

**Class 1 September 15, 2020 (Class 1 Sept. 15 Handout):** In the strange time of the Coronavirus I have really been drawn to Ezekiel and The Psalms. Ezekiel seemed like it would fit well with this season (a bit distorted by internet issues so not exactly what Mark said beginning with “Ezekiel” in this sentence).

As you see on your handout about the overview of the book, you will see that Ezekiel is a book of the Bible that the ancient rabbis were concerned about having people read. In fact, they said you had to be at least 30 years old to read and study Ezekiel. Thirty years old in the ancient rabbinic understanding was to be a mature believer. Ezekiel is a hard book for new believers, so I pray this study will draw us deeper into The Lord, into The Holy Spirit, even as we are sometimes challenged by some of the language.

Now, be prepared, if you are not familiar with Ezekiel; he is a raw prophet. He will use sexual imagery and terms; he will use scatological imagery and terms; he pulls no punches and we'll see that. Sometimes some of Ezekiel can be (*internet distortion so part of what was said is missed*) \_\_\_\_ ”Lord, why is it that Ezekiel is such a raw book?” But the important thing is to understand that in the midst of all that Ezekiel is also one of the most Gospel-filled books. Why? Because while there is a lot of judgment in Ezekiel; and he goes to great lengths both speaking, as well as his actions, to impress upon the Jews who are in captivity in Babylon that they are there because of God's judgment against their unfaithfulness. There's a lot of judgment, but there is also a lot of glory and comfort and grace. And at the end, the Book of Ezekiel contains one of the greatest sentences of Scripture where God promises that in Jerusalem, and, of course, it points us to The New Jerusalem of Heaven, God is there.

Often in studying Ezekiel, people don't get past the first chapter. They get bogged down in this opening vision that we'll look at today; and they don't get beyond that. But we're going to really persevere and ask The Lord to help us.

We'll be meeting on Tuesdays. Please note that we will not be meeting on October 6th. I'll be out of town that day, but the rest of the Tuesdays through (*screen froze*)\_\_\_\_\_ Pastor Mark returned to the screen and shared that next week he will be doing the study from home where there is a stronger internet connection.

As I was saying, we are going to be studying Ezekiel; not just chapter by chapter; but as you see correlated there on your message and method of Ezekiel that today and next week we will be looking at “Ezekiel as the Messenger of Yahweh.” And then the next section, “Ezekiel as the Watchman,” etc. If you'll keep that handout with you in the weeks to come, that will be a good way to keep your notes together.

Let me just hit a couple of highlights from page 3 of the Ezekiel Overview, a brief introduction to Ezekiel. Contextually, Ezekiel is one of the prophets who we can date exactly; not just “well around the year\_\_\_\_\_” We know exactly when he was called. It was July 31st in 593 BC. So it's a remarkably historically centered book. On the one hand it's perhaps the most visionary of all books. On the other hand, it is also one of the most grounded and historical of all books. It's a beautiful combination of how God

is both transcendent, with this amazing vision of His Shekhinah, His Glory, but also how God comes in real history.

Ezekiel, we know, is by The Chebar canal, which is in the nation of Babylon, in the City of Nippur, which is maybe 60 miles from the capital. Ezekiel is in a community of Jews who have been exiled. (We'll get to this in just a moment), but it is a turbulent time in 722 BC. As many of you know, the Assyrians wiped out the Northern Kingdom of Israel. About 125 years later, the Babylonians are coming to siege Judah. In 597 BC they take the King of Judah in Jerusalem, Jehoiachin, into captivity and then they put a puppet on the throne named Zedekiah. He reigns for about ten years until he revolts against the Babylonians and they come and crush the city and he is taken in chains and blinded back to Babylon. So, it is a turbulent time, and in this context, of course, The LORD Yahweh, Father Son Holy Spirit, would want to speak and certainly He does.

And so, you have some of those notes. Ezekiel is in the first group of Jews being deported to Babylon; about 8,000 from Jerusalem and Judah were taken in the first wave in 597 BC. So, we can date these things exactly. We know exactly when Jehoiachin was deposed..he only reigned for three months. So, I just love how historically centered Scripture and History are.

When we think about the Babylonian captivity, do not not think that all the Jews were taken back to Babylon in one fell swoop—there were several waves of captives. The idea was, in the ancient world, you wanted to dilute your conquered nation; to take out some; leave some; bring in people from other nations; to try to dilute their religious and ethnic identity. So Ezekiel is among the first taken in 597 BC. He's going to get his prophetic call four years later in 593 BC. So, he is in the group of Jews in Babylon. Now, there were some Jews taken to Egypt; some of the Jews, especially the older in firmed, the sick, the vulnerable were left in Jerusalem; and then the rest were taken to Babylon. By 597 BC, you have three groups of Jews still left in the world; i.e., Jerusalem, Egypt and Babylon. And, Ezekiel is going to be in Babylon.

Now, in Babylon the Jews did well, primarily, because they were God's people. And part of the reason the Jews have suffered more than any other people in history is because they're God's people; and they're blessed; and they always do well wherever they are.

And so, in Babylon: Yes, they were removed from their homes; yes, they were cut off from the Temple in Jerusalem. But at the same time, many of them thrived as merchants, professionals, doctors, teachers, etc. And so, Ezekiel, himself, a younger man, is in this environment. When Ezekiel is first taken, he is 26 years old, but at the age of 30; in fact, on his 30th birthday, July 31 593 BC, he's going to have his prophetic commissioning and that is the exact age where he would become a priest. And so, we look back in the Book of Numbers and we see that at the age of 30, a Jewish man became a priest. And so, Ezekiel is going to be one of the few priests AND prophets in Scripture. And that's all set in Babylon by the Chebar canal.

Now, at the same time this group of the Jews were doing their best in Babylon, they also were beginning to have idolatry encroach upon them. They were beginning to assume some of the Babylonian pagan religious idolatry. It was also a very dangerous time for them, in terms of their spiritual lives. Just like it is for us. We live in a pagan culture 24/7. We are inundated with pagan ideas through the internet; through social media; the TV; with the air we breathe is far from God. And so, we need to understand that we are exiles; this is not our home; we are on our way home. And, I believe that in the rest of our lives and the generations to come, this idea of being in exile is going to be a very important one. And we need books like Ezekiel to teach us how to remain faithful in a land that's not our own.

In your handout, the Jews had four pillars of God's Promise, and you look at all of Scriptural history including the New Testament, here are the four pillars upon which God's people rested their hope in God.

- God's irrevocable covenant with Israel. Paul will talk about this in **Romans 9-11**.
- Secondly, God's promise of the land (we have spoken a lot at St. John about how the land is central to The Covenant; it's the tangible, we can even say, sacramental promise that God's people have the Land and how important it is today that the nation of Israel is back in the land. You can talk about the second coming and when that's going to happen, the land is a key.
- Thirdly, that they trusted that God was going to be in Jerusalem; in the Temple. That's where He reigned on earth; that's where the Ark of the Covenant was—the Mercy Seat where God sat.
- And Fourth, it was God's eternal Promise with the House of David, that He would raise up a king to rule Israel through David.

So, those are the four pillows; and you can see then what happens when they're in Babylon, because those are all going to be jeopardized. Had God broken His Covenant with Israel? They were no longer in the land. How could that be? In Jerusalem, the Temple had been destroyed. How could that be? And, now the king was a puppet king appointed by the Babylonians, not in the line of David.

They were disillusioned; they were spiritually ill. They were wondering had God abandoned them? It was a strange and difficult season for them, just as it is for us. Some of those same things, I have heard believers say today, "Has God abandoned us? Where is God?" This is why Ezekiel can be a real call to us.

Finally on the fourth page of your initial overview, you have some facts about who is Ezekiel; his name means "God strengthens" "God toughens." I hope that we will get toughened up through the Book of Ezekiel. We need to be tougher believers. We cannot have skin deep faith. It's a tough time. I want to be positive, but I also want to be honest. It's a tough time to be a believer. There are so many philosophies and theories and understandings competing with the Gospel Truth of Scripture. We need to be toughened up like Ezekiel.

His ministry took a colossal toll on Ezekiel's life. So again, to be a toughened believer, we cannot see suffering as contrary that somehow God has abandoned us. We need to be toughened up because Ezekiel really took a hit to be God's prophet and priest in Babylon. You know, his wife dies and he has no time to mourn; quickly bury her because your work has to go on. **Ezekiel 24:15-16** **15** The Word of the Lord came to me (*Ezekiel*) **16** "Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down."

*It is not very pastoral; it is not very kind. So, Ezekiel's work took a huge hit on his family and his marriage. It also took a huge hit on him personally. At one point, and we're going to see this in a few chapters, Ezekiel lies bound up on his left side for 390 days; and then he switches and lies for another year plus on his right side with just a bowl of water and some food within reach. I mean, it's incredible stuff he went through to try to capture the attention of his fellow Jews.*

*What's the message of Ezekiel again? In your handout you've got some things, but I just want to impress upon you one point among those others. God is a jealous God as in Ezekiel. I don't mean jealous God as in terms of an unhealthy being jealous as in a marriage and there is an unhealthy jealousy of your wife or your husband in all of the negative ways we can think of jealousy. I'm talking about jealous in terms of God is the Husband who loves His wife Israel, and He is so angry if His wife goes off with other gods and the pagans. And so, marriage..the marriage of Yahweh, the Bridegroom, to Israel, the bride, is foundational to the Book of Ezekiel, which then impresses upon us that marriage is the foundational doctrine of Scripture. Paul will say that in Ephesians, our marriages are a facsimile; are to the point to the very marriage of Christ, the Bridegroom to His Church, the Bride.*

And, finally, **the enduring theology of Ezekiel**, the 9th point on your initial handout. You've got several points that I think are imperative to underscore the Holiness of God; the Glory of God; the Power of God; the Love of God, but look at that last point on the handout, 9.L. In the end through it all; through all this strange stuff that we're going to work our way through,

- God's Promises are eternal.
- Israel is to be His Covenant people forever.
- The Land of Israel is their promised homeland forever.
- Yahweh will dwell with His people forever.
- And, God's commitment to the Davidic household and kingship through The Messiah King Jesus will be forever.

Now, this is a glorious Promise and we, who, not all of us but most of us, are Gentiles, who have been grafted into Israel through our faith in The Messiah, so these promises are for us.

We're going to see a little bit later when Christ Messiah gives His vision to the Apostle John, that we call "the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John," the Revelation, we're going to find, that many of the details and images of Ezekiel will also be paralleled in the

Book of Revelation. You've got a beautiful symmetry of how The Holy Spirit is giving this amazing vision to Ezekiel in the 6th Century BC and then the Lord gives a vision that has a lot of similarity to the Apostle John in the 1st Century AD. These visions connect us to God.

Let me stop there before we get into our class today (Class 3 September 29 Handout).

Questions, comments at this point? We'll be going back to some of these things each day, but let me ask, Any initial comment, questions, concerns at this point? Please unmute and feel free to speak.

Okay, has anybody done a study of Ezekiel? Is anybody saying, Yes? Oh, good, so anything I say, you're going to think and say, 'that's right' because you've never done one? (*smile*) Well great! That makes it a lot easier.

**Opening Prayer.** "Holy Spirit as You empowered Your prophet priest Ezekiel 2500 years ago, please Holy Spirit be the power, the breath, the fire, the wind of our study. Anoint, Lord Holy Spirit, all that we do these Tuesdays that Your Word may be the fuel and the food and the fire of our hearts. We pray this in Your Holy Name. Amen."

Okay, if you have your class notes, following a couple of introductory comments, we're going to look at this. I'm going to read part of the verses and then we'll stop and do some notes. And then hopefully we will have plenty of time for comments or questions. But, if you have a question or comment that cannot wait until the end, please let me make sure you understand that you are always free to unmute and make your statement.

God is speaking through Ezekiel; it's a very trinitarian vision; The Father The Son and The Holy Spirit are working in the great conspiracy and concert of power to give Ezekiel the vision. This is a specific period; Ezekiel goes to Babylon to the Chebar canal 597 BC and then four years later the vision comes to him in 593 BC. And so, he is working now for this next six or seven years until Jerusalem is crushed in 586 BC and then the book finishes after that.

So, a lot of the book is a preparatory prophetic word that Jerusalem is going to fall. So Ezekiel is speaking to the fellow Jews in Babylon about a word of what's going to happen back home.

It is the glory of the Lord that just covers the book of Ezekiel. We haven't talked a lot at St. John about the Shekhinah Glory of God. The Hebrew word Shekhinah does not actually appear in Scripture, but its meaning and its presence is throughout the book and throughout all the Scriptures. Salvation in History. It means "the Glory of God," and so I pray that in this season where there are so many stresses; i.e., virus and politics and race and disruption to our lives and uncertainty, I think God wants to bring His Shekhinah Glory back. He wants your life to be filled with His Glory. And, He wants you to have that hope.

So, whenever we do Bible Studies, Brothers and Sisters, we always want to make sure we understand what's happening in The Word of God in that time. We want to make sure that we know what God is saying to Ezekiel in 593 BC. At the same time, we always want to say, "What is this saying to us in the year 2020?" So these connections between history and our lives today are inseparable.

So, let's look at **Ezekiel 1:1-3 in Babylon: 1** In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. **2** On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), **3** the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar canal, and the hand of the LORD was upon him there.

*Now, you understand, anytime you see the word "LORD" in capitals, it means "Yahweh," which means God Father Son and Holy Spirit.*

*So, it's in the 30th year; i.e., the 30th year of Ezekiel, it's his birthday; he's 30 years old; he's a priest now. He's going to be a priest and a prophet. If we were to drill down on these dates, we can date this exactly July 31, 593 BC. So, right off the bat, I am very excited about the historical context of Ezekiel. This is not just a shot in the dark. This is stuff that WE KNOW HAPPENED WHEN. So, as I've said before, Ezekiel is among the exiles, the first 8,000 deportees back into Babylon, etc.*

*Now, that last point on your notes on these first three verses, The Spirit of God, The Holy Spirit comes upon Ezekiel. Ezekiel is the prophet of The Holy Spirit. Now, he's going to be the prophet in terms of how we think of prophets normally; that they speak The Word of God..absolutely Ezekiel speaks The Word of God. But, of all the prophets, he is the most under the direction of The Holy Spirit. He is a man totally possessed by God The Holy Spirit. So, he is the most charismatic of all the prophets. So whenever we read in Ezekiel "The Spirit of God," then that is obviously "The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity."*

*Now, let's look at the "Inaugural Vision," and unfortunately a lot of people read the "Inaugural Vision" and go "Ah, don't think so; I don't know what this means; it's bizarre; it's strange; I'm stopping right here." Some people even say, "Oh, look it was a space ship! Ezekiel saw a spaceship; it's about aliens; it's about UFO's!" I mean there are a lot of strange interpretations of Ezekiel. Brothers and sisters, this is NOT about a spaceship; this is not about a UFO. It's about The Throne of God. And, the only way you can speak about Yahweh and His Throne is to do it by analogy. There are not words to describe God so you have to say, "It is like this," and that's what we need to understand in this Inaugural Vision.*

Let's look at **Ezekiel 1:4-14 "The Glory of the LORD" 4** As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal.

*Okay, Wow! Here we go! Look at all the different images of The Holy Spirit. Who is the Holy Spirit? He is a stormy wind, a great cloud, a fire flashing and then he's going to see gleaming metal. So again, we're talking about analogy about this.*

*So then I'll read **verses 5-14** and then we will stop.*

**5** And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, **6** but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. **7** Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze. **8** Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: **9** their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. **10** As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. **11** Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. **12** And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. **13** As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. **14** And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning.

*Whoa! Got that in your mind? Can you imagine that image? Probably not; this is one of the most difficult visions to try to paint or to get an accurate...if you will go on-line; if you will Google "vision of **Ezekiel chapter 1**," you will get just a boo-coo of artistic renditions of this one vision. And, many of them disagree and many of them just...it's almost impossible to do that. But, let's try to understand it as well as we can.*

*So, it's full of majesty, obscurity, difficulty. Ezekiel is overwhelmed. He is just..in the Spirit he's excited yet he's overwhelmed by this vision. Now, interestingly enough in **Chapter 10** he's going to see this same vision...this vision is going to return. But when it returns it's going to be a lot more specific. So, this is an inaugural vision. He is overwhelmed. He doesn't really know how to speak. The Hebrew that he's writing in in **Chapter 1** is grammatically all over the board, they are not complete sentences. He is just uttering what he has seen, and he's overwhelmed. We can understand that, perhaps. But in **Chapter 10**, he's going to be more settled, and he's going to be able to help us with the vision with more clarity and detail.*

*So this is no ordinary cloud; it's a stormy wind. This is the Holy Spirit; It's the Shekhinah of God; the Glory of God that overcomes him. And then we have the four living creatures. Each creature is a composite so you've got four creatures; each one has a body in human form; each one has four faces and four wings, but their feet are bovine (calf's feet); and their wings, at the end of which, are not tips of wings like you would see on a bird, but human heads. So, these four creatures are obviously things that*

*Ezekiel could hardly make up. They must be just this amazing, overwhelming vision of God found nowhere else in the Old Testament. So, Ezekiel stands out in this. So these creatures emerge out of a fiery cloud. Now, this again lays a foundation for \_\_\_ in the New Testament. Each figure has a face of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. So, later on the early Church fathers read Ezekiel; read about these four faces of the creatures and said, "Well, it points us to the four Gospels because in the middle is the face of a man and that's the Gospel of Matthew; Jesus is the Jewish Man Messiah coming to save both Israel and all nations. To the right is the face of a Lion; well, that's the next Gospel, the Gospel of Mark because in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is the Lion of Judah who comes out to save the world. To the left is the face of an ox; the early Church fathers said that was Luke because the ox is both a sign of divinity but also a sign of sacrifice. So Jesus, in the Gospel of Luke is the incarnation of God Himself to give His Life for the sins of the world. And then, behind—the back..the fourth face is that of an eagle—the last Gospel John—it soars majestically, theologically with divinity above all others. And so you can see how Ezekiel is underneath a lot of things. Ezekiel is never quoted directly in the New Testament. The Psalms are quoted many times; Deuteronomy many times, etc. No New Testament writer quotes exactly from Ezekiel. But, foundational to the New Testament is the prophet Ezekiel; we're going to see how this gets played out. So, it's not a space ship, Brothers and Sisters. We will find out this is going to be The Throne of God.*

Now, in **verse 12** "And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went."

*So, their wings do not propel them. We're going to see the wheels in just a moment; the wheels do not propel them. It's the "Ruach" which is Hebrew for the Spirit; the fire; the breath. The wind of the Holy Spirit is the force and the fuel of this.*

*So, the entire apparition is dominated by the number 4; 4 creatures; 4 faces; 4 wings. It represents completeness; it, perhaps, represents the four directions of the compass, but it really is to understand that we are in the completeness of this.*

*Now, let me get through this section and then we'll stop for questions.*

*The wheels in **verses 15-21 15** Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. 16 As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl.*

*And beryl was one of the great jewels on the breastplate of the high priest.*

And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel.



*So, we're to think maybe of a gyroscope here or a suitcase; the new suitcases that you take to the airport where they go in any direction if you just push them because their wheels are in casters.*

17 When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went. 18 And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around.

*So, we have an inanimate object, a wheel that is alive and has eyes,...strange.*

19 And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. 20 Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went,

*I love that; wherever the Holy Spirit wants to go, that's where they go; I pray that's true for us. Wherever the Holy Spirit wants you to go, I hope you go.*

and the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. **21** When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

*The amazing thing; if you look at your handout; again, like the creatures, the wheels are composites; one wheel inside another wheel. Again, it's like round coasters or gyroscope. But what we're envisioning here is a divine chariot. That's what we're going to get to; that eventually it's going to be Yahweh on His Throne; Father Son Holy Spirit, Yahweh on His Throne; an amazing Throne being carried by the four creatures and in a divine chariot. They're full of eyes; they're inanimate; yet they are alive; and they, again, are under the power of Ruach, the Spirit; The Holy Spirit of God.*

*And then finally then in this section we have **verses 22-27***

**22** Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. 23 And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. And each creature had two wings covering its body. 24 And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army. When they stood still, they let down their wings. 25 And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings.

*That's the first time there's any auditory image in the vision.*

*The word Almighty is El Shaddai, one of the great names of God in Scripture; it means The God of the Mountain; The God of the Vision; The God of Power; El Shaddai.*

*So, the expanse, we go back to Genesis where God put an expanse to separate the heaven, the sky, from the earth and so it is an amazing image. So again, if you look at your handout, the platform and the throne, **verses 22-27**, the vision shifts from the wheels below to a form above the living creatures, The sound now captures Ezekiel's attention; like when God appeared on Mt. Sinai to Moses, the peals of thunder and the flashing of lightning came with God.*

*It's a majestic throne above platform and so literally in the Hebrew this crystal throne; sometimes your Bibles will have a footnote; in the Hebrew it says "It's a throne of Lapis lazuli, as many of you know, was just an exquisitely deep blue element, a rock, a sapphire; a mineral in the earth that was even more precious in the ancient world than gold. And so Ezekiel sees a throne of the most precious mineral—a Lapis lazuli—in God's whole creation.*

*And then the dazzling regal figure is seated on the throne; and the figure is a man; the likeness of a human being. I need to read the rest of this..*

26 And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance.

*This is going to be a prophetic utterance of The Messiah; the Word of God; the Second person in Holy Trinity; Messiah. In 593 BC, Jesus did not have a human body yet. Right? The incarnation had not happened. He was the second person of The Trinity, but He was pure divinity. After the incarnation, He's going to be forever The God Man; so right now Jesus Christ has the body of The Messiah. When you get to Heaven, you will see His scars; He was fully God and fully man. BUT, this is a prophetic utterance 600 years before the incarnation that The Messiah will come in human form. So Ezekiel is laying amazing groundwork for what's coming at the right time in the Incarnation.*

27 And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. **28** Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

*And, so again, going back to our notes, is this dazzling divine figure on the throne in the form of human being. It is, therefore, a vision of The Messiah. Later in, say, **Mark Chapter 9** and other Gospels we will get the Transfiguration story where Jesus, the Man Incarnate, gives glory of the Divinity of Christ shining forth; and so in Ezekiel you have the Divine Son of God becoming human. And, in the Transfiguration you have the Man Jesus revealing His Divinity. So, we've got this beautiful movement through Scripture that Jesus is both fully God as well as fully man.*

*And then, the vision ends on a glorious note—the rainbow—this is the Glory of God. Let me try to summarize. So this is what we have in this inaugural vision, **verses 22-28**: We've got four sphinx-like winged creatures; so sphinx, you know from the ancient pyramids with the wings and the body of a human with different faces. So you've got four sphinx-like winged creatures, and they're holding up a glorious crystal platform.*

*So, think of the four creatures; they're holding up their wings and their hands a beautiful, glorious platform, on which there is a magnificent throne of Lapis lazuli. And, seated on the throne is who? It's Yahweh in human form. And then the wheels underneath add a remarkable dimension so they can go in any direction.*

*When you put all that together you have something like a divine chariot (you've got the wheels) held up by these amazing four creatures on this platform, the throne, with God Himself on the throne in the form of a human being.*

*Brothers and sisters, THIS just gives me chills to think that you've got the glory and the transcendence of God and yet, what does it mean to be in His human form? It means He loves you; it means He knows you; it means you have been created in the image of the One on The Throne. Now, this is the connection between this strange vision that is gloriously strange because it brings us such hope today. God knows who you are. You know **Genesis 1:26** "God made them male and female; in His image God made them." **Ezekiel Chapter 1** "God becomes an image of a man and a woman; a human being, because He loves us so much." It's beautiful.*

*Now, if we have time and we had some introductory things that took some time and, of course, internet problems. So, if we had time and maybe we will do this next week at our beginning, we'll look at the parallel of this vision to **Daniel 7** and **Revelation 4**. So, next week we'll make some connections to what else happens in the Bible and pick up on some of these visions in **Revelation 4** and **Daniel 7**.*

*Unfortunately, you've got a bunch of questions; actually six questions at the end of this that I wish we had time, and, again, I don't want this to be a monologue. Next week we'll have more time to speak. But let me just hit the **Theological Implications** of this and let this ruminates for us over the week ahead.*

**Theological Implications**, I believe, we find from this vision:

1. This vision proclaims the transcendent Glory of God; the radiance of God. Brothers and Sisters, we need to know that God is transcendent; He's in charge; He is glorious.
2. Secondly, it also proclaims the transcendent Holiness of The Lord. He alone is on the Throne; He is separated; He is Holy; He is God alone.
3. Thirdly, at the same time this vision proclaims the imminent meaning, right here with us now, presence of God on earth is a prefigurement of the incarnation of The Messiah.

4. Fourth, the vision proclaims the sovereignty of God. God is in control. In Babylon, God is in control. In Jerusalem, God is in control. God is in control in Roanoke—you think your life is out of control; hat God doesn't know about your life? Read Ezekiel. He's on the Throne, Brothers and Sisters. He's in control even in a time of exile.
5. The vision proclaims God's interest in His people in the form of a human being! That's HUGE!! The vision proclaims the presence of the Lord among the exiles. In Babylon, they said that the gods only operated in that one land/country. So they said, "Well you Jews, you're no longer in Judah; you're in Babylon; therefore, your God is stuck back in Judah; your God can't help you because you're in Babylon and only the gods of Babylon can help you now. THIS blows that out of the water! God is NOT limited by a border between two nations.
6. The vision, also though, at least hints at the coming judgment of God. Remember the coals of fire and the great noise—the rushing water; these are all hints that judgment is coming.
7. Finally, this vision serves notice that whoever would serve God must have a clear vision of The One who is calling him or her. So, there are other things that we could draw from that.

