-48:35)

Each of the tribes have their place, and the aliens who have come to live in the land will share in that inheritance (cf. Eph. 1:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). The temple is in the middle of it all and the king's territory adjacent to the temple area—given his particular responsibilities.

The name of this city, answering to all the great needs of the formerly polluted and abandoned city is ‘The Lord is There’ (cf. Rev. 22:3-5).