We've got about four minutes. I know there must be at least one comment or question or concern so please unmute and if you've got something to say, please do so. Let me ask..okay, somebody's got to say something. So, what is one encouragement you're taking away from Class 1. Someone say one thing that can encourage the rest of us.

**Lilly O'Brien**, "I feel like this was very needed for my soul; it has been a stressful week and just thinking about The Throne of God, I don't know why, but it always sends chills down my spine but also helps me just set my focus on His Kingdom because it's His Throne so instead of things of the world. So I feel very encouraged about that. My question does have to do with..like parallel between **Revelation 4** and **Ezekiel 1** so I am not sure if I should wait until next week.

**Mark**: Lilly, if you want to share your question then I can answer it and it will give me a whole week to give you the right answer.

**Lilly**: "Well, it's interesting to me that the creatures in **Ezekiel 1** have like two faces on them; (**Mark**: "four") but each creature has like the face of an ox and a face of..... Then in **Revelation 4**, just the creature? Like the creature's face; like it's not two faces.

**Mark**: "Well, you've got different faces, but we'll talk about that. Right, so you've got a variety; so we'll look at that and **Daniel 9** as well; so it's a good question so we'll compare those. It is not an exact comparison, but it's in the ball park and then the question is "Why is that?" and we'll be able to answer that.

**Lilly**: Alright, okay, cool!

**Mark:** Yes, Lilly thank you especially for that comment about...you know at a time like this, Brothers and Sisters, especially for those of us who are feeling oppressed or stressed; you've got something in your life that is really weighing you down. To lift your vision to The Throne of God is so important for your help (health); that that vision of The Throne; even if your life feels like it's in chaos, this gives you a hope that God is sovereign on His Throne. Thank you.

One more comment and we will close with prayer.

**Vickie Smith:** "I have a question, Mark." I was wondering, when these prophets get visions like this, do they understand what they mean? I mean, is he looking at it saying, 'Oh, of course, this is God's Throne that I'm looking at' or does he (the prophet) have as many questions as we do when we read about it?"

**Mark:** Ah, that's a great question, Vickie. You ask really good questions. Well, I think initially in **Chapter 1**, in this inaugural vision, Ezekiel has no idea; he is just speaking what he sees and hears. In **Chapter 10** he's had a couple of years to think about it, and there he begins to understand. And, we'll see in **Chapter 10** how he puts some, 'Oh, well this means it was really the Cherubim, etc. And so, in **Chapter 10** we get details. So what that tells me is initially he didn't understand this. He saw it; he was put on his face in worship and awe, but it took him awhile to understand it, which, to me, makes sense that he gave it some time. And it's like, you know, when God moves in our own lives. It may take us a little time to understand what that movement is all about."

**Closing Prayer:** "So, Lord we give You thanks for the time. Thank you, Lord, for these Brothers and Sisters who have taken their lunch hour this Tuesday. We pray that You would continue this week—maybe most of all, Lord, this week, let our vision be on You on Your glorious Throne, radiant, transcendent, sovereign, but in the form of a human being loving, caring and knowing all about us. Lord, thank You that You are both God and man. In the Name of God The Father Son and Holy Spirit we pray, Amen."

Thank you. Hope to see you next week without any internet problems.

**God bless you!**

**(End of September 15, 2020 Zoom Recording for all of Class 1 Sept. 15 Handout)**

**Please NOTE: No Recording for September 22)**

**Zoom Recording dated September 29, 2020**

**Class 2 held on September 29 using Class 2 Sept. 22 Handout for the first part of the class before beginning Class 3 September 29 Handout)**

**Pastor Mark:** I am back at Church and in the Prayer Chapel and hopefully this is going to work. You know, last week I was at home thinking that was a safe place for internet connection but a rare occurrence that the whole thing went down.

**Opening Prayer:** Lord, we pray to You today, Father Son and Holy Spirit in great thanksgiving for this opportunity to try once more to study Your Word in Ezekiel. Lord, thank You for the great comfort that we receive as we study the Book of Ezekiel; and thank You equally for the great challenge this study presents to each of us. Lord, Ezekiel had one of the hardest callings except for You, of course, Jesus, second only to You in the Bible. So, we pray that his faithfulness, his transparency with his faith might be an inspiration for us as we strive to be faithful to You today. To You be the Glory and the Power and we pray Your Holy Spirit would anoint, illuminate and bring this Word alive. In Christ we pray, Amen!

If you have **Class 2 handout from September 22**, I want to pick back up. I must be cognizant of time, and I want to make sure we have enough time for feedback and questions. But, this is a very important introductory material that if we did not, at least cover as much as we can, we would be remiss.

We are going to go back and pick up from last week with the Lord's first commissioning speech in **Ezekiel 2:3-7**: 3 And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day.

*That's an amazing declaration about Israel.*

4 The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' 5 And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them. 6 And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. 7 And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house.

*So if you look at your Class 2 Sept. 29 handout again, a lot of this is self-explanatory, but let me just highlight two or three things of this first commissioning speech.*

*You will see that the phrase, "son of man" is used almost 100 times in the Book of Ezekiel. Literally it means "son of Adam" which is to say "human being," and the idea is why God continues to refer to Ezekiel, never by his name; he is never referred to by his first name; it's always, "son of man" "son of Adam" "human" is to make sure we*

*understand there is Yahweh God and there is human being Ezekiel, and there is a HUGE difference between them. We are always aware, by the words used to describe the prophet, that we are in the presence of a Holy transcendent powerful God. At the same time, He's going to be the God who comes beside His people at the Chebar Canal in Babylon. It is an amazing thing that the transcendent God, beyond time and space, is also God who comes into our time and space because of His Love for us. So, it's Yahweh, the LORD, who sends Ezekiel; Ezekiel is the prophet; and the people of Israel are the target.*

*Now, it is an amazing thing when, in the book we read, that Israel has become "a nation of rebels." The word "nation" has become, sometimes in the Yiddish, the slang that we will hear, perhaps, a Jewish person refer to a Gentile as a "goy or goyim." "Goy" has become a slang term for anybody not a Jew, and it's often a pejorative term ("a word expressing contempt or disapproval"). "Goy" is the word "nation" in Hebrew and "goyim" is the plural "nations."*

*גוי, גוים or גוים) is the standard term for a gentile. Through Yiddish, the word has been adopted into English (often pluralized as goys) also to mean gentile, sometimes with a pejorative sense. In biblical Hebrew goy is the standard term for a nation.*

*noun plural goyim (גוים) or goys—a Jewish word for a gentile*

*And so when Israel has rejected her LORD, in her rejection of the covenant she has become just a goy; a pagan Gentile nation before God. It is a great mark against Israel that she would have turned her back on the LORD who made her in the first place. So, a big part of Ezekiel is how in the world will Israel come back into a covenant relationship with God? It's not going to be by what Israel does; it's going to be by God's work to bring her back because He is faithful even when Israel, even when you and I are faithless.*

*So, who is Israel, as you will see in your handout in point 4? Israel is a family; a household of rebellion; they are refusing to listen; they are impudent insubordinate, stiff, hard of face, stubborn, hard of mind and heart, and they are in rebellion; house of insubordination; they are defiant. But, Ezekiel is not to be afraid. He is to dare to speak for the LORD because God wants to bring His people back.*

*Throughout the prophet Ezekiel, he is being called to be faithful and not successful. That's one of the hardest things for you and I to overcome. The world says, "Your life is predicated on your successfulness—how much money you make; how much prestige you have; the good things people say about you; how you rise to the top of the world's standards. The Book of Ezekiel says, the way of God is exactly the opposite. It's not your success, but how are you faithful today? How are you faithful in your relationships How are you faithful in your calling, whether or not you have success or not. So, it is an invitation for us to follow the way of God and not the way of the world.*

Look at your Class 2 September 22 Handout; we now have the initial vision of the scroll; we are now in Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 **8** “But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.”  
 9 And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. 10 And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

**Ezekiel 3:1-3: 1** And he said to me, “Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” 2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. 3 And he said to me, “Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.” Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.

*Wow! So here we begin to see the kind of calling that Ezekiel is going to have; that he is going to consume an inanimate object—a scroll in his faithfulness. So, if you’ll look at your handout, “The scroll then is unrolled and the words of the title of the scroll are ‘lamentation, mourning and woe,’” which really becomes the title of the whole Book of Ezekiel. This is going to set the tone for Ezekiel’s whole ministry.*

*If you look at your Class 2 Sept. 22 handout under 4d1, literally in **Ezekiel 3:3** the Hebrew words are “your stomach gorge and your intestines fill with this scroll.” So, we are handicapped by not being able to read the Hebrew. If we did the graphic visceral kind of language would be a lot more apparent. But, God is saying basically “stuff this in your mouth and gorge on it because this IS The Word of God.” Both, literally, on the scroll, as well as spiritually. Twice Yahweh commands Ezekiel to eat the scroll.*

*How do you and I, brothers and sisters; how do we respond if we get a Word of God that seems contrary to what we would expect? I can’t imagine Ezekiel was anticipating The LORD to tell him to actually eat a scroll. Now thankfully, the scroll was a papayas scroll. It wasn’t until much later, around the first Century, that scrolls were being written in sheepskins and animal skin, so at least it was a plant. That was a bit of a break. It would probably a lot worse if he had to eat a scroll made of animal skin. But, even so, how you deal with the Word of God when it seems hard and strange? Well, you take it to the Lord in prayer. And, we’re going to see that Ezekiel spent seven days trying to spiritually digest what God was giving to Him. So, even Ezekiel needed a week to really struggle with this.*

*So, did he actually eat a scroll? I believe he did. There is no reason to doubt that anything less than an actual eating of the scroll happened. So, in the Book of Ezekiel it’s important for us, I think, to take the Word of God literally as The Word of God. Now there are many who will say, “Oh, this is just symbolic!” I don’t think so. I think we are looking here at a real life event. And so, it becomes a test for Ezekiel of his readiness and obedience to serve the LORD; and he passes the test and he complies to it.*

*But, at the end of your handout on point 4, there are two things about this that are extremely important to understand about Ezekiel moving forward. He is a prophet, a*



*human being who is full of and consumed by two things: “The Word of God,” and “The Holy Spirit.” If you want to know Ezekiel, you have to know two things about him—The Holy Spirit is his empowerment. God The Holy Spirit is working in Ezekiel maybe more than anybody else in Scripture except for Jesus Christ. And secondly, he is a man who physically eats The Word of God.*

*The Spirit and The Word, brothers and sisters. That is God’s combination for a power house of faithfulness. So every time you read the Bible; every time you pray, you always want to say, “Holy Spirit, bring the Word of God alive to me.” And every time you read The Word of God, you will want to say, “Lord, may by The Holy Spirit, I live out Your Word and so it’s always a “both and” and not an “either or.”*

*Secondly, this is the only prophet in the Bible where we move from the written Word to the oral Word. At every other prophet in the Bible there is the oral proclamation which then gets written down. But, in Ezekiel it is the written Word of God which then gets proclaimed. So you see why Ezekiel is also a great prophet for us to read in the 21st Century because this is the way it works for us. We are people who read and consume the Word of God and then we speak that Word to others. So, it is, I think, a huge encouragement in teaching that Bible Study, The Word, also becomes the Bread upon which we live.*

And then we get to the second commissioning speech **Ezekiel 3:4-11: 4** And he said to me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them. 5 For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel— 6 not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you. 7 But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. 8 Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. 9 Like emery harder than flint have I made your forehead. Fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.” 10 Moreover, he said to me, “Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. 11 And go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ whether they hear or refuse to hear.”

*So, in this section of the second commissioning speech, Ezekiel has consumed the scroll; and now, of course, he is to let the Words of God flow out of him as they have flowed in so they are to flow out. Even though Ezekiel is living in a foreign land among pagans and Babylonians, he is to speak only to the exiles. Remember, Ezekiel has been in the first wave of exiles that expelled from Jerusalem about 597 B.C. There were about 8,000 of them. They are living there in this Babylonian compound on the Chebar Canal and Ezekiel is to speak just to them.*

*Years ago, and I have said this in sermons, so please forgive me if you’ve heard this. Years ago I had a dream; the same dream for three nights, which often, when people have dreams of God, you will find they come in threes. The dream was the same each*

*night and particularly it was this. There was a huge crowd around this figure and I couldn't see His face, but I knew it was the Lord. And, the crowd just went on and on and on as far as the plain and this man was in the middle and the crowds were encircling Him and the Man in the middle just turned with His hands out and turned 360 degrees as if He were looking each person right in the eyes. And, then His hands kind of beckoned the whole crowd to come where He was, to come forward. And, I had this dream and at first I thought it was Jesus calling the crowds of the world to stop their rebellion and their unbelief and come and submit their lives to Him, but then I realized by the third night that I believe the dream was the Church. That it was the Church that had not yet been converted, so to speak. It was the Church that was far away from the Lord and the Lord was saying to His own people, "Come to Me; you are far from Me." And so, it's like this in Ezekiel. Yes, of course the LORD wants the Babylonians to be converted. Of course, the Lord wants Muslims, and Buddhists and Atheists in our world to be converted. Of course, He does! But, at the same time until the Church is converted; until God's own people, Jew and Gentile, are truly walking with Him by faith in The Holy Spirit according to the obedience of The Word of God, the pagans will not be converted. Until the pagans see that the Church is serious about taking up their cross and following faithfully.*

*I remember in Israel on one of our trips time before last, I had spent about four hours at the front of the bus with a guide. We were in Jordan; we had to have, by Jordanian laws, a Muslim guide along with our Christian guide. I was sitting next to the Muslim guide. His name, of course, was Mohammad. A third of all Muslim men are named Mohammad. And so, I am sitting next to Mohammad and he is telling me, "Oh, you Christians you really don't believe that Jesus was actually raised from the dead? You don't actually believe he was truly God's Son?" I said, "Why do you think Christians don't believe that?" He said, "Well I've read your Christian scholars." He had been reading liberal Christian theologians like John Shelby Spong, the Episcopal Bishop who did so much damage to The Word of God. He was reading Marcus Borg, who died a couple years ago, who became the darling theologian to liberal protestants. And, Marcus Borg's big claim to fame, and many Lutherans and Episcopalians and Presbyterians bought in to it, was that the resurrection was all metaphorical. He said there was the human Jesus and the Spirit of Christ. And the Spirit of Christ was just a symbolic hope that the apostles had. But, he said, "of course, we don't believe that there was an actual bodily resurrection." And Marcus Borg became a huge theologian. Mohammad in Jordan had read Marcus Borg and John Shelby Spong, therefore, he assumed that Christians really didn't believe what the Bible teaches.*

*So this is what we're up against and this is why it will probably be a remnant of the Church, but once God has parried the Church down to the remnant that truly believes, then I think we'll begin to see evangelism like never before.*

In **Ezekiel 3:4-11** (Class 2 Sept. 22 Handout) God sends him out to Israel and Ezekiel must not take it personally if they reject him. Look at your handout there in point 5.C. PLEASE remember that Ezekiel's name means "God hardens...God toughens." Ezekiel is going to have a really tough ministry and even his own people, the Jews, are going

to reject him initially. God wants Ezekiel to toughen up. God wants Ezekiel to have hard tough skin and not be so sensitive to rejection. This has REALLY spoken to me that in the 21st Century we cannot have sensitive feelings about being rejected. God needs to toughen up believers. God needs to harden believers; not to be hard unloving people, but to have hard tough skin because when we speak The Word of God and we hear on facebook where our best friend tells us or we get rejected by our neighbor or even somebody in our own Church rejects us, we need to be tough and hardened and not say, "Oh, no, I don't want anybody to speak badly of me. I will just be quiet." We need to toughen up, brothers and sisters, and Ezekiel, I think is the perfect prophet for us today.

Look at **verse 9** "9 Like emery harder than flint have I made your forehead."

*In the ancient world, emery was considered the hardest substance in the world. So God has made Ezekiel's forehead the hardest substance so he has thick skin and not thin skin. And he's ready to take it even though he's going to be rejected. **28:12** Fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house."*

And, then in point 6 some **Theological Implications**. You see those..I don't know if I need to speak any more about those, but you know there are so many implications to this. Whoever would serve as a messenger of God must realize that the calling comes from God. Whoever would serve as a messenger would have a clear vision of the one who sends him or her. So, if you feel like you are being called by God, pray until the vision is really clear. Whoever would serve must be empowered by The Holy Spirit and not lead by your own efforts. Whoever would serve must be inspired directly by The Word of God—it's not your word; it's The Word of God that might be proclaimed. Whoever will serve as a messenger will need to be divinely equipped, so if God calls you, He will give you everything you need to fulfill the calling.

And, remember; don't ever forget; the calling of God is about faithfulness and not successfulness. Remember, Jesus Christ? He had a negative growth. He started out with 12 apostles; He ended with 11. So, even the Lord realized that it was going to be faithful and not successful.

And, now **Ezekiel 3:12-15: 12** Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake: "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from its place!" 13 It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, and the sound of a great earthquake. 14 The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me. **15** And I came to the exiles at Tel Abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar Canal, and I sat where they were dwelling. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.

*Ezekiel is so honest; he is so transparent; I appreciate that about him so much. So, now the scene opens, He will be lifted off his feet by the power of the Holy Spirit; that same*

*power that empowered the Divine Chariot, The Throne of God now takes him; a great noise like an earthquake. He carries Ezekiel to Tel Abib, the word “Tel” means a mound, and here literally it’s a mound of spring produce and it’s beside this Jewish compound in Babylon by the Chebar Canal. And this is where most of the 8,000 Jewish exiles lived initially in Babylon.*

*Here is something remarkable that I also find extremely comforting and is one of the reasons I love The Bible. The great men and women of the Scripture are just like us in many ways. They are weak; they need God’s help; they are not these super women and super men, but yet God still works through them.*

*Look at your (Class 2 Sept. 22) handout, **Ezekiel 3:14-15**. Ezekiel is bitter, bitter. He’s eaten a scroll, but it’s not sweet anymore. He’s bitter because he is being asked by God to do the very thing that’s going to be the hardest thing in the world for him to do. He’s angry—“In the heat of my spirit” means “I was angry in my spirit,” because God is going to impose upon him a commissioning that is going to take a lot out of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was married and later we are going to hear...his wife dies about halfway through this book. But, God does not allow Ezekiel even time to mourn his wife because Ezekiel has so much to do, he has to move on with his commissioning. Ezekiel pays a steep price—no wonder he’s bitter—no wonder he’s angry—and he’s also stunned. The word “overwhelmed” in the Hebrew means “desolated/disparaging/shocked.” He is being asked to do something that causes great emotional turmoil.*

*Isn’t this true? Isn’t this transparent? I mean, I can’t imagine I would be any different. He’s going to have to say, “Yay! I get to eat a scroll and then I get to tell people who don’t want to hear it that they’ve been really wicked sinners and they’re going to perish and go to hell forever if they don’t turn back to God right now! Oh, great! Sounds wonderful!” Of course, I’m going to be upset; of course I am going to be stunned. And so, Ezekiel gives all of us, I think, permission to react in a way that we understand is a human way to react. But, he is going then to be faithful, but it’s going to take him at least a week sitting stunned and desolate by himself.*

So let me stop here before we get into the other...have questions for further discussion, but we may or may not want to get to any of those. I would prefer to hear what questions, comments, observations that any of you will have before we move into today’s session of Class 3. So please unmute yourself. I would love to hear you.

**Dr. Chris Miller:** “How do we reverse the effect of what scholarship has done to The Bible and this book?”

**Mark:** “Dr. Chris, that is a great, great question? Do you have an answer for that? When I heard Mohammed on the bus and realized the great damage that unfaithful, unorthodox Christians are doing, it’s really stunning.

**Dr. Chris:** “I think we need to know who the people are, like John Dominic Crossan, James Hamilton Charlesworth, all those people. We need to know who they are so we know who the enemy is, you know?”

**Mark:** “Right. So, when you say ‘enemy’ they are the ‘enemy’ of The Word of God but, of course, our Lord says to pray for enemies so maybe the first step then, Chris, is how do we reverse the effects of liberal Protestantism is to pray for those who would purport it and to ask The Holy Spirit to please change their hearts. Because, if a John Dominic Crossan, a very liberal Catholic Theologian, who has also done much damage, was truly converted to Christ and became a spokesperson for Orthodox Christianity, WOW!! WOW!! That would be HUGE! So when you raised the great question, Chris, I think maybe that would be my first answer. First, it’s going to take lots of prayer for those who no longer believe but who say they are Christian. Thanks, Chris.

Anybody else..a question, observation, concern?

**Alan Denekas:** “In response to Chris, I will say that in 2 Corinthians 10, Paul talks about pulling down strongholds. I think we have to identify those ideas and we have to go back to the Scripture. That is one thing from Gerry’s course. He always says, “Scripture, Scripture, Scripture.” Michael J. McClymond (book “Devil’s Redemption”), said that nowhere in any of the rantings and ravings of the liberal protestants on universal salvation was there even the slightest suggestion of Scripture. So, we have to go back to The Word; we have to go back to sound reason, philosophy, systematic theology and show that their answers are wrong and then reteach The Truth.

**Mark:** “Yes. Thank you, Dr. Alan, thank you. That’s a good word. And so, Alan is referring to the summer study that we had with Gerry McDermott on the universal salvation (that’s a phone call that comes in on my iPad so people should not be calling now). Yeah, the universal salvation book by Dr. Michael McClymond, and Dr. Denekas is right that it is breathtaking how The Word of God is completely absent in this heresy and so it is “The Return to The Word of God.”

Anybody else before we move on to today’s Class 3? Those are good observations.

I just want to reiterate. Ezekiel is under the power of The Word of God and The Holy Spirit. That’s a Word for each one of us. The Lord would have each one of us to be empowered by God The Holy Spirit and The Word of God working in concert.

And secondly, God wants to toughen us up. We’ve got to be tougher Christians with a thick skin because the world does not want to hear what we have to say, sadly. What they desperately need is The Medicine of the Soul (God’s Word). The only thing that is going to save them is The Lord. But we need to keep speaking. And, it’s going to cost us something.

I just had a conversation about an hour ago with a Church member, and I mentioned him in the sermon Sunday. There has been a change in his workplace where he and a

handful of other Christians are gathering to push back against this. It may well cost him his job and he is, understandably, frightened about that. He can't afford to lose his job. Who can? But I believe he's going to do this, regardless of the consequences, and I just say, "Thank You JESUS for this brother," and he is an example to me of how we have to be toughened up in this world.

Alright, bless you, please, if there are other questions or comments, I will make sure I leave time before our 1:00 ending (Zoom Recording Location 39:14 ending Class 2).

**(End of Class 2 and Class 2 Sept. 22 Handout)**

**Zoom Recording Sept. 29 continues moving to Class 3 and Class 3 Sept. 29, 2020 Handout Ezekiel 3:16-21)**

(September 29 Zoom Recording location 39:15 begins Class 3) Let's turn now to **Class 3**. We are moving now into a new section as we have collated the book into different themes. So, we're not going to be reading it consecutively just verse by verse through it. We've moved from "The Messenger of Yahweh," and now we're moving into a new way of understanding it, "**The Watchman.**" This is one of the most famous parts of the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel is The famous Watchman for Israel and for the world.

So let me read for us then; it's a short section and we're just going to look at the first part of "**The Watchman.**" Now, if you don't have the handout, please know it's posted on the St. John website. There are hard copies here at the Church if you are here on Sunday to pick those up.

Let me read this **Ezekiel 3:16-21 "A Watchman for Israel" 16** And at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me: **17** "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. **18** If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. **19** But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. **20** Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. **21** But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul."

So this first part of "The Watchman," of the Book of Ezekiel...lots of important stuff. Let's look at your (**Class 3 Sept. 29**) handout if you have that handy.

*This is a formal oracle from God; an oracle means "a teaching," "a declaration." God is not asking for Ezekiel's feedback. He is saying to him here is the Word, the teaching, listen and obey.*

*So, Yahweh charges Ezekiel to serve as His watchman. You probably know about Biblical history and what a watchman did. It's a military term; it's a lookout; it's a spy; it's a person that's always on the search for the enemy to report back. Now, we're going to find that this section **Ezekiel 3:16-21** is replicated in Ezekiel, Chapter 33 and much more fully explained. So, part of what we find in the prophet Ezekiel is repetition. Whenever, we find repetition, it means that this is a really important part. So, we know this is a really important part that Ezekiel is going to be a watchman.*

*This is a private calling to be a watchman given just to Ezekiel. In Ezekiel Chapter 33, it's going to be a very public commissioning; that all of Israel is going to know about this and about the calling to be a watchman. So, we have a private calling here and a public calling later. And, he is not to shrink from his responsibilities because Ezekiel is a stubborn man and God is going to press him, "Don't shirk your responsibilities."*

*Ezekiel 3:Verse 16 "end of seven days" is, obviously, we just talked about that. Ezekiel sat bitter, angry, stunned for a week, but now he must be ready, by The Holy Spirit, to be picked up and ready to become the watchman that God is calling him to be.*

*Ezekiel 3:Verse 17, a watchman was a person looking out for the enemy. Ironically, it is God Who is the danger; that Ezekiel needs to warn Israel, "You better watch out; Yahweh's coming and you've got it coming too. So, it's this ironic twist that the very one that the watchman is to be watching for is The LORD God Almighty Himself because He's coming, The LORD is to pass sentences of life and death upon His people.*

*The role of watchman we will see in Ezekiel Chapter 33, verses 1-6, but we have many references in Scripture to watchmen. As you see in your handout, they could be on lookout towers; on city walls; on the housetops of gate houses; they could also be in towers outside the city. Jesus tells a parable about a watchman in a vineyard and so sometimes very wealthy land owners will actually pay watchmen in towers on a big big vineyard because the wealthy owner did not want people coming in and stealing his grapes and produce. So we find several examples of the function and the importance of watchmen throughout the history of Israel. So, whenever watchmen was in any danger, he would have a **shofar** which is a ram's horn. He would pick that up and blow it and that would be the signal that the enemy is coming and to take cover.*

*Now, Ezekiel is not the only one who is referred to as a watchman. Both the prophets Hosea and Jeremiah were called watchmen. Now, we will see in just a little bit (that) Jeremiah and Ezekiel almost certainly overlapped. Jeremiah was the older of the two and Ezekiel almost certainly looked to Jeremiah like a mentor, a father figure of a prophetic work.*

*When we think about the prophets we find that there are several godly prophets whose books from The Bible are working in concert in this period. And so, it was a very active time when The Holy Spirit called, not one, but several to speak up and out because this is a particularly hard time for Judah with the Babylonian captivity.*

*Then, we look at **Ezekiel 33:18-21**, and we see that there are four hypothetical cases set before Ezekiel. The word "wicked," by the way, the word "wickedness" appear in the Book of Ezekiel more than in any of the other books in Scripture. And so, there is a clear delineation between the wicked and the righteous. And, I would go so far—we hear then later, our Lord's parable in Matthew 25, the separation of the sheep and the goats. Jesus is really in a parabolic fashion talking about what we read in the Book of Ezekiel. I said, I think the first time, Ezekiel is never quoted explicitly in the New Testament, but it underscores, foundationally almost all the New Testament. A lot of the*



*inferences that Jesus teaches, the apostles teach, especially in the Book of Revelation. We are going to find Ezekiel foundation to this and so it's very easy, and I think it's very correct, for us to assume that what God says to Ezekiel is in the back of the minds of much teaching in the New Testament.*

*So, going back to your (Class 3 Sept. 29) handout, in terms of Ezekiel's context, a wicked person is one who holds Yahweh and the LORD's covenant in contempt. He's ostensibly, on the outside, a member of the community, but in his heart and in his life he willfully violates the covenant stipulations. So here is how, I think, Ezekiel is in the background. Later, Jesus will say that there is one unforgivable sin; that, of course, is the sin against The Holy Spirit. He doesn't say exactly what that sin is. Most Orthodox scholars say that the sin against The Holy Spirit is the person who has been born again; who is filled with The Holy Spirit; who has said, "Jesus is Lord," but then turns against The Holy Spirit; against the Lord; and says, "I reject You Holy Spirit; I don't believe in You; get out of my life; I'm going to live this way, not according to Your way. Now, theologically, we've got a lot to work though that. If that, indeed, is the sin against The Holy Spirit; if it is to reject The Holy Spirit who has filled a person; then it could be that this is very similar to what is happening in Ezekiel. Because, these are members of the household of the covenant of faith; these are God's own people, the Jews. And yet, here they are as a member of the covenant and yet they rejected the covenant. This is the wickedness that Ezekiel is called to speak against.*

So, in just a minute I would love to hear your comments about this because it raises all sorts of theological questions; about salvation; about assurance of salvation. Can a person whose truly born again turn against The Holy Spirit? Or, does that mean that the person was never truly born again in the first place? We'll talk about that in just a moment.

Then, if you will look at your second page (Class 3 Sept. 29 Handout), A righteous person is the opposite, obviously, of a wicked person. A righteous person is the man or woman that not only believes and worships Yahweh, but actually obeys the covenant.

There are four cases in these verses:

**Case 1 (v 18)** – Yahweh charges Ezekiel to deliver to the wicked person the legal sentence of the death penalty. Here no repentance is offered, although there will be repentance offered later in the book. The emphasis here is on Ezekiel's responsibility to warn the wicked. If he doesn't Ezekiel will be guilty of the murder. So, today, brothers and sisters, part of our calling is to warn the wicked; and that's a hard thing; its a hard thing to tell a person, "You're living in sin, and if you continue in this way of sin, your life will end in the outer darkness of hell because God is God and you're not and He is just and Holy and He's told you The Way." Whoa, that's a hard thing. But, if you know and love somebody who is willfully, intentionally sinning against God and you do not speak up, according to the Book of Ezekiel, it is The Lord who's going to hold that responsibility that you have shirked against you. It's tough. That's why I think the Book of Ezekiel is the most comforting book and, at the same time, one of the hardest books

to read.

**Case 2 (v 19)** – Ezekiel has dutifully delivered the sentence; he's absolved of responsibility of the wicked man's death (what that wicked person may or may not do).

**Case 3 (v 20)** – A formerly righteous person now turns to practicing evil. The LORD brings about his death by placing an obstacle—a “stumbling block”—before him. A stumbling block is some sort of concrete equivalent to the death sentence.

Four stages in the life of, what we might call a backslider; that's an old term that many of us are familiar with. A backslider is a person who used to be faithful and yet now, obviously, is not. The person is a faithful member of the covenant community. He turns from his righteousness to evil. He is tripped up by God with a stumbling block. He dies, and his whole life when he was righteous no longer has any effect on him. His fate is determined, not by how he began his life of faith but whether he has persevered in his faith, in the LORD.

Now, that is another huge theme in Ezekiel. To persevere in your faith, you're going to have days when you're really weak. There are going to be days and seasons, brothers and sisters, and you know this as well as I do, where you're going to really struggle to believe and hold on with the tips of your fingers to God. God says, “I want you to persevere.” “I want you to fight through those seasons.” “Because a better season is coming.” So much of the life of faith is not how much faith you have but whether you are persevering in the faith you do have. Whether you have just a tiny speck of faith or whether you have a big gallon of faith, it's the persevering that we are called to do.

**Case 4 (v 21)** – the fate of a repentant backslidden person

The watchman has given his warning, and the backslider has heeded it. And now the repentant person has a sentence not of death but life. There's a great parallel teaching and that is why we think Jeremiah and Ezekiel were in conversation together. We find a parallel teaching in **Jeremiah 6:16-21** (a very similar occasion so this is why I said earlier we believe there is overlap).

Let me share some **Theological Implications** and then we'll have a few minutes for questions and comments:

1. Those who repudiate the covenant stand under the judgment of God. That seems to be obvious. It's really emphasized in the Book of Ezekiel.
2. The wages of sin is death. Paul is going to pick this up in Romans and this is why Ezekiel is so foundational to the New Testament. The warning is to the members of the covenant community who have in the past trusted in Yahweh and submitted to His LORDship. But, God loves them enough to give them the freedom to turn away from Him. It establishes the perseverance in the faith.

3. The voice of the watchman represents the grace of God reaching out to those under the sentence of death. Is it a loving thing to tell a person, “Listen, if you continue this, you will die in your sin?” Isn’t it the most loving thing we can do? It is the grace of God that wants to save sinners and not see their destruction.

4. This passage affirms, above all else, that with the privilege of having the prophet’s authority comes the awesome responsibility for the life and death of the people in his charge. Later we are going to see, The Shepherds of Israel have been repudiated and rejected, and condemned by God because they were not shepherds who carried both the staff and the crook. The crook was to bring sheep back out of care and love that had wandered. The staff was to hit the wolf over the head that would try to kill the sheep. Shepherds need to have a staff, and they need to have a crook and the people of Israel had not.

5. The messenger, the watchman of God, is not called to success but to faithfulness, the theme throughout the Book of Ezekiel.

Let me stop there. You’ve got some questions at the end of this handout.

What’s the biggest takeaway? Well, how do you negotiate the two Biblical Truths? On the one hand there’s election—Jesus said, “I chose you; you did not choose Me.” Paul talks about election throughout his letters, especially in Romans as well as in Ephesians. On the other hand you have here in Ezekiel that people have choices; i.e., follow the way of wickedness or the way of righteousness of those in the covenant community. So, are there other things? Other questions, comments observations? We’ve got about eight minutes. Please unmute and speak up.

**Mark:** “Peg, good.”

**Peg:** “You’ve blown me away here. So now getting back to the theology of you’re assured of your salvation, okay? And yet, on the other hand, you’re saying we can walk away from it. I understand the term “backslide,” but I always was under the impression that God would bring you back. Yes, I understand free will, but this is really huge. So you can actually walk away from your salvation. Okay, Mark?”

**Mark:** “Peg, right, you have really zeroed in on what I was hoping you or somebody would raise. So, I take great great confidence in security and comfort in the doctrine of eternal salvation; that eternal security; that once you are filled and connected to Christ by faith you cannot lose your salvation; that, yes, you can wander, but you’ll come back. So, I think that is taught throughout Scripture, and I think pastorally I really want people to find great comfort in the doctrine of eternal security. The challenge is when you read Ezekiel and you find that these are Jews in the covenant community who had turned to wickedness. So, could it be that in their hearts they were never faithful in the first place? It is not that they were faithful and had lost their faith. They were truly never faithful in the first place. It is also hopeful that those who have turned to wickedness,

as you say, Peg, will eventually be brought back. Yes, you can backslide; you can deviate, but at some point, because of eternal security in Christ you will be brought back.

**Peg:** “Or God will take you back to Heaven. In other words you might die if you go too far and don’t start to return. That’s what I was always taught to believe.”

**Mark:** “Well, that is certainly what I hope and hold onto. That’s why I find the Book of Ezekiel so wonderfully challenging. Because, what do you do with these four cases where there are Jews who have repudiated and rejected the covenant of Yahweh and He’s...there’s no gray area..they are all for Him or they are all against Him. So, at the same time, at the end of the day, I have to trust in eternal security because, otherwise, I am trusting in myself—and so, it really is I trust in Christ. And, I agree with you, Peg, even as I find some challenges here to work through. And, it’s why we need to read Ezekiel in the context of the whole Bible. We can’t say, ‘Oh, Ezekiel is the only book that really counts.’ We cannot do that. We need to read in context, but there’s a challenge.” “Lisa Bond, I know you and I have had some conversations about this. Do you have any observations on what Peg has raised?”

**Lisa Bond:** “What Peg has raised is pretty much what I, also, have been taught and believe. For one reason salvation is a work of God and what God has done cannot be undone by me. God is stronger than I am, obviously. It is troubling though that some people who are on the other side of the argument will say, ‘Look at all these other verses.’ There’s one in Hebrew..might be Hebrew 6 are hard to understand. But, I still go with that God has us in His hands and we can’t get out of His Hands; He keeps us there and that’s in **John 10**. But, perhaps, it’s something like the wheat and the weeds where there are among us those who we think are believers; they look and they act and they talk like believers, but they aren’t really believers and again all of this..I think it’s a great mystery and it’s in God’s hands. But, I take comfort in eternal security because, otherwise, I would think that I would be able to somehow sin myself out of God’s hands and what sin would that be? I would always be living in that kind of anxiety.”

**Mark:** “Yes, thank you, thank you Lisa, I think that speaks well to this question and I would agree with that. And, I too take great comfort in eternal security. I would say to the person who says, “I believe in Jesus,” and ten years later says, “I don’t believe in Jesus.” Well, I would say, “Brother, you were never changed in the first place because if you were really converted, you would believe ten years later.”

**Mark:** “Frank, do you want to add to that?”

**Frank:** “The simplest passage in Scripture is Jesus Himself saying, “Those that the Father has given me, none can take from me. That’s the assurances right there. So, I believe the same as you do that if a person looks to be saved and they turn from their righteousness to unrighteousness, they were never truly saved...born again.”

**John 6:37-40** **37** All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. **38** For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. **39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. **40** For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

**Lilly O'Brien:** “I have a thought..so it says in my version at the end in **verse 20**, the righteous things that person did will not be remembered.” So, it sounds like when you are talking about a righteous person it’s a person who “does good,” but then starts pursuing injustice and doing evil things, and The Lord says, “These good seeds that you did will not attribute to anything because you’re wicked and you’re hard and that’s taking root and that’s going to be the fruit produced. But a true righteous person is righteous on the inside out. So, that is just a thought that I had. I am not sure that makes sense.”

**Mark:** I think it does; thank you, Lilly, for your observation. Thank you so much. As a matter of fact, this is a great way to conclude today. It is a matter of the heart. You know, you can be..you can look outwardly like a righteous person and be inwardly wicked. You can be inwardly righteous and do bad things. It’s a matter of the heart. God wants to change our hearts. And so, for all of us, brothers and sisters, who are born again, we have eternal security. The evil one and our temptations cannot snatch us away. You must trust in the grace and the salvation of Christ for you. And, it is also though, at the same time, a call to us to really live out our faith. A call to call others, that they too can be born again.

So, thank you for this great conversation. This is why the Word of God is so important to study together so that we can help one another and encourage one another.

Let me close with a prayer. It’s 1:00. Now, next week I will be out of town so we’ll not have class next Tuesday, October 6, but we’ll pick up the next Tuesday after that and by the grace of God we’ll continue until Christmas without interruption.

“Lord, help us by the power of The Holy Spirit to help us to live and to stand and to hold to Your Word because we know Jesus that from day to day, moment to moment You always hold to us forever. You be the glory now and forever. In Christ’s name. Amen. thank you all. Bye, bye.

Two weeks ago on **Class 3** we ended on a little bit of a shaky note. “What about the doctrine of eternal security?” and, “Oh, could we lose our salvation?” And so, we had good discussion and the Book of Ezekiel is going to bring up a lot of questions in theology that we need to work through. And, okay, there are no questions that are off limits; they’re all germane. But, I want to encourage you because I do believe the Doctrine of Eternal Security is a really really important one both Biblically I think it’s sound worthy; practically, I find so many Christians who wring their hands, “Am I really

saved? Will I really get to Heaven?" And, the Lord wants us to have peace about that and to trust in His Salvation and that, I believe, leads to all sorts of wonderful things.

So, at the end of last week...two weeks ago in **Ezekiel 3:16-21** I think the overall takeaway from **Class 3** is God's call to persevere in the faith; that Ezekiel is writing to the people of God at an extremely stressful time. My goodness, there are exiles in Babylon. Of course, their faith is going to be challenged and sadly some fell away. But the point is, once you're in Christ The Holy Spirit will give you everything you need to persevere. Remember **Romans 8:37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Nothing!" so you will persevere, but I think the Lord needs His Church in this stressful time, all these years later to persevere. So my concern is for those believers who have not been in worship for six or seven months and are having a tough time thinking about going back. And some, of course, have legitimate concerns about not wanting the virus and they need to be more isolated—I get that. But there are some who could be back, but have chosen not to and I really want to pray for those, not just in our Church but the Church throughout the world that they, too, at such a time as this will persevere. So that was the takeaway that I really would hope we would all have from **Class 3**.

**(End of Class 3 and September 29 Handout - End of Zoom Recording Sept. 29)**

**No Class held October 6, 2020**

**Class 4 - October 13, 2020 Zoom Recording and Class 4 Oct. 13, 2020 Handout  
Ezekiel 6:1-14**

**Opening Prayer:** Lord, we give You thanks this beautiful Tuesday. We thank You, Lord, that it was this day in the first week of creation that you doubly blessed by calling it “good” twice, which, Lord, we give You thanks for it’s the third day in that first week of creation and then that, of course, reminds us directly to Your resurrection and that is why we are here because You defeated sin, death and the devil. And, You called us to be Your people and we want to follow You, Lord. We want to be your people. We are so grateful that You grafted us into Your covenant through Israel. We thank You that You have lifted up prophets such as Ezekiel who, not only spoke in his day and age to the people of Israel but obviously You were speaking to us through Ezekiel in our day and age in the Church now. To You be the honor and the glory now and forever Amen.

Okay, just kind of a point here. It has nothing to do with Ezekiel. I just mentioned in the prayer in **Genesis 1**, Tuesday, the third day, is the only day called “good” twice. And that is just one of these little things that are so important. The third day of creation is the only day doubly blessed. And, obviously, that third day points us to the ultimate third day of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. So, there are all sorts of signposts throughout Scripture and we just pray that The Holy Spirit will open our eyes to them.

Brothers and Sisters, hopefully you have been able to obtain a copy of today’s notes for **Class 4, October 13**. We were not able to meet together last week. I missed all of you. We were down in Atlanta taking care of our grandchildren, but it’s good to be back with you. Anything you want to bring up or add, please unmute yourself and speak up if you do.

**Dr. Alan Denekas:** Mark, you talked about the sin against The Holy Spirit. It is something I happened to have thought about a lot. It used to scare me a lot. But, I think what it really is talking to is, especially in the Book of John, Jesus, in two different places (I think in **John 5 and John 10**) He talks about ‘if you don’t believe Me, believe the works that I do.’ In other words the miraculous work of The Holy Spirit was giving testimony to Jesus’ Messiah-ship. But the Pharisees were essentially writing that off. They could not deny the miracles so they denied the Source of the Miracles; they wrote it off, I think, particularly in the **Matthew** passage. In **Matthew 12** it talks about the Pharisees saying ‘Well, He’s just doing His miracles by the devil.’ So again, they couldn’t write the miracles off so they wrote the Source of the Miracles off and, thereby, they were rejecting The Holy Spirit’s testimony about His Messiah-ship. And since the only way we can come to God is through Christ and through His atonement, they’re cutting themselves off from the only Source of Salvation; i.e., like it says in Acts that ‘there’s no foundation laid other than that which is laid which is Christ. And, they’re cutting themselves off from the only possible source of salvation. Now interestingly in **1 Timothy 1**, Paul refers to Himself as a blasphemer so he was probably among those Pharisees who Jesus was issuing that warning to. (Mark: “WOW”) So it doesn’t appear to me to be; like if you just think, ‘Oh my gosh, you have one thought against The Holy

Spirit and you're doomed,' it's that if you have that hard hearted attitude that persists against the obvious testimony against The Holy Spirit throughout your life and die in that frame of mind, well then there is no return. But, Paul! Paul! 'our St. Paul,' apparently he counts himself against those blasphemers in **1 Timothy 1** so evidently it is a severe warning, 'Don't persist in your hard hardness against the testimony of The Holy Spirit,' but it's not just if you have a stray thought about or against The Holy Spirit that you're doomed. And then, in **Romans 8:38-39**, I think Lisa Bond was asking about 'what kind of sin can we possibly commit to be separated from God?' Well, I think, in **Romans 8:33**, it is saying 'God is the Judge..who judges? God is the Judge,' and in **Romans 8:34** it says Jesus is, on one side, our Prosecuting Attorney; who is he to condemn?' Christ Jesus who died and was raised. And, so we know The Prosecuting Attorney, and He is also our Defense Attorney who intercedes for us. And so, there's no sin that can snatch us away from God. And, then throughout the other verses, **Romans 8:35-38**, it says that there's 'nothing else in all creation; 'no demon of hell; principalities, powers; nothing can snatch us away from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.' So, that is how I have come to understand of all that.

**Mark:** Thank you. Thanks so much.

**Dr. Denekas:** In other words, I think we can rest in assurance that yes we are eternally secure and a believer, essentially, cannot sin against The Holy Spirit again because we have already accepted Jesus' testimony. So it's not going to cause you to lose your faith, it's going to keep you from coming to faith in the first place.

**Mark:** "Well, thank you; alright, I really appreciate those reflections, Dr. Denekas."

Alright, let's move into today. We can continue in this section as we are looking at the Book of Ezekiel under the different kinds of themes in which the prophet operates. And so, we're still in the section we are calling, "Ezekiel, The Watchman." And, the watchman is to give a warning to the people that an enemy is approaching and to take care. And so, Ezekiel is functioning as "The Watchman of Israel" out of God's love to express the warning that if they persist and do not return to Him that there are dire consequences.

So, you've got your handout; we're now in **Ezekiel 6**, we're moving then from **Ezekiel 3:16-21**, the last class, and today we are focusing on the 14 verses of **Ezekiel 6**.

And so, just a few notes about the chapter before we dive into it verse by verse. The opening phrase, "The Word of the Lord came to me," is really important throughout the Book of Ezekiel. It identifies a new section; a new oracle; a Word that is being delivered from God through Ezekiel to the people. And so, it is really important to understand that when we read the Book of Ezekiel, just the way we phrase it; for example, if you will look with me at **Ezekiel 6:1 "Judgment Against Idolatry" 1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** "Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel,



And if we say, “Well now, Ezekiel says ‘Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel,’ technically, that’s not right. It’s God who says that. So, I would encourage us to love the Scriptures so much that we understand that these are the very words of God being spoken through the prophet. And, it’s not Ezekiel making things up; not Ezekiel’s opinion, but it’s God speaking to us.

And, if we had time we would compare this whole chapter of **Ezekiel 6** to **Leviticus 26**. Because, it’s clear that **Ezekiel 6** is built on the template of **Leviticus 26**. And, as you know, that’s the core of The Torah, and the ancient rabbis said that The Torah, the first five Books of the Bible, are the important Books of the Bible. And then they said within The Torah, Leviticus was the most important of the Torah. So, the ancient rabbis said that Leviticus was the most important Book in the whole Bible. WOW! So that’s a great commendation. And here in **Leviticus 26** God is saying, “These are the blessings, when, by grace through faith you remain true to the covenant.” And then the second part of **Leviticus 26**, these are the curses.

And so, when we get to **Ezekiel 6** then, we understand that God is not saying a new word to Ezekiel. That’s really important. God is not changing His mind; He’s not changing the rules of the game. He is simply articulating through Ezekiel what He has always said to the people of Israel beginning with Moses in **Leviticus 26**. So, God is simply moving forward in the **Book of Ezekiel** on His covenantal promises. God is not capricious; He acts according to His Word spoken once and for all.

This Sunday, I think, I’ll be preaching on **Malachi Chapter 3** and the opening part, I think it’s **Malachi 3:6** it says God is changeless and in the old King James the word is immutable. And, that is a beautiful secure word. God doesn’t change with the times; He’s not a God of whims; i.e., “I think this today and I think that tomorrow.” So, God is building and speaking to His people The Word that they had already received.

Let’s look then at **Ezekiel 6** beginning with **verses 1-3 “Judgment Against Idolatry”**  
**1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** “Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, **3** and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places.

WOW! This is a strong Word of God through the watchman Ezekiel. So if you will look with me at your handout **verses 1-3** “set your face toward the mountains of Israel.” And so, this is another **key phrase in the Bible and is used 17 times in the Book of Ezekiel**, and it’s found no where else in Scripture. So, it obviously refers to the whole country of Israel. And so, in the Bible we often find theology intertwined with geology. So, the topography, the geography of the land will often be the foundation upon which God will speak theologically to His people. This reference to the mountains of Israel means that the spiritual problem and illness with the people of Israel is pervasive. It runs the whole gamut of the country. In Israel there’s an amazing mountain ridge that runs

north to south and it's like the spine of the whole country. And so, it is a geographical way of speaking about a pervasive, broad and deep spiritual issue.

Now, here, Ezekiel is the watchman giving a warning against the mountains of Israel. But hold on! In **Chapter 36** that term is going to be used in a very joyful way. When the people of God return to Him, then there's going to be great rejoicing along the mountains of Israel. So, hold on! Ezekiel is full of judgment and the book is full of restoration, but you've got to hang in there; you can't just get one; you've got to get both.

And then, this key phrase in these opening verses, "I will destroy your high places." That should send a chill down all of our spines. Again, we hear this term "high places" throughout Scripture in the Old Testament. As we know; as you know, "high places" is a euphemism for pagan cult and shrines worship sites. They were often built on hilltops and mountain tops. And so, "high places" really becomes the great enemy of God. And, at these high places we know, typically the Canaanites are the ones who built them originally, and we know very sadly, tragically, Israel began to worship in the high places. The high places usually had two shrines at each high place. There was the one to baal and the image of baal was typically a bull. And baal was considered the male God of the high places. And then right beside the bull, representing Baal, would be an asherah. You will see "the asherah pole," throughout the Bible, and that was the female goddess. And so, the image of a female goddess was carved into a pole, and she was thought to be the fertility god to go along with the male god Baal.

And so you will see then how Israel's was drawn into worship in these high places and is the very thing that God said they must destroy. Only two kings in the history of Israel were ever able to tear down the high places totally, Hezekiah and Josiah. And, sadly their reforms only lasted through their lifetime. In both cases, the successor to Hezekiah and Josiah reestablished the high places. So this was a huge problem in Israel and it leads then to the ancient problem of syncretism. Again, this is a term, I am sure is very familiar to you.

Today, Brothers and Sisters, I would propose that syncretism and syncretistic practices continues to be, perhaps the chief enemy of God's people and the chief temptation into sin and to false worship. The term syncretism or syncretistic is a combination of two Greek words. If you will look at your handout syn is the Greek prefix for with and you can see the word for cretan in cretanetistic which is the word for Crete, the people of Crete, on the island off of Greece. So this is an ancient word that literally means, with the Cretans. If you will look at the **Book of Titus Chapter 1** Paul calls the Cretans just a bunch of liars. In the ancient world the inhabitants of Crete were infamous for lying, deceitful, false words in worship and practices. So syncretism means that you join yourself with a false teaching with liars. And this word syncretism becomes the way we talk about joining true worship of God with false worship of God. That is syncretism and we see it all the time. And it is a subtle pull that we must fight against. For example, syncretism would be ummm..how about like the health and wealth theology. There are so many popular preachers who say that "God wants you to be very wealthy and have

*your best life ever.” With that term, it’s a best selling book by the pastor of the largest church in North America. So, you’ve got to be careful; it’s a subtle pull. Is that really what The Gospel says? Does Jesus say, “My friends I have come that you may be really wealthy and and have a great life; your best life ever?” Or does He say, “I want you to deny yourself.” I want you to take up your cross and I want you to follow me.”*

*So **syncretism** is a very subtle thing, and God wants us to be wise and full of His Word so that we can have the Truth speak to our friends who get pulled into it. Probably, the one religion in the world that’s the most syncretistic is hinduism. Technically, there is no religion hinduism. Hinduism is a term of a panoply of thousands of religions. The word means just a coming together of religions. And so, hinduism, by its very nature combines more than a thousand different belief systems under one. That is probably the most obvious example today of a religion that’s syncretistic, but there are so many issues with Christianity as well so be careful with that.*

*And then **verses 4-7** and then we’ll take a break and ask varying questions as I read these next set of verses **Ezekiel 6:4-7**: **4** Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain before your idols. **5** And I will lay the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. **6** Wherever you dwell, the cities shall be waste and the high places ruined, so that your altars will be waste and ruined, your idols broken and destroyed, your incense altars cut down, and your works wiped out. **7** And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I AM the LORD.*

*And that’s the same name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush, “I AM.” And, then Jesus will say seven times in The Gospel of John, “I AM.”*

*So, God obviously abhors false worship, and that’s the key for us today. Whatever else we can say, the Lord wants us to worship Him truly and not false Gods.*

*If you will look with me at your handout. Read in vivid detail about God’s housecleaning(s) that are associated with the high places. First of all, the altars will be torn down. We know what an altar is; we have two of them at St. John, one in the Great Room and one in the Sanctuary. So, an altar can either glorify God, or an altar can blaspheme God. Secondly, the incense altars will be taken down. Now, technically in the Hebrew, the word is “chapels,” but it’s often translated as “incense altars,” but (again) technically the word is “chapels” and it refers to the building(s) that house the altar(s). So you can imagine on a hilltop, you’ve got some sort of rudimentary structure that’s covering an altar to a false god.*

*We’ve talked about Ezekiel as the most graphic book in the Bible, but because of our modern sensibilities and just because we’re nice people and we don’t want to be crude and rude, we don’t translate Ezekiel literally sometimes. And so, this is an instance where we’re not translating the book literally because we’re such nice people who want to avoid crude language. But, the word here is found 39 times in Ezekiel; and the word he uses for “idols” in the Hebrew sounds like a four letter word for human excrement.*

*So, if we were doing this literally, in your own mind, you know what I am talking about. He is calling an idol literally a four letter word for human excrement.*

*Remember General Patton? Did anybody see the movie “Patton?” Great World War II leader. He was a serious Christian. General Patton, as I have read his biography, was a very very devout believer. He was a man that four letter words flew out of his mouth. So, he’s kind of “an Ezekiel,” that, you know, sometimes, ah sometimes a graphic word just has to be used because other words just don’t quite get to it (the point/message being conveyed). So, Ezekiel is saying that these idols are nothing but excrement, and it is one of the most graphic words in the book. And, then the slain, the dead bodies will be left out there. And so, these Israelites who have abandoned God and gone to the baals and the asherahs. In other words, their bodies will not be buried. That affects two things. One, it makes the shrine impure because of dead corpses lying around. And secondly it means that there is no holy burial of the body, and so they’re left exposed to the elements for the birds and the insects to eat. And so, it is a dire warning that Ezekiel proclaims from The Word of God. So, as the victims of Yahweh’s judgment fall, the survivors will be forced to admit the powerlessness of the pagan deities and God’s own wrath against them, but the ultimate goal will be repentance and a remnant.*

Let me stop and please if you’ve got any questions or comments, observations, concerns, would love to hear those for a moment. Just unmute and speak up.

**Linda Handy:** Mark, when you’re talking about *syncretistic* worship altars, were these just the Canaanite altars and Canaanite idols or were these the Israelites who had become syncretistic and involved the pagan worship within the context of god worship?

**Mark:** That’s a great question, and I would say probably both, Linda. It’s both the Israelites going to these pagan shrines and then taking back elements of those false worships back to their own worship sites. So, obviously, Solomon builds the first Temple. The high places were really temptations before the Temple was built in Jerusalem. Once the Temple was built, there was absolutely no excuse that now we know where true worship is and where false worship is, but, the high places, obviously, continued long after Solomon through all the kings of Israel and Judah to Ezekiel’s day. It was a huge problem, and it is the fundamental issue of, “Who is worthy to be worshiped?” and it is just something that I think the Church today and Christians today have to be so careful about. Harvey Cox was the great Professor of Religion and Sociology at “Yale” (Harvard Divinity School) for 40 years. He was an Episcopalian. I only can assume that he was a Christian. Harvey Cox wrote, probably one of the most important books years ago, and the exact title escapes me (The Market as God). Basically, he did years of research and basically said that American Christianity is a buffet and that, he said, that the majority of people who say they are Christians pick a little bit from this religious dish and a little bit from that religious dish and they they make their plate up from the buffet line of religions and beliefs. And so, it was really Harvey Cox that exposed this issue for American Christianity years ago and I am not

sure it has gotten any better. So, I think it is just something I think the Scripture continues to call us to be observant about.

**Andrea Stephens:** Hey Mark, this is Andrea, so I have a question. As I see this warning and you know, this word against Israelites who are being tempted to worship at these high places and I see the bowl of incense, it makes me wonder, you know, these are Israelites who are in exile, correct?

**Mark:** Yes.

**Andrea:** So worshipping; the Temple has been destroyed.

**Mark:** Yes. They do not have the option to worship at the Temple. Do you think any of this high place worship might mimic true worship? It just makes me think how dangerous it is that false worship can have some of the same elements as true worship. But for Israelites who are removed from the ability to worship at the Temple, which was such their national decor of their worship and yet they're gonna go worship at these high places and do some similar things, ugh, I think that; it just seems very prophetic; isn't that interesting 'prophetic' for us that I think that there might be; tell me what you think; is there any connection there; is there any concern for us for false worship that is like true worship?

**Mark:** Well, that's a searching question, thank you. Now, technically the Temple, at this point in Ezekiel has not quite been destroyed. It's about six years into the book into his ministry that he will then receive the word that Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians have finally destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem, so technically, worship is still going on. But, the reason, in this initial wave of exile now Ezekiel is in the initial wave of about 8,000 exiles to Babylon. The reason that it happened in the first place, primarily their false worship, so you are asking then the question, Andrea, today how can we make sure that we are not bringing false elements of worship in. It's a great question. It's one that concerns me a lot, and so, we have tried hard to follow the ancient practices of worship here at St. John. To me, the best defense against false worship is to worship as God's people have done, not just in recent times but ancient times. From Israel to Jesus and the apostles through the Reformation to our Church today. And so, that's why I think ancient liturgy is; yes, there's a danger liturgy can become rote and boring, "Oh, it's the same every day blah blah blah," and it can just become words that just roll off our tongue. But, if we come into worship every Lord's Day; we come before the altar and we sit there and we say, "Lord, thank You that you're bringing me in not to some new novel brand new exciting experience of worship; thank You that you're bringing me in to the ancient journey that millions of faithful Jews and Christians have walked." And so, the ancient liturgy that unfolds from the synagogue; from the Temple to the synagogue to God's people; where we move from gathering to Word; to Meal; to Sending. This, to me, is how we can keep the way that God has asked us to worship without bringing in false and individual practices. I would say, we don't worship the liturgy. The liturgy is a basis upon which we can have confidence that we are not

brining in novel and false worship into us. It's a good question, thank you, Andrea. Anybody else?"

**Ann Wolfer:** Yes, Pastor Mark, I would like to say that it's not by coincidence that in Ezekiel in this exile that the people of God; well these people were taken to exile to Babylon, which is also known as Ur, which is where Abraham was first called to follow God. It's as though God was saying, 'You want these idols so much, I will take you all the way back to the beginning of My relationship with you and you can be in the very polluted land of these idols where it all started. And, you'll be surrounded by idols where, there really is no place to worship Me unless you choose to worship me in My heart. And, I think that it's a picture. And, how did they get there? They got there because they were in captivity and they were in bondage. And, I think this paints such a picture that when we worship anything or anybody other than the true and living God, we are in captivity and in bondage; we are in darkness. And, it's only in Christ that we are in The Light and that we worship our True And Living God in Spirit and in Truth. So, this really paints a picture and a contrast. Ezekiel whose a messenger and watchman of God apropos to these people who want to cling to these idols that are worthless and nothing back in the land where Abraham was originally called to leave all of that and there they are in bondage going back to what they think will bring them happiness.

**Mark:** That's great Ann! I did not make that connection. I am so glad you have. That is a beautiful, powerful connection that you have made for us. Thanks for sharing; that really nails it. That is really very helpful. Again, God is not just doing this capriciously; there is a purpose to why they are back in Babylon and not in Persia or Egypt or some other place, and, again, you've just nailed it. That's great insight!

*Alright, well, let's go to **Ezekiel 6:8-10**. because, I think we all need a ray of hope about now in Ezekiel and in our lives. **8** Yet I will leave some of you alive. ("that's good; that's news") When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries,*

**Verse 8**, *Yahweh is sovereign; those who survive do so by His divine initiative, but they shall emerge as a transformed people. But, one of the things they will learn through the time of Ezekiel is that God is working in a foreign land away from the land of Israel and Jerusalem. Yes, He wants to draw them back to the land because the land is central to the covenant. But, in the meantime, God doesn't stop at the border of Israel. He goes into Babylon; and He meets the exiles where they are. So, wherever we are, brothers and sisters, if we wander far from God, He's the God who goes into our exile to find us to bring us back.*

9 then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols. And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. **10** And they shall know that I am the Lord

*("there's the name of God, that's technically 'Yahweh' I AM the LORD)*

I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them.

*So, let's look at just a few things about this. Here is the beginning of the word of the theology of the remnant; it's huge in Ezekiel. We will finally get to some great news about eternal security; that God will never wipe away all His people. He cannot do that; He will not do that. You know Paul says in Romans, not every Israelite is a true Israelite, but so, within Israel there is the remnant that will be saved. And, so that's a very important overall Biblical theme, and we'll say more about that as we go along.*

**Verses 9 and 10**, *their spiritual renewal will occur on three levels. First, they will remember Yahweh, which is a way to say, "their covenant promises will be renewed." Secondly, they will also acknowledge their sin; they will loathe themselves. Suddenly they will say, "I can't believe I was doing this. I can't believe I had this false worship. I can't believe I was worshiping baal or I had taken...." So they'll say, "Please, God forgive me. Please, Lord God, I am sorry." And so, it's an awful thing to see your sin, but it's a lifesaving thing. Because then you don't keep your sin. You put it down before God and He always promises to forgive you. Thirdly, they will know that "I AM the LORD." They will remember the LORD's name. They will remember He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is the God of the burning bush. He is the God who has come in exile to bring them home.*

And then, to finish out this chapter, let's get **Ezekiel 6 verses 11-14** and then we'll have time for some more discussion. **11** Thus says the Lord God: "Clap your hands and stamp your foot and say, Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, for they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.

*So a second announcement of house cleaning going on. And, notice how God says to Ezekiel, "I want you to speak these words, but I want you to speak them bodily. I want you to proclaim them with intense emotion." (verse 11). Scholars call this in Ezekiel a 'sign acts.' In other words, Ezekiel, more than any other prophet, is the one who acts out his proclamation. So, he is putting his whole body into his ministry. He's not just talking off the top of his head. He is physically clapping and stomping like a 3-yr. old having a tantrum. And, he is physically going, "ALAS! ALAS!" So, God wanted Ezekiel to do these dramatic acts to capture the attention of the people so if His words did not get their attention, perhaps, the clapping of the hands or the stomping of his foot would because God is so angry over the sins of His people. Remember, at the beginning of Class 1 we talked about God is a jealous God. Jealous doesn't mean a negative thing. Jealous means He loves us so much, nothing causes Him to be more angry than when we go, and, as you see in the **Book of Ezekiel**, "whoring after other gods."*

*And so, throughout Ezekiel, the understanding is that God is the husband and Israel is the bride. The marriage covenant really is foundational to Ezekiel and to the whole Bible. And so, when the people of God worship other gods; when they incorporate*

*pagan worship, it is as if they are breaking their marriage covenant; they are committing adultery against Yahweh. That's foundational to the whole book of Ezekiel; that when we worship falsely, we are committing adultery against our One True Spouse who is The Lord God Almighty.*

**12** He who is far off shall die of pestilence, and he who is near shall fall by the sword, and he who is left and is preserved shall die of famine. Thus I will spend my fury upon them.

*And so, Ezekiel, the watchman, announces God's coming disaster by sword, famine and plague, and that will happen back in Jerusalem in just a few years. The exiles have started in 597; about nine, ten years later in 587, 586 then Jerusalem will be destroyed by sword; and then there will be many who will die by famine. And, then anytime you have that, of course, you have pestilence, plague and all sorts of bad germs.*

And, then in **verses 13 and 14** we see again the long arm of the LORD reaching to the heart of Israel's spiritual problem, the pagan worship sites on the hill and mountaintops.

**13** And you shall know that I am the Lord, when their slain lie among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountaintops, under every green tree, and under every leafy oak, wherever they offered pleasing aroma to all their idols.

*This is the source of the issue. This is the source of the sin. Any time we worship God the Father Son Holy Spirit in Spirit and in Truth, it always leads to life now and forever. Whenever we worship a false god, pagan god, an idol, it always leads to death now and forever. There is no in-between. It's either one or the other.*

*Now, do you see the play on words there in the Hebrew, 'a pleasing aroma to all their idols.' That's tongue and cheek; remember what we said about what idol literally means; that's a stink. It's not a pleasing aroma; it's the stink of the idols.*

**14** And I will stretch out my hand against them and make the land desolate and waste, in all their dwelling places, from the wilderness to Riblah. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

Given that, here are **Theological Implications to Ezekiel Chapter 6:**

First, this oracle gives us vivid evidence of the impassioned side of God's character. Does it surprise you how emotional God is? That He is stomping His feet through the prophet; clapping His hands. He is a jealous and God's an emotional God. We are made in the image of God. We are emotional people. Now, some of us are less emotional than others, but all of us are emotional people. We all have feelings, and this is a gift of God. We need feelings. And our emotions, then, even that comes from a God who also has feelings.



Secondly, it is possible to be sincere in one's religious commitment, but to be sincerely wrong in error. The Israelites gave great devotion to the pagan gods in the high places and they did so to their own ruin and death. Unlike what many believe today, all roads do not lead to Heaven. And, all religions and gods are not equal. False gods are but excrement, figments of sinful imagination according to the Book of Ezekiel.

Thirdly, the Lord is faithful to His covenant to the very letter of it. He is a God who acts according to His Word given from one generation to all generations according to His covenant.

Fourth, God's wrath is never so great that it cancels out His grace. He may bring judgment, brothers and sisters, but He will always preserve a remnant. Let us remain faithful and persevere with the Lord.

And finally, one more theological implication, this oracle (oracle is that term 'Thus says the Lord, that's an oracle) calls us to look at ourselves as God sees us. He is Holy and we are not. Our sin is great before Him, and we live and move only by His grace and mercy. Seeing our sin, opens our eyes to seeing the beauty and the holiness of God and that is a life giving thing.

What's your biggest takeaway from **Ezekiel 6**? We've got a few minutes. Do Israel's spiritual issues remind you of any issues that we face today? What are the idols that we deal with today or other things like that? And then I am going to stop and please, would love to hear your takeaways.

The final thing on your handout is **6e**. I've not read these books, but I am hearing a lot about them, and we may all want to read them and discuss them at some point.

First, is Rod Dreher's new book. Now Rod Dreher became famous for "The Benedict Option." He writes for the American Conservative Magazine. He's written a new book called "Live, not by Lies, a Manual for Christian Dissidents." Dreher's premise is that we are living in terribly syncretistic times; and we need to come back to serious faith. And so, how do we do that? We've got to do that very intentionally.

And then, Dr. R. Albert Mohler, a Baptist theologian and pastor and seminary professor, has written a new book that's just been published called "The Gathering Storm," secularism, culture, and the church where he also talks about these issues much as Dreher does. And, as I read reviews of these two books, they remind me a lot of what we are getting in Ezekiel. Once again, we see that the ancient problems contend to be very much contemporary problems. So, we may want to read those books and discuss them down the road, but that's just an "fyi."

What are your reactions, thoughts, questions, concerns?

**Vickie Smith:** I have a question about the remnant. When God punishes like He does in the Bible from time to time and always leaves a remnant, it almost seems like the remnant gets punished also. Does it appear that way to you? That the remnant, while we, (I say we because I am assuming that we will be the remnant, you know, if things continue on in our country and the world they way they are), but I'm wondering, do we wind up suffering a lot because of the sins of our countrymen who we disagree with and argue with as strongly as we can and stand up for God and The Word of God, and yet it seems like we also get punished. And, is that true? And, why is that?

**Mark:** 100 percent true. Great point..**the Beatitudes, Matthew Chapter 5**, where Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for My sake for righteousness." And so, the Lord continues throughout His teaching; the apostles, pick up on this, James, Peter especially, that yes we will experience suffering because of righteousness. So, the remnant is not this isolated little preserve that is immune to suffering. In fact, it could be, Vickie, that our greatest suffering is our greatest testimony to the world. Nothing gets people's attention more than when a believer suffers faithfully. Then an unbeliever says, "How can that person be so faithful and joyful when they're going through this terrible thing? I've got to investigate why that is." And that can lead them right to the Lord. But, you are right, the remnant is going to be saved and God's grace is secure, but the righteous will suffer.

**Linda Handy:** But, Mark in **verse 9** "then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive," we will suffer but the very thing that will allow us; and I say, 'will' because I believe you're right because we will suffer. We will suffer, but we will give thanks to the Lord that He, as He says, will meet them wherever we are. He will not abandon us so we can carry with us His Promise of grace and salvation and connectivity with us, which means we also spread The Word. Thanks be to God.

**Mark:** Amen.

**Vickie:** Then I look back on Sodom and Gomorrah and God had said He would save them if there were ten righteous men, or whatever, I mean, I think the remnant..doesn't the remnant represent those righteous men and ...I'm not able to say what I am thinking here. What I'm wondering here is that I feel like God promises the remnant that, you know, if you're there and you are there for Him, then Yes He will...I guess I'm confusing saved and think that means not suffering. But, saving does not necessarily mean that we will not suffer I guess.

**Mark:** No, you bring up a great point to wrestle with, Vickie, and so it's sobering to read what Peter says in his letter and James says that suffering is not contrary but can be the very way that God makes Himself known through us; that through our suffering He is known the most.

Martin Luther wrestled with this more than anything else when his beloved 13-year old daughter, Magdalena died. And after a year of great despair and suffering, depression and wrestling with Scripture and praying through the night, what emerged was Luther's now famous theology of The Cross where he says we only truly know God as we know Him on The Cross that He loves us enough to suffer for us. Luther didn't really answer the question, but Luther was able, then to say, that suffering is not a sign that God's abandoned us, but can be the very way that we know God the most. But, it is a great mystery."

**Mary Peg:** Hey Mark, it's Mary Peg, I have a question. It's very simple, but I get confused easily. When they were building the Temple, the real Temple, and the altar, correct? Was there any thought? I know this sounds silly, but, was there any design or thought about when they built this they would want to do something that would entice the guys up on the mountains to leave their Temples and to come to us? You know what I'm saying? Like, as an enticement to get them off the mountain to come worship in our Temple. Or is that just like nuts?

**Mark:** It's an interesting question. I'm not sure there was anything structurally about the Temple, that was built for that purpose, but certainly their testimony was, you know, "Come away from these false gods that lead to death; come to the true God where true sacrifice and worship is made." So, it's an interesting question. Now, so anybody else want to weigh in on Mary Peg's comment there; her question?

**Linda Handy:** Wouldn't it be, Mark, similar to what we just said; that the people who are suffering; who are maybe not finding satisfaction in their idols and in their false theology, would see true peace and true contentment and true shalom in living a life with the Lord, and then would say, what you just said, how can they do that? "I want, in the midst of this suffering, to have that peace that a Christian has; that the believer in Yahweh has and, Mary Peg, wouldn't that be similar; that they would come away from their false idols because they see something better in worshiping the true (God)?

**Mary Peg:** Yeah, and I was thinking of the Temple itself, like would there have been anything that said, "Come here."

**Mark:** That's a great..so Mary Peg, your question has prompted your sister, Linda, to make a very profound comment that then I think is a great place for us to leave today. What does Paul finally say in **1 Corinthians 6** about the Temple? The Temple is our body—you are a Temple of the Lord; you are a walking, breathing, living Temple of the Lord. How is it that others are going to know the Truth of God? They are going to experience The Christ The Holy Spirit in your Temple who will then bear witness to Him. And so, this beautiful outpouring from the Temple of Jerusalem; now the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer, he or she is a Temple of the Lord, and through their witness, as you just said, Linda, people will come to Him.

Thank you all so much. I look forward to next week. "Lord we pray that You may keep us; and we pray, Oh, Lord, that we may keep You in our hearts. For all those today in our Church, we pray for our nation; for the world; for those who are hurting and wandering; for those who say that there is no God; that they hear the Truth in us and come to You. We pray this in Jesus' name.

God bless you all; thank you.

**Class 5 - October 20, 2020 Handout and Zoom Recording**

When asked to share, **Pastor Mark**: These are photos on the wall from Israel; a number of photos that depict Jerusalem; the Dome of the Rock, the mosque, the Muslim sanctuary that was built over the top of Mt. Moriah. Moriah, you remember from your Bible is the rock where Abram took Isaac for near sacrifice. And so, as a Holy site, Moriah, then was the foundation of the threshing floor that David bought in Jerusalem to build the first Temple. The Temple was built over Moriah. So, that domed mosque, the Dome of the Rock, is built intentionally over the Temple site, and that rock was right there in the Holy of Holies, for Jews, the most sacred place in the world. Therefore, we see the political and religious implications of having the mosque built over it. Now, before we get too far afield in that there is a very mysterious, oblique comment in the Quran about Mohammad's night visit to Jerusalem. And, just a couple of verses talk about "he rode a flying horse from Mecca to Jerusalem in a night visit to that site and then flew back to Mecca. And from that the Muslims get their religious argument that, Mohammad made sacred Moriah for Muslims, taking it away from Jews. So, it is a spurious, obviously, we would say, ridiculous argument given the fact that historically we know that was the Temple site from 1000 BC, historically, without question. So, the Jews would say, "Listen, this has been our site since the days of David, 3000 years ago, and you're saying, 'Muslims, this is the third holy site for you,' simply because of a strange couple of verses in the Quran about a night visit on a flying horse?" So, right now, as you know in the 67 war Israel won the Temple Mount back, but Moshe Dayan, who was the military leader, became the great leader of Israel, gave the authority back to the Jordanians to control the Temple Mount as a peace concession. So, technically Israel owns the Temple Mount, but has surrendered control to the Jordanians. So, it's a very contentious place. If there's going to be a World War III, it will be fought over this rock. There's a movement; it's a small movement but very vocal in Israel, to reclaim the Temple Mount and build the third Temple. And so, to do that they would have to, of course, take out the Dome of the Rock. And, if that happens, then there will be a World War. So it is, both Biblically as well as politically one of the major sites in the whole world. You could argue it is the most important religious political site that overlaps in all the world. So, if Israel is the most important nation and Jerusalem is the most important city, then the Temple Mount is the most important part of the city. That's how the argument goes. So, when we visit Jerusalem we always try to go up on the Temple Mount, but there's a lot of security up there; i.e. Muslim security, that if you even look like you want to stop and pray, they will rush over and without any mystery say, "You must move on. You cannot pray. We do not allow any Christians or Jews or non-Muslims to pray at the Temple Mount." Anyway, the rest of those pictures are from Jerusalem and I hope that, God willing, we will have at least one more pilgrimage over there at the end of next year. But, we'll have to see how the travel goes.

Well, God bless you, welcome to **Ezekiel**; this is **Class 5, October 20**. Let me pray and we'll begin.

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to you, Father, through your Son our Lord Jesus Christ by the power of Your Holy Spirit in Great Thanksgiving for Israel; for Jerusalem; for Your continuing covenant, Lord, that You make through Israel to all nations; that we, who are mostly Gentiles, by Your death and resurrection, dear Messiah Jesus, we can be grafted into that covenant that You have made with Your people. Forgive us our sins, O Lord, as You bring in Ezekiel Your judgment and punishment upon the Land of Israel, Lord, it makes us go to our knees to realize that this land, the United States, is also dealing with and stricken with great sin. And so, Lord, we can never just point our fingers and say, 'Look at how that Israel was,' Lord, we must also look and repent of the sin of this land. So, we thank You for Ezekiel that is so important as your prophetic Word in the 21st Century. We ask all these things in our class today, in the name of Jesus our Lord and Savior, Amen.

We are continuing now in our second part of **Ezekiel** as we have divided up under The Watchman (Ezekiel's the watchman) so next week we'll finish up this second part of The Watchman with Ezekiel; then we'll go to the third part of how we're dividing it into **Ezekiel, The True Prophet**.

So, last week was **Class 4** and we looked at Ezekiel 6. We saw that God is going to clean the house of Israel and we remember that the primary issue there was idolatry, false worship, that is the central sin in the Scriptures whenever, there's a lapse into paganism, idolatry, false worship, that sparks the great judgment upon children of God, especially His own people. And so, last week it was full of warning, full of dire circumstance. And today, hold on; put your seat belts on because **Ezekiel 7** is even a louder crescendo of the warning that God's bringing punishment to Israel.

So you remember now, chronologically, **Ezekiel 7** is the prophetic warning of God that He is going to punish the land of Israel. And so we have the prophetic warning of God, that He's going to punish the land of Israel. And so the Babylonians have not yet, chronologically, in the **Book of Ezekiel**, in his life, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. They're on the precipice. So, right now **Ezekiel**, in the initial exiles, 8,000, living by the Chebar Canal and there are still Jews back in Jerusalem under a puppet king who Nebuchadnezzar put on the throne, but the final devastation of Jerusalem and Israel is yet to happen, but it's going to happen. And when it happens, it's going to be as bad or worse than anybody could have imagined.

So, whenever we get strong words of judgment and punishment from God on His own people, we must understand that He does it under His great jealous love for us. I mean, the typical illustration is if you are in a grocery store and your child is sitting in the grocery basket and he or she throws a tantrum, you're going to be pretty concerned about that. You're going to do everything you can because that's your kid and he or she is representing you and you're going to either do something to stop that tantrum and get the child out of the grocery store. But, if you're grocery shopping and the child in the grocery basket of some other parent is down the aisle throwing a temper

tantrum, you're probably not going to pay much attention to it. You're just going to get your beans and your ketchup and you're going to go on because that's not your child. Israel is God's people and so, of all the people in the world, when they rebel against Him; when they denounce Him; when they live contrary to His commandments, a Loving Father is going to punish His children, not out of anger and hatred, but out of divine love and justice. So, eventually in **Ezekiel** there is going to be restoration, but you can't get there until you go through the judgment. Eventually, Easter Sunday is coming, but we've got to live through Good Friday. And so, to try to skirt this, or go around the punishment, that's not The Scripture; that's not The Gospel, and it must be both and the same.

We're looking now at "The Watchmen" **Ezekiel 7** "Sounding the Alarm for the Land of Israel." We can divide this chapter into sections, as you see in your handout. First two verses serve as an overall heading for the whole chapter; then it subdivides into three dire warnings (alarms) that judgment is coming. So, I love that about God. He doesn't surprise us with the judgment. He doesn't sneak up on us to say, "I gotcha!" He gives years and years and months and days and minutes of warning. So, the people have no excuse that God's judgment is coming.

The people must be convinced, which is incredible that they must be convinced, but they have to re-convinced that God is really involved in Israel's nation's affairs. Here's a question right off the bat. Is God involved in America's affairs? Does God care about this nation. Is He involved in the political and religious and spiritual and economic and morale life of this nation? American is not Israel. Now, we understand that. We are not a theocracy. Israel is unique. At the same time, I think we would have to be pretty close minded to say "God only deals with Israel in these ways." Does He not deal with all nations in somewhat similar ways in the 21st Century? WOW, every sin of Israel is magnified tenfold in the sin of this country. So that's what we're wrestling with. How does the judgment of God in 6 BC Israel parallel through God's relationship with our nation in the 21st Century AD.

The land is so important. We're going to see that in **Ezekiel**, there's a unique term that's used 16 times called "**The Land of Israel.**" Nowhere else in the Bible does that term exactly come, but **Ezekiel** really hammers home that you cannot separate the land from the people. The Land is, if you will, the sacramental means; the real tangible means of God's presence with His people.

Secondly, this is one of the most difficult **chapters in Ezekiel** to translate. It's because God is so angry He can hardly speak. You know, have you ever been so angry that when you try to talk your words come out like spit; and you can hardly make a sentence. It's kind of like a machine gun kind of speaking. That's what's happening in **Ezekiel Chapter 7**. I would dare say in all the Bible, this may be the Chapter in which we see The Lord God, Yahweh Himself, the most angry. This may be the angriest revelation and prophetic Word of God in all the Bible. There are other places where

God is very angry, but I dare say, they don't supersede how angry He is here (in **Ezekiel 7**).

And so it's going to be the sin of Israel; the sin of Gentile nations; God's strongest Words of judgment; promises of punishment. But, the question is, "Will the people listen and confess and repent of their sin?" There's an urgency. The Divine punishment can happen at any moment, but will they listen and repent? And, of course, as I said earlier that we have to ask, "Will we listen and confess and repent by both individually but here in **Ezekiel 7**, the issue is, will the nation collectively repent?" Let me stop with that opening 'salvo' for questions or comments at this point?

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, as usual, I have a question. Especially in these Old Testament chapters we keep seeing how emotional God is in His relationship with man. And, it makes me think back to a long time ago you did a sermon and you said that it was wrong for anyone to say that God created man because, I guess because He needed man or He was lonely; that God doesn't need us. But, it almost sounds, with these emotions that He has; that He has some sort of an emotional need for us. Does that make sense? I almost felt like God was above emotion in that one sermon that you preached, and it was years ago literally. But, I'm wondering about His emotions and how they apply to us as far as, does He really need us? Does that make sense?

**Mark:** That's a good question; a very deep question, Vickie. Thank you. So, God did not create us out of some sort of lack or need. He created us out of His Love. So, love, of course, is the strongest of all emotions. We see now in **Ezekiel** a jealous Love. He is a jealous Husband for His wife. His beloved bride has abandoned Him and has given herself over to other lovers, pagan gods. So I don't think to say that God is angry or emotional, I do not believe suggests that He created us out of His emotional need. I think He created us out of Love. His Love, though, is so powerful and all inclusive that when we rebuke His Love and throw it back in His face and go after other gods, there is nothing that provokes a deeper emotional response. I don't know if that answers your question, but it certainly...Of all the Books of The Bible, this is another reason why Ezekiel stands out. We see the emotional quotient of God more than any other place. Now, we hear it again in **John 3:16**. So, we know we are created in the image of God. Even though I tend not to be the most emotional guy. My own makeup is that I suppress a lot of my emotions that I probably should express better. But, I think all of us are emotional to some degree more than others, but that's a reflection of God. It doesn't suggest He is needy. It is that He Loves us more than anybody else. Good question; thanks.

**Ezekiel 7:1-27 "The Day of the Wrath of the Lord" 1** The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "And you, O son of man,

*Remember "O son of man," is the famous phrase in **Ezekiel**; it means "you man; you Adam; you human being."*



thus says the Lord God to the land of Israel: An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. 3 Now the end is upon you, and I will send my anger upon you; I will judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations.

*There's this repetition in **verse 6** that God is just spitting out the words, "the end has come," and look at **verse 3**, "Now, now the end is upon you." So don't think you've got 20 more years to get your act together. God is calling us to confess and repent right now, which is true for all of us. I mean, hopefully all of us have years ahead in life before we go to the "**Feast in the House of Zion**," but we could die right now. I mean I could die right now during this **Ezekiel** study; everyone of us can. And so, this false lie that we can live however we want to today and then we'll kind of get our act together at the end. Well, that's a lie of satan. So, all of us need to be ready to meet Our Maker.*

*I remember Downtown Roanoke in the Center in the Square, before they cleaned it up, there was a guy there, probably 25 years ago, was there every weekend with a big sign. You know, the proverbial "The End is Near, Repent." And, people passed him and everyone thought he was a kind of kook and ignored him, and he was kind of an embarrassment if you had visitors or people visiting Roanoke. "Oh, God, we've got these kooks downtown." But, that's the message of **Ezekiel**. "The end is near and is upon us." So, probably 25 years ago, I would have said to you to ignore him; we don't do that, but, the more I read Scripture, the more I'm into **Ezekiel**, I go, "That's the message of **Ezekiel**." And so, that guy is probably no less a kook than **Ezekiel** is so I have a different understanding of that.*

**4** And my eye will not spare you, nor will I have pity, but I will punish you for your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

*So, right there, God is lashing out upon Israel and the end will come.*

*So this begins the first warning of a three-alarm blast, and we'll see later that God is going to blow the trumpet. And what is the trumpet? The trumpet is the shofar, which is the ram's horn. Here is what it sounds like to hear the shofar being blown in Jerusalem, and you can hear it as "the shofar was a call to worship; and was always blown at the Temple at the time of worship to get people's attention." "Now's the time folks stop, pray, worship when the shofar is being blown."*

*But, it was also used by The Watchman on the towers to blow a warning. So, listen to this (sound of shofar being blown). That's one shofar being blown by a Rabbi in Jerusalem. So you get a sense of, it's a mournful kind of call; it gives you a tingle in your spine even to hear it through a cell phone, iPad to your computer. Can you imagine being in Jerusalem and you're going about your business and suddenly hear that? You just drop your tools; drop whatever is in your hands and your face goes ashen. "There must be some dire enemy at the gates." And, this is what God is doing here in **Ezekiel**.*

So, “The Land of Israel,” I said earlier is unique to **Ezekiel**. It emphasizes The Land. And, we know The Land, of course, is central to the covenant that God made with Abram, **Genesis 12**. If you have had an opportunity to read Gerry McDermott’s book, “Israel Matters,” you’ll see that The Land is mentioned in the Old Testament about a thousand times, which is incredible. If you have not read “Israel Matters,” please do so; it’s written for us in the Church pews. And so, we have to understand that one of the reasons that we are required, if you will, as believers to pray for Israel is that The Land is still part of the covenant.

So, it’s not that the state of Israel makes perfect decisions. Of course not. We would never say that our Congress makes perfect decisions; no State government does, but The Land is still central. And so the state protects The Land. You pray for the nation of Israel because to do so you’re praying that The Land will be protected according to God’s covenant. Because in Revelation 21, we are moving to “The Feast in the House of Zion in The New Earth, The New Heaven and, guess where, The New Jerusalem. And so, The Land is eternally part of the covenant; to be renewed, perfected, completed at the end of time.

**Verses 3 and 4 is a three-fold declaration of Yahweh’s judgment.** God will judge them on the basis of their conduct (**verse 3**). Secondly He will judge them according to their abominations. Every time you see the word, “abominations,” it’s a two-fold meaning; i.e., first is about worship anytime you are falsely worshipping. Also, it’s a moral sexual word. So to be immoral is tantamount to being irreverent and vice versa. So, it’s all kind of connected; i.e., your heart, your body, your mind—it’s all connected. And then a third time He says, “but I will punish you for your ways,” your conduct.

If you put these things together, and again this chapter in Ezekiel is difficult to translate, but these things together form an ancient Hebrew idiom, “to bring one’s conduct down on one’s head.” In other words, as they behaved, so they will be judged and their very sins will come crashing down on their heads. And, when God is finished, they will have no choice but to say, “The Lord is with us; we repent.”

So that’s the first alarm, let me stop for questions/comments at this point. (silence)

Okay, the shofar has been blown and not the shofar, the trumpet, is going to be blown a second time. Remember that mournful, dire sound of the ram’s horn being blown on the ramparts of Jerusalem.

**5** “Thus says the Lord God: Disaster after disaster! Behold, it comes. **6** An end has come; the end has come; it has awakened against you. Behold, it comes.

And so “an end has come; the end has come.” There’s this repetition that God is just spitting out the words, “the end has come.” (takes us to the rest of Mark’s comments below verse 3).

**7** Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come; the day is near, a day of tumult, and not of joyful shouting on the mountains.

*We are going to look at the word, “doom” in just a moment. I think that’s not the best translation. One of the words used to describe the calamity, and probably in your translations, verse 7 says, “Your doom has come to you..” Does anyone’s translation have a word different from ‘doom?’ No? Okay, probably a better translation is leash. The reason I say that is this is a reversal of the Promise of God in **Isaiah 28:5** where He speaks about the crown of glory that He’s going to give to His people, and the word that’s translated ‘doom’ the word, ‘leash’ is a play off the words ‘Crown of Glory’ becomes a ‘leash of punishment.’” So, the very Crown of Glory God was going to give to His people, He now takes and He stretches out into a leash, and it becomes a way to punish His people.*

*Probably..almost certainly Ezekiel’s audience there in Babylon, when they heard this prophetic word, they knew their Hebrew, of course, and they knew their Scriptures, and they knew what was happening; that God was moving from celebration to punishment.*

*“the day is near,” This is “The Day of the Lord,” that all the prophets announce. If you really want to read more about this specific term (it’s a technical term ) that means when God will visit, finally His lasting judgment where He will judge the living and the dead. You can look, for example, in the prophet **Joel 2**. That whole chapter is about The Day of the Lord. And, Joel is famous for emphasizing that the day is coming; the day of your judgment and my judgment. Paul will later say in **2 Corinthians 5** that every one of us will have to go and sit on the seat of judgment. It’s called the Bema Seat. It was in Corinth. And so he says in Heaven, we’ll go on the judgment seat; God will be both prosecutor and defender, and our whole life will be set before us and God will bring judgment upon us accordingly. So The Day of the Lord is a deeply important term and theological and practical announcement throughout all the prophets. And we see it here in Ezekiel.*

*So that’s the Second Alarm and these are getting stronger and stronger. Questions or comments? (None) Okay, let’s move on then. The Third Alarm. So again, in your mind, the shofar being blown a third time.*

**8** Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and spend my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations.

**9** And my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will punish you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the Lord, who strikes.

Notice how “ways” and “abominations” are held together. The second alarm is even more piercing; these alarms are escalating from bad to worse to the worst. In the Hebrew in these verses six different words are used to describe the calamity. “There will be disaster, evil, the end, the leash, the time, the day, the panic.

**10** “Behold, the day! Behold, it comes! Your doom has come; the rod has blossomed; pride has budded. **11** Violence has grown up into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, nor their abundance, nor their wealth; neither shall there be preeminence among them. **12** The time has come; the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn, for wrath is upon all their multitude. **13** For the seller shall not return to what he has sold, while they live. For the vision concerns all their multitude; it shall not turn back; and because of his iniquity, none can maintain his life. **14** “They have blown the trumpet (*that’s the shofar*) and made everything ready, but none goes to battle, for my wrath is upon all their multitude. **15** The sword is without; pestilence and famine are within. He who is in the field dies by the sword, and him who is in the city famine and pestilence devour. **16** And if any survivors escape, they will be on the mountains, like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, each one over his iniquity. **17** All hands are feeble, and all knees turn to water. **18** They put on sackcloth, and horror covers them. Shame is on all faces, and baldness on all their heads. **19** They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing. Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord. They cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity. **20** His beautiful ornament they used for pride, and they made their abominable images and their detestable things of it. Therefore I make it an unclean thing to them. **21** And I will give it into the hands of foreigners for prey, and to the wicked of the earth for spoil, and they shall profane it. **22** I will turn my face from them, and they shall profane my treasured place. Robbers shall enter and profane it. **23** “Forge a chain! For the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence. **24** I will bring the worst of the nations to take possession of their houses. I will put an end to the pride of the strong, and their holy places shall be profaned. **25** When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there shall be none. **26** Disaster comes upon disaster; rumor follows rumor. They seek a vision from the prophet, while the law perishes from the priest and counsel from the elders. **27** The king mourns, the prince is wrapped in despair, and the hands of the people of the land are paralyzed by terror. According to their way I will do to them, and according to their judgments I will judge them, and they shall know that I am (Yahweh) the Lord.

*WOW! This is God’s promise of judgment against His own people. This is not Moab; not Philistia; not Egypt; **this is Israel**. We know then when Nebuchadnezzar throws the hammer down and Babylonians destroyed the city, it will be total. And, the Temple will be destroyed; walls will be broken down; their homes will be ransacked and just a few of the most feeble, sickest and the weakest will be left in Jerusalem.*

*So, all that God promises in **Ezekiel 7** is about to happen.*

*The Third Alarm, obviously, is much longer and more complex than the first two. It describes the complete disintegration of the whole nation, the society, top to bottom. This section subdivides into four parts.*

**Verses 10 through Verse 12** is the announcement of The Day of Yahweh; **verse 10** is the reversal of the blessing of God and again the Hebrews would have understood exactly what was being prophesied. That the Rod of Aaron; remember the blossoming Rod of Aaron that put in the Ark of the Covenant. Remember that in your Scripture; the sign of authority in God's sovereignty and presence with His people? That very rod has blossomed now into punishment. So again, the connection then is from the blessing of the rod of Aaron to now the punishment of the rod of judgment.

**Verses 12b through 18** we see the economic and emotional effects of The Day of the Lord. And so, again, these are rare words in the Hebrew. These are short sentences. God is spitting all this out.

You will notice in **Verses 12b through 14** that the word, "multitude" is used three times; that word could also be translated more graphically as "mob." And so, Israel has turned into a mob against God. It is an amazing thing that The Holy people of God have turned into a multitude, a mob of violence, against God; and the noise and the shouting against God. God is going to bring His crushing fury. In **verse 13**, God's judgment cannot be reversed.

Secondly, this has a devastating economic impact (**verses 12 b and 13 and again in verse 19**). So, there's a complete collapse of the economy and everybody is going to be devastated. It's going to be the great equalizer; businesses will fail; the economic enterprises of the nation will all fail.

The emotional and psychological impact of The Day of the Lord, **verses 14 and 18**. There's going to be three scourges, a sword, a plague, a famine upon them. We have said many times that Ezekiel is the most graphic of all the prophets (**verse 17**). If we were to translate that sentence "all knees turn to water," literally, is that they are going to lose control of their bladders and their urine is going to run down their legs. That's what it says in the Hebrew, but we being nice polite people, translate it a little cleaner in the English. But really, it's a disservice when we don't really get the graphic announcement of God right in our faces. So the emotional and psychological impact will cause them to lose control of their bladders. We know that in times of great stress and horror that people do that, and so this is what's happening.

And then in verse 17.....(cut out for a few seconds and started back) and so this is a physiological effect.

In **verse 18** we get classic descriptions of mourning. It will be too late; so the sackcloth is a way to symbolize one's confession of sin; horror covers them; shame—their whole faces will be contorted with shame and baldness on their heads. This doesn't mean that baldness is a sign of God's wrath; it means they shave their heads. Remember the Nazarite vow, John the Baptist, Sampson? And part of to be a Nazarite, for both women and men, is that during the period of the Nazarite vow, you would promise never to cut your hair. And so, long hair was a sign of devotion and piety and

*righteousness. Remember Sampson and his hair and the strength of his hair. So to cut your hair intentionally; to make oneself bald was a sign that you were no longer thinking of yourself as a very faithful person, but you were in abject mourning.*

*Judaism is a very physical religion, if you will; there is nothing to spiritualize about Judaism; they really cut their hair, not just symbolically, but actually to show their mourning.*

*The religious effects of The Day of the Yahweh in **verses 19-24**, especially the gold and silver, so God is judging them for materialism and their love of money has been part of their problem. So the failure of Israel from top to bottom has been complete. Worship, immorality, greediness, the love of wealth and material things—silver and gold. But, probably the most important damning thing here is taking the precious beautiful ornaments, a reference to appointments in the Temple, with the beautiful silver candelabrum and the silver and gold bowls and all the beautiful, very expensive appointments that were used in the Temple to show their devotion to God. They spared no expense in making only the best of all the worship objects to God. And so, they've melted those down into objects of blasphemy where they've used them, much like we saw back in the wilderness when Moses was up on the mountain, and Aaron capitulated to the people and had them give him all their earrings and nose rings and they were melted down into the golden calf. So, they have melted the very appointments in the Temple into something like a golden calf.*

*He will even allow Gentile, the worst of the worst, to come and bring His punishment in **verses 21-24**. So we know what happens with Babylonians. The Babylonians are a Gentile sinful nation, but God takes that nation as an instrument of punishment against His own people. By the time all that punishment is over all those abominable cults sites will be destroyed.*

*In the last part of this chapter **verses 25-27** there's going to be a political effect. Politically from the people to the prophets to the kings to the princes to the elders to the leaders, all of that will be doomed and brought under God's judgment.*

So, before we get to some of the theological implications of this important chapter, let me again pause and invite comments and questions.

**Martha:** I'm confused about The Day of the Lord. When you first mentioned it and referenced us to look at **Joel 2 and 2 Corinthians 5** and made the statement that we will all be judged on the Bema seat. So, is The Day of the Lord..are we talking about various Days of the Lord when Israelites were judged and being sent to exile and Babylon and Jerusalem destroyed or The Day of the Lord when we are judged. Is there more than one Day of the Lord?

**Mark:** That's a great question and to hear you say that, Martha, I realize that I probably muddied the waters a bit when I referred to **2 Corinthians 5**. So technically The Day of the Lord in the prophets..well, actually the answer to your question is Yes. Because The

Day of the Lord is one day when God will bring final judgment to all the earth. So we confess that, of course, in the Creeds, "He will come to judge the living and the dead." That's The Day of the Lord. While at the same time The Day of the Lord comes in part in this life before the final Day of the Lord. And so you could make the argument here in **Ezekiel 7**, The Day of the Lord came to Israel when the Babylonians finally destroyed Jerusalem, and that is to point us to the final Day of the Lord so it works on both levels. So, you raise a good point, thank you for pointing that out. It is a little confusing. So, there is THE Day of the Lord, but even now we get a real forecast of that day in God's punishments even now. Good, other comments or questions or concerns?

**Terrie:** Could you comment on how we prepare for The Day of the Lord? Of course, we want to be humble and ask for mercy, but is there anything else you can advise?

**Mark:** Good question. I would say, Terri, that daily confession; just daily time with The Lord, "Lord, help me understand my life. Don't let me talk myself into I'm this great person with no issues. Lord, let me see my life truly, honestly. Show me the ways in which You would change me." So we build in confession and the proclamation of God's forgiveness in every Lord's Day and in the Worship services, but as Martin Luther said and really emphasized daily confession and a daily examination of one's soul before the Lord so that you don't fool yourself into thinking that you don't have any need to repent. So, you know, on the one hand, I would not encourage us to walk around with this huge fear on our back. I think that defeats the purpose; rather it's an invitation to be real with God and not put that off and if you've not made confession; if you've come to worship here at St. John or in your own Churches and you have not taken time in worship to really confess your sins, well folks, don't do that again. Don't do that Sunday. Why would you put that off. So, accept the invitation to be ready to die in the Lord every day, even as we are always ready to live in the Lord every day.

**Andrea:** Mark can I ask, ugh, and maybe you're going to jump in with this but where's The Gospel in all of this? Those of us who are in Christ; who have been covered by the blood of Christ, I know we hold intention, God's wrath, God's desire for Holy living, and when we look at passages like this it seems we could lose sight of the fact that the wrath of God toward me regarding my eternal security has been satisfied in Jesus. So, ah, so I confess; I submit myself to the process of ongoing sanctification and transformation because I have the indwelling Spirit; because sin stains me and interferes with my relationship with the Lord, but can you just speak of that. Ugh, we have a healthy fear of God that is through the lens of Christ.

**Mark:** Sure and that's good observation. So, we always want to read Scripture, Ezekiel 7 or any chapter in the context of the whole Word of God. So, obviously we know there's good news for us in Christ and we hold to that. But, classically, in classic Lutheran theology we talk about Law and Gospel. And when we don't have a strong proclamation of the Law, then we can never have a strong proclamation of The Gospel. Until we know just how bad it is we can never have the joy of how good it is. And so Ezekiel 7 is how bad it is. Now, the one glimmer of hope in this Ezekiel 7 and it is just

the briefest glimmer of hope is in *verse 16*, “doves of the valleys,” and that’s the cooing of the doves and that’s a mournful cooing so there is, then the hope that there will be survivors, even though it’s a total devastation, **there’s going to be a remnant**. And so, even in one of the strongest, hardest chapters of the Bible, in terms of punishment, there is the hope of the remnant; there will be survivors and they will be the ones who will recognize sin and they will coo like the mourning of doves on the mountain. So, you’re right, in Ezekiel we get to hope. Ezekiel is also the prophet who says, “Prophesy to these dry bones; these dead sinful judged bones; live; live!!” I mean where else do you get that in the Bible. Nowhere!! Nowhere, do you get the Valley of Dry Bones that become restored to dance and enjoy the Lord. So, in Ezekiel we have the bottom of punishment and we have the top of joy. You’ve got to stay with the whole thing. If I said, to you, “Our only Scripture at St. John is Ezekiel, Chapter 7. It’s the only Bible that we’re ever going to read. WOW! Horrible! but we need it.

**Martha:** Pastor Mark, can I say one thing about where The Gospel is in Ezekiel? If we really believe in The Day of the Lord; the wrath of the Lord, then as Christians that draws us and pushes us to witness to The Gospel and salvation in Christ Jesus so I don’t look at it as wrath upon me. I look at it on wrath of other people. And so, the Gospel says “spread the Good News.

**Mark:** Okay. Great point. Exactly right Martha, if we take this and say, “Lord, just forgive me; make sure I’m right,” we’ve missed the point. We need to share this with our neighbor so they will also be ready for The Day of the Lord.

**Theological Implications.** (I don’t know if any one of these will spark more discussion) **First**, the loss of a vision of God and of the sense of awe and wonder at His grace always leads to cynicism and independence. When a society forgets its theological roots, evils sprout and flourish: arrogance, pride, idolatry, violence, disregard for human life (*think about abortion*), a rejection of the ways of the LORD to follow the ways of mankind, etc.

*So any time that a people; i.e., Israel, or I would argue, any particular people, forget who they belong to and where they come from, it leads to placing man in the center and not God. And that goes back to **Genesis 3**, of course.*

**Secondly**, those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). That is, a society/culture/nation/church cannot violate God’s moral and spiritual will with impunity and expect to escape the consequences of their behavior.

*Before we wag our fingers at the nation and the culture and at silicone valley and Hollywood, look at the church. Think about how many ministers and people and priests and pastors Sunday after Sunday announce that all is well; and that death is okay and it’s alright to take innocent life of children.*



**Thirdly**, the apparent delay in the LORD's visitation in no cause for complacency or indifference toward evil. See **2 Peter 3:3-4**. All who practice evil stand in danger of the judgment of God—right now.

*Peter says, "Listen, just because the day has not come, it doesn't mean it's not going to come; it doesn't mean that you should not be ready for it. We need to be looking back to Terri's comment, we need to be ready for The Day of the Lord right now!"*

**Fourthly**, The Lord has ways of undermining all the supports on which we may base our security. Under his judgment, the wealth of the rich turns to rubbish, the futility of idolatry is exposed, and human institutions are annulled.

*In other words, we can't place our confidence in government or in how much money we have; our banks can fail; government can collapse. A lot of people think we're on the brink of that right now in our nation with the Coronavirus pandemic; socialism coming in; violence in the streets. Some people are saying that we are in a perfect storm where the prophetic utterance of **Ezekiel 7** may not be just something we are studying from past history.*

**And then the fifth one**, God's agents are not limited to those who acknowledge him as their Lord. On the contrary, he has full sovereign power over the most wicked of nations (*like Babylon, Persia*) too and uses them as instruments of wrath on His own people. But, (*and to get to Andrea's point His heart is always to draw people back to Him; we will get to that in Ezekiel, but we've got to go through this valley before we get to the mountain of hope*) God's heart is always to draw his people back to himself.

We've got three minutes, any comments, questions, observations and anything else that comes to mind? Just unmute yourself and please speak up.

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I'm wondering, if America is at a point right now where we are about to be judged in this way, is this our final warning (**in Ezekiel**)? I guess I'm wondering, does God continue to give us warnings or do we look back at earlier prophets for our warnings?

**Mark:** Yes, that's a good comment. The Word of God endures. And so, I have to believe; and I think we do teach that the prophetic word of **Ezekiel** is a contemporary word to us that we can never relegate the Word of God to historical contemplation only. The Word of God is meant to be a two-edge sword to every generation. Now, why is it, not just me, but I've heard other people say they are being drawn to **Ezekiel** for the first time in their lives. When I said that I was going to do Ezekiel Bible studies, there are a couple people in the Church that said that is interesting and that they have never read Ezekiel, but we started during the pandemic and that's the reason we started reading Ezekiel. I don't know, I mean, is God bringing us to look at Ezekiel, if not the first time, the most in depth time in our lives because He is getting ready to bring that day. He's fed up. It would not be surprising. I mean we don't know. Only our Father in

Heaven knows. But we should not live cavalierly like it's not going to happen. It does bring to mind The Creed that I have confessed every Sunday for all my life, and usually I don't give it a second thought, "He will come to judge the living and the dead." And, I'm telling you starting with Ezekiel; starting with this pandemic, when I confess that with you all, my brothers and sisters in Christ, it has taken on a new meaning for me; that I do not quickly dismiss it. So we can think about America has never been perfect; we've had issues; the 1960's; all the terrible riots; the Vietnam War; all the confusion in our country. But, it is a period where those things are taking deeper root and we need to be warned; and we need to tell our neighbors that the time is coming. God bless you, let's pray:

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, thank You that You love us enough to warn us; may we listen, confess, believe and, Lord, hold to the joy that You have given to us in our salvation. But, Lord, let us hold it in such a way that our hands hold it with open hands so that those around us; our family; our friends; our neighbors can see the joy that You've given to us; that they, too, will want that same joy of salvation for themselves. We pray this in The Name of The Father Son and Spirit. Amen. God bless you; thank you; see you next Tuesday.

**End of Class 5 October 20, 2020 Zoom Recording and Handout**

## Class 6 - October 27, 2020 Handout and Zoom Recording

**Opening Prayer:** So, we pray to You Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ and Your Holy Spirit in Thanksgiving that You inspired and moved through our brother Ezekiel; that You may continue to inspire and move through us today. So, Lord, let us see this beautiful connection between The Word of God and our lives of faith today. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

We are going to begin today in **Ezekiel from Watchman to the True Prophet:**

We're finishing the Watchman section of Ezekiel and moving on from there. Just real briefly, last week we looked at **Ezekiel 7:1-27**. Remember the three alarms that God brought to His people both the exiles as well as the word got back to the people in Jerusalem about the pending judgment of God. Any lingering comments, questions, concerns from last week?

We are going to finish out this first section called The Watchman where he is the Century on the tower on the hillside to blow the shofar for God's coming judgment of the sins of His own people. As we turn now to **Ezekiel 33:1-9**, starting next week we are going to pick up the pace now that we've warmed up after six weeks of jogging through Ezekiel. Today, we are opening the next section called "**The True Prophet,**" **Ezekiel 12:21-28**. Next Tuesday we're going to finish all of The True Prophet section, looking at all of **Ezekiel 13 and 14** and **partially Ezekiel 22**.

Today, we have a little bit more time to discuss, and next week we will finish out the section called The True Prophet.

Obviously, we are not taking the book sequentially, chapter by chapter, but we're following the suggestion of the great Ezekiel scholar who years ago suggested this outline of how to read and study Ezekiel. And, I think the fact that we are not taking it sequentially helps us understand the urgency that Ezekiel is moving back and forth between as God's Word as The Holy Spirit moves through Ezekiel. He's moving from watchman to prophet to pastor; he's just all over the board. Not taking this chapter by chapter helps us understand the urgency and how he is moving back and forth between different ways to respond to the Word of God. And so, we're going to finish this section and we see then that **Ezekiel 33:1-9** is a representation of what we've already seen in **Ezekiel 3:16-21**. We are going to reread that in just a moment and then see how **Ezekiel 33:1-9** expands that. So this is what we often see in Ezekiel. A Word is given and then later in the book, the Word is expanded. So, anytime that we see a double presentation of the same Word of God, it is to emphasize its importance to us.

So, we know the importance of this section because we get, not once, but twice; and there's a real urgency about that. And so, The Holy Spirit is moving in Ezekiel's life, and I pray that you are experiencing The Holy Spirit working, even with a certain urgency in your life.

I don't mean to make too much of the word urgency, but I'll tell you about a book I am reading that's made me more urgent today than I was last Tuesday. I'll tell you about that in just a moment. So, I just want to warn you that I want to be at peace and calm. I want to know the balm in Gilead. But, at the same time, I pray that none of us lose the urgency that we also need to have by The Holy Spirit.

Generally, speaking, even though we are not taking this sequentially, we can say basically, generally speaking, that **Ezekiel 1-24** are **The Oracles of Judgment against Israel**; **Ezekiel 25-32** **Oracles of Judgment Against the Foreign Nations**; **Ezekiel 23-48**, the last part of the book, are **The Oracles of Hope and Salvation**.

So, that's the broad scope of Ezekiel and within that we're moving back and forth. And so, today, as we end the section we're calling **The Watchman, Ezekiel 33**, is actually the beginning of this next section which then leads to hope and restoration. We've said all along we will get to hope and restoration eventually, and that's what we all need.

**Ezekiel 33:1-9** is our focus today, and it is a final public appeal to the exiles; to repent and return; confess to the LORD. And so it is the opening then of a new section even as we close this section. So, keep your finger at **Ezekiel 33:1-9** and let's turn back briefly to: **Ezekiel 3:16-21 A Watchman for Israel 16** And at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me: 17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 18 If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. 20 Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. **21** But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul."

*So, that was initially the private personal call to Ezekiel to be The Watchman, the Sentry for Israel. And now we get that recalibrated here in **Ezekiel 33** as a public announcement. So now, it's not just Yahweh speaking to Ezekiel. It's now Yahweh speaking so that Ezekiel and all the exiles can hear these same words.*

In **Ezekiel 33** we get the metaphor of The Watchman recast in **Ezekiel 33:1-6 1** The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, speak to your people and say to them,

*So now, you see this is the public proclamation of what he heard back in **Ezekiel 3**.*

If I bring the sword upon a land,

*And, anytime you hear in Ezekiel the term “land,” it always refers to Israel. Remember, one of the unique features of the Book of Ezekiel is the phrase, “The Land of Israel.” It occurs only in Ezekiel in all the Bible, and it’s meant to emphasize that God’s covenant with His people is tied to God’s covenant with them through their land. That’s why we pray for Jerusalem and Israel every Sunday, not that the government of Israel; not that the state of Israel is perfect; of course not. The state and the government of the United States, is it perfect? Of course not, no state is, but we pray for the state—the nation of Israel because it is a covering and protection for The Land of Israel. So, even though very sadly, very sadly, 70 percent of all Israeli Jews are secular. 70 percent of God’s own people do not call out to Him in worship and confession and prayer. Even so, by God’s provisional sovereign care in your lifetime and my lifetime, it is an amazing miracle that the state of Israel has been restored to protect The Land of Israel. And so, it’s a very complex situation, but we cannot escape its importance of The Land then in and Ezekiel and in our lives today. God’s covenant is still in place with Israel and The Land of Israel.*

and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, 3 and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet

*The word there is “shofar.”*

and warns the people, 4 then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity,

*in his sin*

but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.

*So, again the powerful metaphor of the watchman. It opens with God contemplating bringing a sword against Israel. He concludes by declaring that such an event God will hold the watchman responsible for those who die if the watchman is negligent.*

*So there are two wartime scenarios described here, and I think they are pretty self-explanatory. I think we can understand those really easily. Basically, if God sets a watchmen; if God brings Truth into your life, and you ignore it, that is to your eternal peril. At the same time, if God raises up a watchmen to speak His Word, and that person, man or woman, fails and does not speak the Truth, then the blood of those who die will actually be greater upon the watchman.*

*Later in Ezekiel, we are going to see how Ezekiel serves as the pastor to Israel, and he brings the sharpest warning in all the Bible against the shepherds of Israel; i.e., “shepherds” can be a synonym for “priest or pastor.” Because, the very pastors of Israel were not speaking the Truth and they knew The Truth of God’s Word and they were scared to speak it. They realized it would not be popular to speak it. They realized that people would reject them and leave them, and so they failed to speak The Truth of God’s Word. God’s judgment upon them is doubled because He doesn’t hold it against God’s people if the watchman doesn’t speak The Truth. That’s true, not just for pastors; it’s true for all of us; for all of us are called to speak The Truth in Love to our friends, our family to others. If you are led by The Holy Spirit, brothers and sisters, to speak, what can be a very hard word of Truth in Love to someone you know, I just pray that God will give you the wherewithal to follow through.*

*We’re looking at Ezekiel and we call him the watchman and indeed he is, but it’s easy to expand this to understand that in some ways, very important ways, we all are called to be watchmen and watch women for the sake of God and the world. And that’s a hard thing, and it’s not easy to say it publicly in a sermon and it’s not easy to say it privately to one another.*

*Just real quickly, you know, sometimes the hardest people to speak Truth to are those closest to us in our family. (story about mother-in-law Rose)*

*And so I do think that God gives us divine appointments, and if you have someone in your life that you need to speak Jesus to, today may not be the right day. It was not the right day for me for 20 years, but then there was the right day, and if it is today, then don’t neglect that. Those appointments, I think, are going to come to all of us, and to speak Truth is a way of speaking Love to people.*

*So, we have these wartime scenarios in Ezekiel, and you can see that the meaning of this parable is clear while the watchman is held accountable for his negligence, guilty residents are still responsible for their own sins. Could their own guilt have precipitated the emergency by bringing on the sword of Yahweh upon them? Of course. There is the double warning here. If a watchman fails to deliver The News of God’s judgment, the people still die in their sins even as the watchman’s punishment is doubled in the eyes of God. It doesn’t absolve anybody of their sins because God is assuming, at some point or another, we will all come to understand that we are sinners who have fallen short of The Glory of God and in need of the Lord.*

*And then we’re moving on in **Ezekiel 3** to verse 7 “So you, son of man,  
and that’s the book of Ezekiel’s famous phrase, ‘so you human being’*

*I have made a watchman for the house of Israel.*

*It’s interesting that God never addresses Ezekiel by name, only ‘Son of Man’ ‘human being.’*

Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 8 If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

*Again, we see the influence here previously in **Ezekiel 3:16-21**. The hypothetical parable is now brought into real historical life. So, God Yahweh is in control of the whole scene. He determines, the crisis, the sword; He appoints the watchman; He identifies the enemy and here, breathtakingly, the house of Israel is the enemy for God's own bride, His spouse, has turned against Him and He pronounces the death sentence, and He calls for all people to be held in account.*

*While Ezekiel is, obviously, chosen by God to be Israel's watchman, they probably would not have appointed Ezekiel themselves. They would have probably appointed somebody who's a little bit softer around the edges. But, true prophets have rarely been accepted. We can see the obvious parallel here to the prophet Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 6:17**, the people really want the prophet Jeremiah out of the way because he is way too hard, and they want somebody who's going to speak easy and soft words to them, and Jeremiah is not going to do that.*

*And so, the nation is in danger as The House of Israel, both the exiles as well as those still back in Judah. If Ezekiel fails to issue God's warning, Ezekiel will be guilty of a capital offense himself, but they're all called to confess their sins and to repent and come back to God.*

*We are going to look at this more in the next section on "Ezekiel The Prophet," but think about it; I don't like it either when people speak hard words to me. We don't like hard words. I mean, we all want soft positive words. We get that, but I think the reason I am feeling (more of) an urgency today that I did not even feel last week, is this is the book that I mentioned last week. I had not even ordered it yet; had not read it. It came the next day from amazon, which was surprising, "Live Not by Lies," by Rod Dreher. So I just got this and "Live Not by Lies" is a quote from Alexander Solzenitsyn. I should know Russian since I'm from Pulaski, but I don't. Right before he was exiled to America, Solzenitsyn, you know, the great Christian; the great Gulag Archipelago guy writes an essay to the Russian people, and he urges them to "live not by lies" of the communist government. Basically in his essay, Solzenitsyn says, "You may not, as an individual, be able to change communism, but you don't have to buy into it, "the lies of communism. You personally can live by God's Truth.*

*Rod Dreher wrote a best seller called "The Benedict Option." He is the editor of The American Conservative magazine, and he is an ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN (with a big 'O'). He was Roman Catholic and then converted to Orthodox Christianity.*

*Dreher and his family moved from New York to, I think, down in Louisiana into an "Intentional Christian Community" with other Orthodox families. His whole thing is, Christians need to have and understand they're living in a very antagonistic world to The Gospel and we really need to gather our forces and encourage one another and it's a great Spiritual battle.*

*This book was just published and is getting a lot of attention. Basically, this book is hard because Dreher is extremely negative about this country. He's interviewing people who lived in communist Soviet Union; in communist Czechoslovakia and other communist states and who have immigrated to The United States. In these interviews they are saying, "Don't you realize America is moving right into what these communist states did," in terms of what Dreher describes as a "soft totalitarianism." He is saying that it is not exactly like the Soviet Union, of course, but the earmarks of 'you've got to say the party line' 'if you don't say what the liberal elites say, then you lose your job, you get slammed on facebook, you get ridiculed. The parallels are breathtaking, and I'm just about a third of the way through so I haven't finished it, but already I'm going, "Wow." I don't want to admit it, but Rod Dreher, I think, could well be right in a lot of what he says, and it's kind of a 'frog in the kettle' syndrome. And, he is basically saying, "Listen America," "Listen Christians." He's writing to Christians. "You need to wake up; you need to really understand what's happening," and in the second half of the book he gives some ways that we can be resistant. The subtitle is "A Manual for Christian Dissidents. What then can we do to live not by lies."*

*And so, just having read that last night. It's a pretty fast read; it's not a real long book. You may want to get it. We may want to talk about it. You can go on-line and read reviews of that book and a lot of Christian people are saying, "Wow, he is way too negative; oh, no, things are much (better)." And I am thinking, "Well, wait a minute, I'm reading Ezekiel and that's what everybody was saying. Could it be that Rod Dreher is a watchman for the Church in North America?" I'm not quite ready to put him in a category of Ezekiel, but I certainly am thinking it is something we need to think and really talk about as Church. So that's where the urgency comes from.*

*To close this out, **Ezekiel 3:16-21** was the private calling; this is the public calling so that everybody now understands what's going on. The private calling to be the watchman came early in Ezekiel's exile around **596-597 BC**. This public calling that's coming now on the eve of Jerusalem's destruction, 10 years later in 586 BC. So, between **Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33**, about ten years have lapsed. Now The Word is just going to come right after Jerusalem has fallen. The exiles don't know it yet, but it's going to come right after this. And then, then they're going to cry out, "LORD, what hope do we have?" And now/then we get into the glory section of Ezekiel. And it's glorious because finally when people say, "We are sinners; we have not loved Yahweh; we have not served the LORD; we fall on our faces; we confess; we repent, please LORD, help us." The help is enormous and we're going to see that. So, hold on because the judgment is deep, but the hope is great.*



**Theological implications of this section:**

God holds each person accountable to Him for his or her own sins. So, brothers and sisters, I ask you because I love you, have you repented today and called upon the Lord? It's not something you do once in your life and you're good to go. The Lord says, "Continually come to Me; continually." Not that you doubt your forgiveness; not that you doubt your salvation, but once God saves you and you know you're saved, you just want more of the Lord. And, how do you get more of the Lord? By having less of you and more of The Holy Spirit in you and you do that through His forgiveness and turning to Him by faith.

Jesus' first public sermon was basically "repent and believe" (see Mark 1:15). In this way, we understand Jesus to be the "Perfect Ezekiel." That is, the Lord Jesus comes to complete and fulfill the role of the Watchman to Israel and all nations.

It's very interesting to me that Ezekiel is never explicitly quoted in the New Testament. Never in the New Testament do we see Jesus or the apostles quoting directly from the book of Ezekiel. But, implicitly, I think we see Ezekiel's influence on The New Testament as much or more than any other book of the Bible. It is a subtle, but very important influence. For example, the first Sermon out of Jesus Messiah's mouth is in **Mark 1:15**. And the Lord comes and says, basically, "repent and believe because the kingdom has come here." You can make the argument, is Ezekiel fulfilled? The perfected Ezekiel? There, the Lord is the Watchman, for not only Israel but for Israel and all nations. "Repent, believe because the kingdom's come and means that basically your death has come near. And today is the day of repentance; not tomorrow. Today, God says, "repent and believe because the day is near." And that's Ezekiel perfected.

And then finally in terms of theological implications, you know this judgment and the salvation, the hope, they are the two sides of the same coin. They're both about God's Love. God is the Heavenly Father Who loves His children so much that He loves them enough to say, "You're wrong; there will be punishment, but then there will be restoration." We have to understand that all these hard words of Ezekiel ultimately come out of the heart of God's Love for His people.

Let me stop for questions, comments, and observations; just unmute and speak up.

**Josh Shreeman:** Josh blows his new shofar....mention of "The Return" and prayer event in September in D.C. and the blowing of the seven shofars.....

**Mark** responds that, of course in the Bible, the number seven is the perfect number and there you have this perfect blowing of the trumpet at this intersection of the announcement....prayer and repentance...and to hear that every day typical shofar, that sound is much more of a warning than the one I played last week. The one I played last week; that 8 ft. long one does (sound more like) something in the NY Symphonic Orchestra, a beautiful sound (the longer they are; the deeper the tone). (But) that real ram's horn is a sharp "stop what I am doing and pay attention right now!" Shofar was blown at the temple, the synagogue (the call to repentance) when Josh was

growing up..and so this sense of urgency is really spreading; a lot of events are coming together.

Brothers and sisters, I'm so glad we are studying Ezekiel because if there's any book in the Bible that I think speaks to this day and age of why we need to have the shofar blown today to bring this nation—His Church back to God, it's the Book of Ezekiel.

Let's look now at the second section. Now we are beginning a section of five prophecies that reflect Ezekiel's conflict with professional prophetic guild. From the days of Samuel in Israel there were these Sons of the Prophets. These are prophetic schools that would gather around a premier prophet, a mentor, who would become kind of his disciples—his mentees and they would form a guild to serve the nation as prophets. Some of them, like Samuel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, were of the LORD. But, unfortunately, sadly many of the professional prophets were self-serving who only spoke what the king wanted to hear because their salary, their compensation was all based only on the king's generosity. So, what prophet wants to tell a king he's going die in battle? That's not going to get the prophet very much money or prestige.

So, there was a great battle then developed in Israel from, we're talking now around 1000 BC; we're talking Samuel; David was around 1000 BC. And now we're looking 500 years later at the time of Ezekiel. And so, we are seeing that over that span you have this growing conflict between the false prophets and the true prophets and the prophetic guild, etc. Probably, we're going to look in just a moment, **1Kings 22**, is the epitome of that conflict. On your own this week, I would love for you to go back and just read 1Kings 22 where you'll see, kind of in a nutshell, the conflict between the guild of prophets that told Ahab, the king of Israel, "Fight Syria, you're going to win because you're the greatest king in the world." And the one lone prophet named Micaiah who came and said, "If you do this, you will die because you are not of the LORD." And Micaiah gets thrown into prison, and Ahab goes into battle and he gets killed, of course.

These oracles, beginning here in **Ezekiel 12:21** divide into three units. So, there's a popular cynicism among the people toward all the prophets; we going to look at today.

And then next week we're going to see the professional use of the office of the prophet and next week, the fate of false prophets and those who find support in them. So, we're dealing now with, "Who's a true prophet and who's a false prophet?"

Again, as I've said, these oracles reflect the conflict between Ezekiel and the people. God has warned Ezekiel way back in **Ezekiel 2** that he would be rejected by Israel if he took up this prophetic ministry. And sure enough he was, and that's why it is so hard to be a true prophet. You're never going to be the most popular man or woman in the room, never. And so, it's hard to do that.

Point four and then we'll look at these verses in just a moment. Ezekiel is not the first prophet to experience rejection. You can read more about the counterfeit prophets in

**1 Kings 22** (below from Handout)

*The rejection of Yahweh's messengers had been a fundamental factor in the fall of the northern kingdom (Israel) (2 Kings 17:13) and would be in the fall of the southern kingdom (Judah), too (Daniel 9:10)*

The word, prophet, literally means, "one who speaks for God." And so, we need to discern, brothers and sisters, who is speaking for God today? Who are the true prophets today and who are the false prophets? It's still a germane question that must be addressed by God's believers.

Now, let's look at **Ezekiel 12:21-28 "When Prophecy Fails"**

**21** And the word of the Lord came to me: **22** "Son of man, what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, 'The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing' **23** Tell them therefore, 'Thus says the Lord God: I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.' But say to them, The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision.

*Yahweh asks what kind of proverb is circulating; that's not exactly a proverb; it's not a great translation. So, here in **verse 21**, supposedly, that the proverb says that 'The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing.' So the people are saying, "Yeah, Yeah, you prophesy destruction but things are going swimmingly and so we don't believe you because it's not coming to pass. The word 'proverb' there in the Hebrew is 'marshal,' and a 'marshal' is a 'pithy statement' so just, technically, it's not a proverb, but it was a saying that was being said among the people.*

*So, if you'll look at this whole section from **Ezekiel 12:21-25**, let me just try to summarize. Basically, God responds with three steps in these verses" **Step 1** God counters the people's marshal proverb with His own. And so, God says, '(The people are saying) the days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing," but the LORD is going to say 'the days are near and the fulfillment of every vision.' So, God counters what they're saying with a true statement.*

**24** For there shall be no more any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel.

**Step 2** God will bring an end to false prophesy above in **verse 24**.

**25** For I am the Lord; I will speak The Word that I will speak, and it will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord God."

**Step 3** God will bring His prophetic Word to reality above in **verse 25**.

*So, there's the dispute; the counter dispute; and the fulfillment. God's in charge and He's basically saying to people, 'You're wrong thinking that I'm not going to do what I*

*said I'm going to do through the true prophet Ezekiel. And, because you haven't listened, destruction is going to fall on you.'*

**26** And the word of the Lord came to me: **27** "Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, 'The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.' **28** Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be performed, declares the Lord God."

*So, the people were first saying, 'You're wrong, Ezekiel, what you're saying hasn't happened; we don't think it's going to happen; our lives are just going along pretty well; you're wrong.' And then secondly, they are saying, basically, what you're saying is irrelevant to us and we're going to dismiss it as well. There's no consequence but God stamps Ezekiel's prophecies as true.*

So, that is a brief step into Ezekiel the True Prophet and next week we're going to see more clearly and more examples of this tension between who speaks The Truth and who does not and how that gets played out in Ezekiel and in our lives as well. And so just some brief theological implications of this and then I would love to have some discussion:

### **Theological implications**

Spiritual coldness is often expressed in cynicism toward God and his spokespersons. The Lord will have the last word—always and forever. Peter says this in 2 Peter 3

*Remember in the Scriptures we have women and prophetic men. So, both women and men have been appointed by God to be prophets:*

In every age, people have questioned the effectiveness of the divine word. In the early church, the people asked, "Where is the promise of Christ's coming?" Peter responded by reminding his readers that they must continue to take seriously not only the word of the holy prophets but also the commandments of the Lord and Savior issued by the apostles (**2 Peter 3:2**).

*Let's look real quickly at **2 Peter 3** because this idea that, 'Yes, you say that The Day of the Lord, God's judgment, is coming, but it hasn't come so maybe you're wrong and it's not going to come because it's taking so long.' This is a perennial question from then to the apostles to our day and age. Listen how Peter address this question when it comes up in the 1st Century 500 years or so after Ezekiel. So I'm looking now at 2 Peter 3:*

**The Day of the Lord Will Come 2 Peter 3:1-10 1** This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, **2** that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, **3** knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. **4** They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the

fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

*That, you see, is a reiteration of what they were saying in Ezekiel's day; same thing.*

5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 7 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. **10** But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

*So, this is Peter's answer to the perennial question, 'You say the day is coming, but it hasn't come and we don't think you are right and we're going to ignore you.' And Peter is saying, 'You've got to look at the long view.'" And, I love the fact that he quotes from the Psalms 'one day is like a thousand years.'" So technically, how long has it been since Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and sent to the Father and promised to come again? Well, about two days; about two days. So is The Lord going to come on the third day? Whoa, yes! He's going to come on the Third Day so does that mean we've got about 1900 years left? Maybe? or it could be we've got 19 days left or it could be we've got 19 minutes left. So, Peter is saying, "Do not reject the prophetic Word because you don't think it's true because it hasn't come to pass. If The Word comes from God; if The Word is embedded in the Word of God, the Bible; if God says It, it's going to happen because The Lord will always have the last Word.*

*The certainty of the fulfillment of the divine word is based on the Person and character of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When God speaks, He acts—in his perfect timing.*

*So I want to give us an encouragement. Every Sunday in the Creed we say, "and He will come again to judge the living and the dead." And we can say it so often we can think, 'Ah, well He's not coming in my day; I don't have to worry about it, but God says, 'today is the day of repentance.'"*

*The famous quote in **Luke 13:1-5 "Repent or Perish" 1** There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse*

offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? **5** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

**Luke 13:31-35 Lament over Jerusalem 31** At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” **32** And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. **33** Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’ **34** O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! **35** Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

*Jesus, were those people worse sinners than the rest of us? And Jesus just looks at them and says, Are you kidding Me? They were not worse sinners, of course not. What you have to understand, Jesus says is, You need to repent and believe today because you don't have tomorrow. You don't have the promise of tomorrow.*

*That's the Lord's response to those questions, and basically, that's what we hear in Ezekiel. We don't know about tomorrow, but today is the day of repentance so today is the day to listen to the shofar and the call to repent. So, I'm very encouraged, Marnie and Josh, to hear (I did not watch that telecast "The Return") that the whole day was a day of repentance along with the shofar. I mean, it is Ezekiel, brothers and sisters. It is Ezekiel's that's come back. I mean that's amazing because you get the shofar in Ezekiel more than you get it in any other book of the Bible. I mean, the shofar is blown and blown and blown throughout this book; more than any other place. And, all of the sudden we're hearing reports that seven shofars were blown in our nation's capitol.*

In the meantime, we need to remember that God's method of reckoning time is different from ours, and we may be much nearer that day than we realize.

Questions or comments; we've got about five minutes or less. Please unmute and say something. How do you know a true prophet today? Tell me two or three characteristics that indicate that person is truly a prophet.

**Marnie** “What they say comes to pass and it doesn't go against The Word of God in any possible way.”

**Mark:** Yes, 100 percent; those are the two at the top of my list. **Deuteronomy 18** says that a true prophet is one whose Words come to pass, but in our day, if those don't come to pass. The key there is if they are in concert and agreement with what's been said in The Word of God. If anybody says to you, “I've got a new word of God and it's a word that's contrary or against Scripture or is not found in Scriptures, say 'NO, No, sister or brother, you are not a true prophet.'”

So, there are the prophets; and then there are people who are prophetic today. So we need to listen to the prophets of Scripture, like Ezekiel, and if we hear somebody with a prophetic word we always then compare today's prophetic word against the prophets, The Word of God, and then if they are in concert it could be The Holy Spirit is saying, "You need to pay attention to what this person is saying in your life right now." So, in that regard, we all can be prophetic in our speaking.

**Will:** "I think one thing that needs to be present if someone is claiming to say something prophetic, is what they are saying glorifying to God? And, I think that's been a very big help in, I think, Lilly and my conversations with Mormons when they talk about prophecies from Joseph Smith and such. And, one of the things that is consistent is that their prophecies are not glorifying to God.

**Mark:** Well, that's great insight, Will....it just seems like God has brought Mormon missionaries to you and Lilly over the last year like He's done in none of us. I haven't had a Mormon missionary come to me in years, but all of a sudden you (and Lilly) are just meeting with the left and right. So they're saying they've got the right word from their prophet, Joseph Smith, but you're able to say that's not in concert with prophets we can trust from Scripture so anything else you want to say about some of these amazing conversations you've had recently?

**Will:** Well, no Mormon can say that the prophecies of Joseph Smith are glorifying to God, and that brings a lot of comfort. And, I would say also that being bold in what we understand from Biblical understanding is incredibly important. But, it doesn't suffice to just be kind and just be nice in those conversations. Sometimes, you have to cut through and say, "Hey, you might be nice to me right now. You're saying it's good news that we're Christians, but is that really true. Do you believe it's good that we know Christ and we are not Mormons and they really have to think about that. I think it's good to be bold. I think it's good to have those conversations and I think it's good mainly (that) every conversation we've had with Mormons and Lilly can verify this (that) when we had some strategy of our own, it never worked. It fell flat every time. When we just read The Word of God and gave them The Good News of God, it made an impact.

**Mark:** That is a great word, Will. That's a great word to all of us and so in closing then we realize that false prophets are all around us—Joseph Smith. I really feel sorry for Mormons. It is a heavy heavy non-gospel religion. Joseph Smith was clearly a false prophet. Mohammad, you know, think about the lack of grace and lack of God glorying message of Islam, false prophet. I go by, often cutting through, down Brambleton past the Christian Science Building, Mary Baker Eddy, clearly a false prophet, but her teachings persist. You know, these are not theoretical things; these are people who come to our door and ring our doorbell, Jehovah's Witnesses, obviously, and they are made in the image of God and God loves them. And, maybe this week if our doorbell rings by a Mormon or Jehovah's Witness, if we're in conversation with a non-believer, let's be bold like Ezekiel and speak the Truth in Love.

Lord, thank You for today. We pray for our nation. We pray, O Lord that all people will hear the blow of the trumpet to repent and turn to You. We pray, Lord, as our nation approached the election day next Tuesday; as we approach conversations that we will follow O Lord the example of Ezekiel; that we, too, will speak Truth in Love to those who you bring into our lives. We pray this in the name of Messiah Jesus our Lord and Savior, Amen!

God Bless you. See you next Tuesday on election day at 12:00 by the Grace of God.

**End of Class 6 October 27 Handout and Zoom Recording**



**Class 7 - November 3, 2020**

I am hoping we are going to have one more trip to Israel before I finish here at St. John, but that's to be determined. I don't know what's going to happen with travel in the New Year. Israel's on its second shutdown so it's hard to tell what's going to happen.

Happy Election Day to everybody...spoke of prayer service at Church the night before "very pleased at turnout; people spending an hour or so in prayer especially for our nation. The prayers from the dear brothers and sisters at St. John were quite touching and powerful so that was good. I'm not sure we've ever had a prayer service at St. John on the Eve of an Election. Whatever else this election cycle has been, it has been, obviously, a lot to sort through, but it has brought us across the political spectrum to our knees....together in prayer so that's good.

We are trying to get through the rest of the section, of what we are calling The True Prophet. It's a lot of material. I don't want to rush us, but there's a fine line between going through the material and getting bogged down in it. But it's very timely. So much in the Book of Ezekiel has direct application to our lives in 21st Century. So, it is startling, but it is also extremely important that we see these connections.

Today, we're going to look at false prophets; true prophets vs. false prophets. We're going to look at the powerful death-giving idolatry magic. We're going to see how the whole land has turned against God from the leaders, the priests, the pastors, the prophets to the very people. So there's a lot of material but let's start.

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to you Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of Your Holy Spirit in thanksgiving that Your Word is eternal; that the seasons they come and go, the years change, but Your Word endures forever. So, Lord, Your prophetic Word that You spoke through **Ezekiel** 2500 years ago is as relevant and current today as it was then, and for that we are grateful. So, Lord let us be people whose ears are open to Your Word and, most importantly, whose hearts, O Lord, are open to Your Word. Even as we pray for our Bible Study today at noon, Jesus, we do, of course, pray for our nation; we pray for a peaceful election; we pray for a fair election; we pray Your Hand upon all the candidates. We thank You Lord that You are The King The Sovereign so ultimately our allegiance is to You and that binds us together, Lord, even as we endeavor to be faithful in the matters that You have brought us to on earth. So, for our nation especially this day we pray in Jesus Name, **Amen**.

I am going to be summarizing some of the material provided to you in your handout as we go along. We are going to start now with **Ezekiel 13**, finishing the section we are calling "**The True Prophet**" where **Ezekiel** is called to be many things before Israel, and, of course, chiefly to be a prophet. The two main things in **Ezekiel 13** is the great sin of the false prophets who were deceiving the people by their own opinions and not following The Word of God. And then, the second part of **Ezekiel 13**, we are going to see that there were false prophetesses, female prophets, who were indulging in magic,

and sorcery and witchcraft. It is quite an alarming chapter, where both the male and the female prophets, in large part, have opposed God and His Ways and have gotten into deep deep magic arts.

**2. (Handout)** According to **Jeremiah 29:1, 15** we know that among those who had been deported to Babylon in 598 were members of the professional prophetic guild who apparently continued their work among the exiles. They were the ones always speaking a positive word to the king, not the judgments **Ezekiel** was bringing. So their clash with a true prophet of God continues here in Babylon, as it had been fought between these false prophets and Jeremiah back in **Judah**.

We know as we compare **Ezekiel** to his contemporary Jeremiah, remember Ezekiel is younger than Jeremiah, but they are living at the same time. And so, Ezekiel is the prophet for God in the exile and Jeremiah is the prophet of God who was left in Jerusalem. I don't know which is harder; you can make a case for either one. But, neither man had an easy life. Jeremiah was lonely; he had no friends; no family; he was under constant criticism; constant criticism, and Ezekiel had to be lonely too. And we're going to see that at the death of his wife, he couldn't even have time to mourn her death.

But, according to **Jeremiah 29:1** we know that there were members of what is called the prophetic guild who were among the exiles. Sometimes in Scripture you will hear the phrase, "the sons of prophets." So there were paid prophets—the guild of prophets, much like paid pastors today, who are paid for their prophetic services. Now, some of the prophetic guild prophets were of The LORD; some spoke Truth, but just a sliver of the guild prophets were Truthful. The vast majority of the prophetic guild had gone far away from The LORD. And, the vast majority of the prophetic guild were working, basically, to tell the prince, the king what they wanted to hear. There's a great danger whenever a pastor or a bishop or a priest is paid by his congregation like I am. There's a real temptation to tell the congregation what they want to hear because nobody likes to be the lone Ezekiel where they're getting criticized and people are getting angry and leaving the Church. So certainly, I know that tension; and it could be why so many of the prophetic guild prophets failed to obey men and not God. That's why so many pastors today do not stand up for The Word of God. So, I understand that.

I can think back to 2009 that was a seminal moment in my life (and in the life of this Church) where the Church that I served, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in August of 2009 in their big votes about would they then permit pastors to marry same sex couples? Would they allow non celebrant homosexual pastors to serve? And, by one vote they allowed all that. You may know that the lightning hit the steeple of the church during their meeting; I mean like when the vote was announced the lightning hit the steeple and the cross came down. I don't know if you remember that. I mean, "whoa.." There were 66 bishops in the ELCA at that time; not one bishop; not one bishop voted against that proposal. And so, it was a clear case where the

prophetic guild had failed to serve the Lord. So, I don't mean to be judgmental, but the parallels between what's happening there (in Ezekiel) with the exiles with these prophets, male and female. Remember, there are many female prophets and some of them, like Miriam, others we can think of, Anna in the New Testament, these were godly women and God spoke through them. So, let's be clear that God speaks through women and men, and we need prophetic male and female voices in the Church just as Israel did. But, many of the women, like many of the men, had lapsed into terrible work against God.

So, in that context now, we're in the exiles, these professional prophets, male and female, had been with them and the troubles that they brought with them from Judah continue now in Babylon.

### **False Prophets Condemned**

**13** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, who are prophesying, and say to those who prophesy from their own hearts:

*See, that's going to be the problem, right? They're not speaking the Word of God; they're speaking their opinions.*

'Hear the word of the Lord!' **3** Thus says the Lord God, Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! **4** Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins, O Israel. **5** You have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the Lord. **6** They have seen false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'Declares the Lord,' when the Lord has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfill their word. **7** Have you not seen a false vision and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, 'Declares the Lord,' although I have not spoken?"

*Really serious stuff. God through **Ezekiel** is going to confront these false prophets. There are **three expressions that God uses to describe them**. They are the **prophets of Israel**, no longer just the prophets of Judah, but He's bringing all the prophets of Israel collectively under His judgment. And then, you get this redundancy in*

verse 2, "prophesy against the prophets of Israel, who are prophesying, and say to those who prophesy from their own hearts."

*So, what this means in the Hebrew is that it infers that the prophets are ranting; they are just so full of wanting the people to like them and to tell them what they want to hear, that it's just like they're ranting. But, here's the greatest condemnation, they are prophesying from their own hearts. This is always going to be where the crux of the matter is. Is it a matter of our opinion "what we think," or is it a matter of what The Word of God declares. And, God calls us to humble ourselves and to submit our personal feelings and opinions and thoughts to what The Word has declared.*

*Ezekiel then cries out, “Hear the word of the Lord!” not a personal opinion, but “Hear the word of the Lord!” And, then you get this really strong word in **verse 3** “Woe.” Whenever you get the word “woe” in the Bible, that should put shivers down your spine because that means God is about to deliver a real real deep judgment. Jesus will later say, “Woe” to you scribes and pharisees. So “woe,” is a classic Biblical Word of “Wake up! The hard Word of God is coming.”*

*And so, the problem with these professional prophets who were paid for their services and unfortunately they obeyed their clients more than they obeyed God. You know later in the **Book of Acts**, that classic statement about the Apostles, “We must obey God and not men.” I tell you, that frames Ezekiel; that’s what’s going on here; that frames the 21st Century! Are we more afraid of men and women? Do we fear them more than we fear The Lord God? And, you could make a case that is the singular point of conflict in everything we are facing today.*

*So what are their problems? They are “foolish.” They are arrogant. “Foolish” here in the Hebrew foolish means “arrogant.” They follow their own spirit, not The Holy Spirit, and they do not represent Yahweh; they represent their own.*

*And so, in verses 4 and 5 there are two figures of speech that God uses to describe them. First, they are described in verse 4 as “jackals.” We all know about jackals. They are one of those animals that makes a lot of noise without saying anything. So these are just prophets who liked the sound of their own voice; their words meant nothing; their words were not from God; they were just babbling and making noise, as it were.*

*And then in verse 5 they have not gone up into the breach; they are preaching the wrong message, and we’re going to see about the breach in just a moment.*

**8** Therefore thus says the Lord God:

*So, the first announcement of judgment comes in verses 8 and 9 or you could translate “8 Therefore thus says the Lord God:” to “8 Therefore thus says Yahweh God:”*

*“Because you have uttered falsehood and seen lying visions, therefore behold, I am against you, declares the Lord God.*

*So, the first announcement of judgment, verses 9 and 10, there are three punishments God is going to bring personally against these false prophets. First of all He’s going to exile them; i.e., excommunicate them, if you will from the community of His people (there in verse 9).*

**9** My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord God.

*or you could translate that, "They shall not be in the community of my people." And so, so they're going to be excommunicated from the people. Secondly, they are not going to be in the official census. (pause) You get in the Bible you know the Book of Numbers and other places we get the official census count. We see this idea of a registry where the names of the Israelites are registered; are actually written down on scrolls. And then that image, of course, is carried forward into the New Testament and into the Book of Revelation where The Book of Life, the names of all the saved are written in the Book of Life. So this is both an important reality and metaphor. Brothers and sisters, by the Blood of Christ our names are written in His Blood in the Book of Life. And so, for these prophets to hear that God is going to blot out their names, hopefully, that brought them to repentance.*

*But, then the third judgment is that they are going to be exiled from The Land. And, we've said over and over how the covenant of God is tied to The Land, practically as well as spiritually. And so, it is a judgment across the board.....names will be obliterated and they will be exiled in The Land.*

*The next announcement of judgment comes in verses 10-16*

**10** Precisely because they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash,<sup>11</sup> say to those who smear it with whitewash that it shall fall! There will be a deluge of rain, and you, O great hailstones, will fall, and a stormy wind break out. **12** And when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, 'Where is the coating with which you smeared it?' **13** Therefore thus says the Lord God: I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath, and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger, and great hailstones in wrath to make a full end. **14** And I will break down the wall that you have smeared with whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you shall perish in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the Lord. **15** Thus will I spend my wrath upon the wall and upon those who have smeared it with whitewash, and I will say to you, The wall is no more, nor those who smeared it, **16** the prophets of Israel who prophesied concerning Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her, when there was no peace, declares the Lord God.

*Woe! Woe indeed. God charges these false prophets with leading the people astray; that's in **verse 10**, they say 'Peace,' when God says that there is no peace.' Until you repent and return to Me you cannot have peace in your lives and your souls (recording paused) until **Ezekiel 13** just recently.*

*"Whitewash there in verse 10; you may see a footnote in your Bible that says "plaster." Now, that's what it means functionally, practically. But that word, actually, literally in the Hebrew is saliva. So what does this mean? It means that they are just plastering the people with their own saliva, their spittle, their words and not The Word of God. That to me is even a more powerful imagery than even whitewash or plaster. Because it gets at the question of what is the core issue here? The core issue is by whose word shall we live. By my word; by your word or together shall we live by The Word of God. That is a*

*central (essential) issue here. And so, these false prophets, remembering that Ezekiel is the most graphic book in the Bible, Ezekiel is saying, "You've done nothing but spit and spittle trying to cover the people with your own words. But the Word of God is going to send a rain and wash that spittle away and reveal the Truth of your words.*

*And so then you get also the illusion to the wall and the wall is no more, and we immediately think that the wall of Jerusalem is no more so the fall of Jerusalem; the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC is right around the corner. And so, it's very powerful to read how all this works on two levels. There is the practical reality and then there's the spiritual Truth. They're always working in concert.*

### **Theological implications**

Counterfeits, false prophets claim divine authority, even when they speak only from their own inspiration and opinions. *How do we judge then a false prophet? We judge him or her by The Bible, by The Word of God. Are we hearing The Word of God being proclaimed by this prophet or are we hearing the prophet saying, "Well I've got a new word that's different; this is the real word."* The message of those who claim to speak for God must have his signature. That is, our proclamation will be true only to the extent that we declare the message of God revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is our guide to shifting between false and true prophets.

(b) Counterfeits proclaim messages that people want to hear, *not the message that they need to hear*, especially when the truth is painful. As a result, many live in the never-never land of "All is well!" when it is far from so, *the reality is just the opposite.*

(c) False prophets are more interested in their own status than in the welfare *than they are of the salvation of the people* of the community. They are like "jackals" devouring others for their own gain, assuming no responsibility for the fate of the people. *They just like to hear their own sound and they are making these babbling loud sounds without any Truth to them.*

(d) The messages of counterfeits die with them. Their words lack any lasting, effective power. Only The Word of the Lord endures forever (**Isaiah 40:7-8**).

(e) False prophets stand under the judgment of God. God is not mocked. What leaders in particular sow, that they shall reap. *On August 10, 2009, when the vote came in the ELCA Assembly, God is not mocked. The Cross came down off that church. We are to fear, brothers and sisters, not the one who can kill our body but the one who can kill both our soul and our body.*

Let me stop, questions, comments, observations? I would love to hear your insights into this because we are doing this together. Please unmute yourself and any or all of you speak up.

**Ann Wolfer:** Pastor Mark, as we look at this, how God uses His creation to punish those who are rebelling against Him. And, I notice here how He uses the hailstones, and we see that again at the end of Revelation. These false prophets are rebelling and they're blaspheming God. And, we find in Leviticus that the punishment for blaspheming is stoning. And so it's as if God from Heaven is stoning these false prophets, and He does the same to men and women at the end in Revelation.

**Mark:** That's a great insight, Ann, I didn't make that connection, but you're right He is sending the hailstones Himself from Heaven. Wow! That's a great connection. Thank you. Other comments and questions.

**Alan Denekas:** There are a couple of quick things. I think first we appreciate you (Pastor Mark) being a true prophet and we appreciate your integrity and Gerry's and Bob Benne's and you guys are awesome. And secondly, I recall Jesus referring to pharisees as "whitewashed tombs." My understanding of jackals is that they are sort of like scavengers like coyotes and so that's a pretty unsavory connotation.

**Mark:** Wow, that's another great point, thank you, Alan. They're scavenging the people; they're eating the people up for their own desires and for their welfare. Thank you, Ann and Alan, great connections there.

Let's move to the second half of Ezekiel 13. So, we have the false prophets and now we have these women who are being charged as false prophets as they bring sorcery to the people. Here in Ezekiel, this is the longest and most intense Word of God's judgment against women in all the Bible. We have just three other examples, which is amazing to me, where women specifically are identified as coming under God's judgment: **Amos 4** and **Isaiah 3** and **Isaiah 32** and then this, the fourth in **Ezekiel 13**, which is by far the most detailed and the most intense.

**Ezekiel 13:17** 17 And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own hearts. Prophesy against them 18 and say, Thus says the Lord God: Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature, in the hunt for souls! Will you hunt down souls belonging to my people and keep your own souls alive?

*There's a lot in there. Ezekiel now has been directed by God to set his face against these female prophets. Basically, these are witches or what we would call witches; i.e. sorcerers. These are a group of women who are selling magic as the answer to God's people. So, there's the presence of a female prophetic guild here, but these women are false prophets, unlike other women who are true prophets, and they only acted like prophets. And, what are they specifically doing? We have this direct reference in verse 18. So what's happening here in verse 18? They are sewing magic bands upon all the wrists. These are probably things like you've seen or know about when in witchcraft they'll take an image of a person and they'll stick needles in that person and say in incantation or curse over this image of a person. We see this in voodoo, right? It's*

something like that; i.e., magic bands that supposedly are blessed by these women to protect you as a magical protection, and, obviously, it is a terrible dark magic. And then, secondly these veils; what are these veils? Probably what is happening is these are false phylacteries. Now, you will remember images of Jews today as commanded by the Torah, the men will wear a small black box between their eyes on their heads. You've seen Orthodox Jews with these phylacteries and within this box are very very tiny little scrolls with The Torah, The Commandments, The Schema. Because, in Deuteronomy, the Schema says, "You should place The Word between your eyes," and Jews took this very literally as Orthodox Jews still today do. And so, what's probably happening is that these women are making false phylacteries to say, "Don't trust in The Torah; don't trust in that old stuff; trust in this magic potent; these magic words that I'm going to write out and make an incantation and this magic word, false phylactery will save you. It's a breathtaking sin to think that these were God's own people; God's own people, men and women doing these things. But, then we look at the church today and we think, "O Lord forgive us," because so many in the church today have gone down the road of false prophets, lies, deception, even magic. So they are praying to people to consume their souls and in the Bible in the **Hebrew the word, "soul," is to mean "the whole person."** Soul is a euphemism meaning, lock stock and barrel; mind body and spirit, these false women prophets are trying to claim these people for themselves away from God.

8 (e) But they also profaned Yahweh. With their witchcraft and magical invocation of God's divine name. *They are basically saying that Yahweh is simply a god like the Babylonian deities Who can be manipulated by certain magic. So they are in effect bringing God down and making Him just one of many deities that could be appeased by witchcraft.* The women have brought Yahweh in the public's eye to the level of the Babylonian deities and demons, who let themselves be manipulated by divination and witchcraft.

(f) *And, notice here too that they are paid by bread.* The people pay for the witches' service with barley and bread. The "bread of life" becomes the "bread of death." As a result, those who should die, they live (that is, these women and their clients who pay them for personal advantage), while those who should live, they die (the victims—God's "people").

*We have to hear as we think about every verse in the Bible ultimately is about The Messiah Jesus and so here you have to have in the back of your mind in verse 19*

**19** You have profaned me *which means you have blasphemed me* among my people for *what?* handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, so, *not the Bread of Life, God Himself, but pieces of bread now that bring death* putting to death souls who should not die and keeping alive souls who should not live, by your lying to my people, who listen to lies. And so, again we battle in our world between life and death.



(g) These women are not prophets but witches, charlatans, and dark magic is their tool.

So then there's a judgment; a second double announcement judgment beginning in verse 20.

**20** Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against your magic bands with which you hunt the souls like birds, and I will tear them from your arms, and I will let the souls whom you hunt go free, the souls like birds. **21** Your veils also I will tear off and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand as prey, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

9 (a) God will personally invade the witches' private and spiritual world, destroying the tool of their magical trade, and thereby annul their grip on his people. Through this saving act of God, his people will acknowledge His Being and His presence (vv 20- 21).

*He will destroy these false magic objects that they are using so that His true presence will be known and He will rescue these souls, if you will, from their hands because He wants His people to repent and live and not be consumed by lies and dark magic, witchcraft and false prophesy and die.*

9 (b) The second announcement opens with a new charge that focuses on the impact the witches have had on the people's spiritual condition (vv 22-23). God will rescue his people from the clutches of these witches, and then they too will realize he is God.

**22** Because you have disheartened the righteous falsely, although I have not grieved him, and you have encouraged the wicked, that he should not turn from his evil way to save his life, **23** therefore you shall no more see false visions nor practice divination. I will deliver my people out of your hand. And you shall know that I am the Lord."

### **Theological implications of this last part of Ezekiel 13**

*Perhaps, we should say, it's not totally shocking that these things would be happening in the exiles in Babylon because the reality is anytime there's a great stress, a pandemic, people are very tempted and prone to grab anything they can for hope; and sometimes that can be occult influences.*

*The demonic spiritual world is real, brothers and sisters. I don't think I have to convince any of you of that, and the activity of the demonic spiritual world right now is huge. Think about all the depression happening; think about all the fear; think about this chaotic election process. In my lifetime and probably in your lifetime, we have never seen, tensions running, at least I've never seen tensions as deep and as conflictual today over this presidential election more so than any presidential election, at least in my life time.*

*We can think about all the coronavirus and everything else. We can think about the racial tensions that have exploded and yet again it's all coming; not one thing but the*

*multiple, spiritual attacks are happening in concert. I don't want to get too weird on you, but I do think it is a dark conspiracy; a concert of demonic, satanic forces coming together. And so, we see people are clamoring for any kind of hope and sometimes they can be very tempted to put their hope in even things like the occult, magic spells or things like that.*

(a) The people of God are most vulnerable to occult influences in times of crisis. Unless we are vigilant in our walk with God, difficult experiences may leave us doubting God's presence and power and thus leave us open to the sinister powers of Satan and his darkness. The demonic spiritual world seeks to gain control over the weak and to destroy the righteous. As Peter says, our great enemy Satan prowling around like a roaring lion seeking to devour us (1 Pet 5:8). Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 6. But we know that God's kingdom of light and life will triumph over the kingdom of darkness and death (see Jude 24-25).

(b) The charm of magic is a trap used by Satan, the prince of darkness, to seduce unsuspecting victims. Magic and witchcraft continue to be powerful forces in our world, and many turn to them. Magic offers power. But the message of Ezekiel is that magic is a trap that binds rather than frees. Deliverance from it is only in the LORD.

*We don't hear much about it. About five or six years ago I became aware of a growing circle; a growing presence in Roanoke County of men and women practicing the dark magic arts. And, I had heard about those, but it wasn't until just five or six years ago that I could verify that by meeting a person and actually talking with him who had been involved in this. And so, we think we live in this enlightened time of great technology and science, but these dark magic things are, not only still with us, but maybe even growing.*

(c) The people of God must resist the temptation to exploit spiritual connections for personal advantage. *We've talked about the health, wealth and prosperity gospel which is a false gospel. Why are churches in both North America, Africa and Asia; churches that preach the false gospel of health, wealth and prosperity growing so much at this time? Could it be just an indication of how people are seeking anything and everything except The Word of God to get them through this terrible spiritual and financial crisis? It could be. So, we are very vulnerable right now, brothers and sisters, and we just need to double down on The Word of God.* Such exploitation can come when a person resorts to spells, charms, and witchcraft, all of which is condemned by God (**Dt 18:10-14**). And beware, too: Treating God as primarily the key to health, wealth, and happiness may be as sorcerous and profaning to his name as overtly occult activity. The antidote to this form of idolatry is to have passion for the honor of the Lord's name (**Mt 6:9-13**).

(d) Those who occupy positions of power will *always* answer to God for the manner in which they have exercised their authority. The way these women exercised their leadership was parasitic and sinister.

Let's stop here. Questions, comments, observations about that second section of **Ezekiel 13**?

**Linda Handy:** Mark, it occurred to me when you said why is the prosperity doctrine growing? We live in an increasingly secular product driven age. Like you said in your sermon about the thousand dollar shoes; everything has to do with what do I look like; how big is my house; how big is my car. So, when you live in a society that values those things and not spirit things, you will go to a church that promises you those things, tangible, visible, wearable, things. That's why it's growing, in my opinion. I want to have what somebody else has.

**Mark:** That's a good point.....so the first thing that comes to mind; that's very helpful, thank you, is **true sacraments and false sacraments**. So, it is interesting when we think about this. **God has given the Church, what we call, the Sacraments, real physical means for which He comes to us. Bread, wine, water, oil, laying on of hands.** So, these are the ways that we've known **from Scripture and from the Orthodox tradition of the Church that God comes to His people**. But then, side by side satan brings false sacraments of money and shoes and magic wristbands and fill in the blank. And so, again you know, the attack is on the classic Word and Sacrament. Which Word and which Sacrament shall we hitch our wagon? From God or from the world? So, as you talk about these things, Linda, it reminds me that there are a lot of false sacraments out there.

**Linda:** I was just thinking of Eve in the Garden when satan came to her and said that it's pleasing to the eye and it tastes good, don't you want some of that and she took and ate and so did Adam, obviously.

**Ezekiel 14** The elders of Israel have come to Ezekiel in his house. The elders being, as you can imagine, the appointed leaders of the exile community. And, they want some sort of word from Ezekiel of God's future for their nation. But, these elders have fallen into pagan syncretistic practices. And so, they come wanting a Word of God, but they get the judgment of God that they better fall on their faces and repent instead. So here's the problem; this is **Ezekiel 14:1-5 Idolatrous Elders Condemned** **14** Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. **2** And the word of the Lord came to me: **3** "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them?"

**14:1-3, the problem** (a) The elders visit Ezekiel at his house bringing a communal concern to him. But God sees into the hearts of these men (v 3). *Could Ezekiel have seen their hearts? No. The Bible is clear. We can never judge anyone's heart. Only God can judge the heart. But, we are called to judge words and actions. So when you hear people say, "When you say something is sin, you're being judgmental; we can't be judgmental; we can't judge anybody." That is a complete misunderstanding of The Word of God. In Matthew 7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's*

clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

*Judge them by their words and their actions. So there is wrong judgment, judging somebody's heart, and there is right judgment, judging their words and their actions. So the LORD sees in their hearts and He knows they have committed terrible sin because they have taken idolatry into their hearts. They have this amazingly false understanding that they can actually serve idols and then seek Yahweh at the same time. It would be shocking if it were not so true today. Again we've talked about syncretism. That word means "with the cretans," and the people of the island nation of Crete were liars and seers. And so it means to bring in idolaters and false religion into the one true worship of God. And, that still happens today all over the place, so they are oblivious to these facts.*

(b) In spite of their paganism, they seek divine grace before the prophet demanding a message from Yahweh. Can God take their inquiry seriously when at heart they are bent on their idolatry? The trouble is, they've come to Ezekiel as if he's a fortune-teller.

(1) But the elders indeed appear to be serious, considering themselves still to be the people of Yahweh. They seem oblivious to the fact that they cannot serve both God and idols.

*And so, here's God's answer to them in **Ezekiel 14: 4-5**.*

4 Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols,

*God basically in verse 4 reframes it and is quoting from The Torah. God is saying to them, Listen, elders, you have The Torah; you've got The Word of God, and you know that specifically idolatry is condemned, and if you come to Me with idolatry in your heart, there is nothing else but judgment that can fall on you. And so, again, God wants to capture the hearts of His people so that they will want to serve Him out of their own hearts not just because they have to.*

5 that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.

*And then the second answer of God comes then in **Ezekiel 14:6-11***

6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. 7 For any one of

the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the Lord will answer him myself. 8 And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

*Again, a lot of material. So it's an urgent appeal to repent of their idolatry even at the very last there is just the glimmer of hope that they might repent and declare themselves back in full allegiance to Yahweh. So there's a glimmer of hope in the midst of all this judgment. These elders have approached Ezekiel from The Word of the Lord but they get God's judgment against them because He knows that they are idolaters in their heart.*

*God is going to make them into a sign and a byword. That means and example of what happens to people who fall into idolatry. And, once again God says they will be cut off from His people.*

(c) The prospects for the people who have approached Ezekiel for a word from God are frightening. Not only has the bond between them and the land be severed, now they are threatened with an ultimate and final break with their LORD. The doom of those in Jerusalem is sealed. However, if the exiles turn their faces toward God alone, and abandon their idolatry, they may escape his wrath.

**9** And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.

*Ezekiel shifts to those prophets who themselves abuse the prophetic office. And, look at one of the most shocking sentences in this chapter in **verse 9**. And so, it's shocking because we stop and say, "Wait a minute. God says that He's the one who deceives them; He's the deceiver. It was Jeremiah who really wrestled the most with what we call divine deceit. Can God be a deceiver? One of the classic examples is **1 Kings 22** where the prophets of Ahab go against the one true prophet Micaiah, but in that situation, it's very much what we see in the Book of **Exodus 10:20** where Moses goes to Pharaoh and says, "Let My people go." And if you remember the ten plagues; I think it's the first three plagues where Pharaoh says, "Yes, I will repent and let the people go," and then he changes his mind about three times. By the time you get to about the fourth or fifth plague we are told that God hardens Pharaoh's heart. So, in other words, Scripture teaches that if God comes to us over and over and over and we refuse Him over and over and over, He will give us over to the desires of our hearts. He will just say, "Okay, if that's what you want."*

*And so, I think when we read **verse 9** it's very close to that story in Exodus where people say that it is not Pharaoh's fault. God hardens hearts. That's not fair God's not*

*fair. If He didn't harden Pharaoh's heart he would have let his people go. No. repeatedly Pharaoh reneged on his repentance until finally God just said, "That's it."*

*So, it's a very sobering word for all of us about God's divine sovereignty and God's divine providence. He always gives the last Word. But, His objectives are always redemptive. He desires that they still may be "My people," God says. Because look at these last two verses.*

**10** And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike—

*And so, even God's divine punishment is redemptive and of love; that in His chastisement, then, if it takes that, by the grace of God they will repent and turn to Him.*

11 that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord God."

### **Theological implications**

(a) *Idolatry is obviously a huge, huge sin and is essentially a matter of the heart; God wants our heart; He does not want us to follow anything except Himself and mind. If true religion is essentially a matter of the heart (Dt 10:12-22), the same holds true of any other worship.*

(b) *The temptation of syncretism to mix false worship with true worship poses a great threat to God's people in every day and age.*

(c) *The LORD invites all to come to him by grace, but they we must come to Him by faith, not deceit or manipulation.*

(d) *So-called prophets of the Lord who fall to the flattery and seductions of hypocritical inquirers become accomplices in their crimes and may expect the same punishment.*

(e) *The Lord remains gracious and merciful to all who repent.*

(f) *God is not capricious in his judgments. Remember, He's quoting The Torah to the elders. He hasn't changed His mind; He hasn't changed the rules of the game; He doesn't have His fingers crossed behind His back saying that He will say this today and say something else tomorrow. He is very consistent in His grace and He is very consistent in His judgment against sin. His responses to human sin is always consistent with his immutable character.*

Questions comments for **Ezekiel 1-11?**

**Ann Wolfer:** Pastor Mark, I think it is so important for us to see.

- We have the benefit of looking back at what Israel had to go through. Looking back we can see that in the year 586 BC, Jerusalem fell and just nearly everybody was either killed or taken into captivity.
- And, one of God's purposes, of course, was to punish idolatry and iniquity and punishment was harsh and severe because these were God's people and to whom much is given much is required.
- But, God also had another purpose. He wanted to take the people who had sinned out of The Land so The Land could have a rest and be cleansed, in a sense, because somebody was coming into that Land.
- And, the people of Israel were not going to hear a Word from Him for nearly 400 years, much like the Israelites in Egypt had not heard from God in 400 years because the greatest event in history was going to happen in The Land, and the remnant was going to have to be returned to Judah in similar conditions to what happened in Egypt.
- The Jews were going to be under the rule of the Romans.
- You know Israel is kind of like the Poland of the Middle East. Those countries going back and forth in wars and everything. And, they were going to be subjected to this.
- And so The Land had to be cleansed as the people would have to be repentant and they were going to have to come back,
- and Nehemiah was going to have to quickly build that wall around Jerusalem in 52 days;
- and there was going to have to be a Temple rebuilt a
- nd everything was going to have to be in preparation for Jesus to come and be born and to... be in the hearts of His people.
- And, when we look at Ezekiel and when we look at how the people had turned against God, then we see that God was still working redemptively in His people because He was getting them ready for Christ to come.
- And He's the second Moses; the perfect Israelite to take away our sins and all of this is getting His own people ready.
- I think about what we're going through today in this election. Here we are as God's people. We are called to be salt and light. We too have a redemptive purpose in This Land and we too are to take that responsibly.
- You know tomorrow, whatever the results of the election, God is still on His Throne and just as God told another prophet there are 600 people who have not bowed to Baal nor kissed Baal
- and you know, by the Grace of God we are counted as those people and here we are by the Grace of God,
- and He's not ever taken off guard, surprised and nothing ever just occurs to God. And I think that we are here, and this is our Esther moment. Who knows that we are here "for such a time as this."

**Mark:** Thank you, Ann. Wow, that's a good word. In just about two minutes, Ann, you put together the whole redemption history. And, that's so important because we study Ezekiel obviously, but we study Ezekiel in the context of all of salvation history. So, we

do know what the end game is. The Land is being restored and prepared for Messiah, so it all fits beautifully together...beautiful Word.

Just to finish off this section called The True Prophet. This is the last passage in which Ezekiel explicitly functions as a prophet. Next week we are getting into the Incarnate Message. It's an amazing thing, brothers and sisters, the Incarnation of Messiah did not happen; well it happened in the first century, but the typology, the sign for incarnation has been throughout the Old Testament. It's great; it's wonderful and that's next week.

### **Israel's Shedding of Blood**

**Ezekiel 22:23-31** And the word of the Lord came to me: 24 "Son of man, say to her, You are a land that is not cleansed or rained upon in the day of indignation. 25 The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst. 26 Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. 27 Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. 28 And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the Lord has not spoken. 29 The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice. 30 And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. **31** Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord God."

We will revisit this one section (**Ezekiel 22:23-31**) next week and then we will press forward into our next section called "The Message Incarnate." This idea about standing in the gap; that is huge. Brothers and sisters, we are called to stand in the gap, and if you take that calling from God you will have a bull's eye on your back. We'll talk about that next week.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, thank You for this time, Thank You for these dear brothers and sisters who are seeking You and Your face. We pray, Lord, for the Church. We pray for this nation. We pray in great thanksgiving that You are the Sovereign Lord of Lord and King of Kings. Into Your Hands O Lord we commend our lives; our Church; our nation; this world. Please Jesus help us. Save us from our sins and call us back to you day by day. In Your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

God bless you. We will have a lot to talk about next week.



After our prayer we are going to return to last week to finish up Ezekiel The True Prophet before beginning Ezekiel The Message Incarnate. One of the great things about the book of Ezekiel is the foreshadowing for the very Incarnation of The Messiah Jesus Himself. That's another reason that I would argue that although Ezekiel is not explicitly quoted in the New Testament, it is implicitly foundational to what The Lord and his Apostles had to teach.

This was the last session about Ezekiel the prophet as I read **Israel's Shedding of Blood Ezekiel 22:23-31 23** And the word of the Lord came to me: 24 "Son of man, say to her (to *Israel/Judah*), You are a land that is not cleansed or rained upon in the day of indignation.

*God is pulling no punches as He speaks to Ezekiel to the people; God is pulling no punches to us today. I've had a couple of emails, three as a matter of fact, just in the last 24 hours, from members of our Church family who all are really thinking that the time is at hand, folks, and that believers, the Church, really need to stand up. And, they're just praying, "Lord, in these days, with the worst to come, may we be ready to stand up." When I get emails and get comments from you and others like that, it just means that The Word of God through Ezekiel is ever the more on our minds and relevant.*

*The judgment is coming upon Judah and Israel because, from top to bottom, east to west, north to south, the corruption is deep and endemic in the land. The thesis statement of this last prophet Word from God as we talk about Ezekiel the prophet who wears all these different hats, comes here in Ezekiel 22:23-24.*

*The reference there is back to Genesis 6 'as in the Days of Noah, so now in the Days of Ezekiel.' God's wrath is going to be poured down, ultimately, to cleanse The Land from corruption and the rain here is not a literal actual rain as it is in Genesis 6, but it is a way to talk about the rain of God's judgment as a cleansing agent.*

*When we read the harsh hard truthful judgment in Ezekiel as we read in all the prophets, we have to just keep in mind, the ultimate purpose of God's judgment is not the judgment itself; it is to be a cleansing that as many as possible will repent and return to God. So, restoration hope is always the twin theme to judgment.*

25 The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst. 26 Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. 27 Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. 28 And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the Lord has not spoken. 29 The people of the land have practiced

extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice.

*We see the princes, the kings are corrupted; the priests are corrupted; the judges are corrupted; the prophets are corrupted; and, therefore, all the people are corrupted. And so, it is not just in part that God's people have fallen away from Him but in whole.*

30 And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. 31 Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord God.”

*There is a response to the crimes of Israel's leaders, and basically we have here a call for someone, some man (you could say some woman) who would 'stand in the breach.' Obviously, this is a military illustration. We can easily imagine a city wall; a fortification and in that wall there's been a breach, a gap, where the enemy, obviously, can come into and take over and destroy the city. So God is saying, 'Is there just at least one person, one faithful, man, woman of God, who will stand in the breach so that the enemy should not destroy the people but be turned away.'*

God says, very sadly in verse 30, “I found none.”

*Again, these Words really echo and mean a lot today. So the question for us, of course, today is, 'Will God find one of us; will God find the Congregation; will God find some of His people, at least one believer who will stand in the gap?' This idea about standing in the gap; that is huge. Brothers and sisters, we are called to stand in the gap, and if you take that calling from God you will have a bull's eye on your back.*

*I am reminded of that great theologian and Bishop Athanasius who lived in the 4th Century in the aftermath of Emperor Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to become a Christian in the Roman Empire. Constantine declared that the Roman Empire would become the Holy Christian Empire. The trouble is that Constantine, and then his sons who succeeded Constantine, all fell under the influence of Arias, priest and very charismatic preacher. Arias taught, as you probably know, that Jesus was a great man but he fell short of being divine; that He was not truly God.*

*We see Arianism incorporated now into Mormonism, into Jehovah's Witnesses to Christian Science. So Arianism is still very much a heresy afoot, but because of Constantine and his sons Arianism was 'this close' to becoming the accepted doctrine of what is now Western Christianity. And in not exactly but almost exactly, one man stood in the breach and his name was Athanasius. He said that, based upon Scripture and the witness of God's people, we must believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man....Athanasius suffered greatly; he was exiled a number of times; he was physically tortured, but he stood in the breach; and because of Athanasius you and I*

*today confess The Trinity, as the core foundation of the doctrine of God, one God in three Persons..*

*So, in every day and age, brothers and sisters, there is always going to be something huge that is going to confront us and the question is, 'Will we stand in the breach.'*

**Theological Implications:**

(a) The call to leadership is primarily a call to responsibility, not privilege.

(b) Those called to divine service, whatever responsibilities they may have, are charged with maintaining the sanctity of God. Moral anarchy results from a lack of holiness and a proper distinction between the sacred and the profane. *I don't think I need to argue the point; I think you agree with me that moral anarchy results from a lack of holiness. Think about the nations of this earth. When their lack of integrity and holiness before God, anarchy always results. Think about the streets of America on fire now; think about the anarchy of Ateiffa; think about the anarchy of Marxism, Communism.*

(c) The survival of the Church, grafted into Israel, depends on the positive response of leaders to the call of God to stand in the breach so *that disaster can be defeated*. The gap is defended and the wrath of God is averted when the leaders appeal for repentance from sin and a new commitment to obey and serve the LORD. *It's hard to stand in the gap because you're going to be attached, and the question is, will we stand in the gap.*

**End of Class 7 November 3, 2020 Handout and Zoom Recording**

**Class 8 - November 10, 2020**

**Opening Prayer:** Father, we pray to You through Your Son The Messiah Jesus our Lord and Savior in the power of Your Holy Spirit in great thanksgiving for this opportunity once again to gather as Your family to study Your Word to Your family through the prophet Ezekiel. We pray Lord that we would both study both what You said to Your people, Israel, in this 6th Century B.C., but that we would study and listen to also to hear what You are saying to Your people in this 21st Century A.D. Lord, may Your Word never be dull to our ears but always be that wonderful and pleasing Word of Love and Truth for us today and forever. Holy Spirit please anoint this time of study and discussion. We pray this in JESUS' Name, Amen.

As we are dividing up the Book of Ezekiel we begin a new section called "**The Message Incarnate**" where in Ezekiel himself, he physically embodies The Word of God, which then points us to the ultimate Incarnation of The Word of God Jesus Christ in His own Incarnation.

Beginning now with this short section we get the end of the most complex calling of a person in all of Scripture. In other words, in other places where we hear of a person called to serve God, it is usually, a pretty short to-the-point calling. Ezekiel's calling involves a Heavenly vision and all sorts of things; and now we get this final part of the calling. So it's very complex; and most people will say this is another very difficult passage to really understand and unpack because of its complexity.

Ezekiel will suddenly find he is unable to speak and, taken at face value, his inability to speak lasts for seven years. Now, within that seven years, we're going to see, that occasionally God will allow Ezekiel to speak when He wants him to. But, basically, Ezekiel doesn't say very much for seven years, which seems to correspond to the seven days that he resisted the call of God. Ezekiel's example is really going to become a sign or a type of Israel's reluctance to stand for God as well.

We will also see that God's hand is upon Ezekiel as you see in verse 22. We see in verse 23 that God's glory is going to come about on Ezekiel. So this is a really important teaching in the Book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel knew The Lord God Almighty as well or better than any other human being has ever known God. Ezekiel was privileged with the most amazing visions of Heaven in the Old Testament. Ezekiel was privileged to have The Holy Spirit work in him, really, like no other human being. And so, you can say that Ezekiel was a friend of God. He personally knew The Lord God Almighty. At the same time, Ezekiel's relationship with God was never casual; it was never familiar; it was never, 'Hey, God, You're my buddy.'

Now, Jesus says, "Yes, you are my friends." So, we are grateful for that, but when we lose the reverence and fear and awe of The Lord. When our relationship with The Lord God Almighty becomes casual, then Holiness and Glory and even faithfulness can be diminished. As we think about Ezekiel in his amazing relationship with God, let us also

remember how serious it was and how reverence and fear were always foundational; that Ezekiel was always falling on his face.

This reminds us that when we come into worship, it is very easy, and especially today with being six feet apart, wearing masks and not seeing our friends, we, of course, want to gravitate and say hello to people as we come into worship if we're able to be back at the Church. But, I would really encourage us to wait and do the hospitality after worship; to come into the presence of God with that fear and trembling before the Lord to set the context of your worship.

**Ezekiel 3:22-27** **22** And the hand of the Lord was upon me there. And he said to me, "Arise, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you." **23** So I arose and went out into the valley, and behold, the glory (*Shekhinah*) of the Lord stood there, like the glory that I had seen by the Chebar canal, and I fell on my face. **24** But the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and he spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself within your house. **25** And you, O son of man, behold, cords will be placed upon you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people. **26** And I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and unable to reprove them, for they are a rebellious house. **27** But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house.

**Verse 24** says that *The Holy Spirit enters into Ezekiel. Now, we know that The Holy Spirit has already been working in Ezekiel so how can The Holy Spirit enter into him if He is already there? I think that is really just another great teaching that all of us who are Christians; all of us who are baptized believers in Jesus Christ have The Holy Spirit. You can only say, 'Jesus is Lord by The Holy Spirit.'* So, brothers and sisters, if you can say with genuineness, "Yes, Jesus, You are my Lord and Savior," *The Holy Spirit's in you. But, at the same time The Holy Spirit wants to give you more of Himself. I love that about The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit says, "I am in you and I want to given you even more of Myself; more Power; more Sanctification; more Confidence, more Joy."* And so, it is right for us to pray beautifully today, "Father Son Holy Spirit, I love You; thank You for being in me and I want more of You." And that is a great teaching from the Book of Ezekiel.

**Verse 27** "He who will hear, let him hear." This is one of the ways that Ezekiel gets used in the New Testament. Basically, Jesus takes those phrases and He often says that. He will tell a story or a parable and he will say "He who will hear, let him hear." So, when we hear Jesus, our Lord, saying those Words, more or less, many times, He is quoting from the Book of Ezekiel without explicitly quoting. So, again, just a little way that we see how influential Ezekiel is on the whole Testament of Scripture (both Old and New).

*In order to make Ezekiel more of the prophet God needs him to be God speaks to Ezekiel in three parts:*

1. *Yahweh orders Ezekiel to go home and shut himself up in his house;*
2. *God tells Ezekiel that his fellow exiles will tie him up with ropes, preventing him from circulating among them;*
3. *Then God told Ezekiel that He was going to make his tongue stick to the roof of his mouth.*

*WOW! That's pretty amazing! How is Ezekiel going to be God's prophet when he's tied up mute in his house. Well, it is breathtaking over the last 125 years to see how so many people, even believers, have tried to psychoanalyze Ezekiel. And if you look at the literature, which I did briefly, people have tried to diagnose Ezekiel as suffering a wide range of pathological and psychological illnesses; everything from kata-tonic schizophrenia to epilepsy to hysteria to paranoia. And so, there are a lot of people who just simply say that none of this could really have happened. It must have been some sort of psychosomatic craziness after the vision; all the calling; all the glory, Ezekiel kind of lost his mind for awhile. So that's a very unfortunate interpretation that does not take The Word of God as The Word of God. We have to understand that Ezekiel is a man totally consumed by The Holy Spirit. So, we should believe without hesitation that he was shut up in his house; he was tied up with ropes; and his tongue did stick to the roof of his mouth, as a mute person. Now God will release his speechlessness, from time to time within this period, but basically Ezekiel is going to be tied up in his house. And, we are going to meet his wife. Unfortunately, we meet her at her death. But, his wife, we can assume, is ministering to him. I mean, what a marriage! She had to put up, not only with Ezekiel, but with God's role in Ezekiel's life. So, we can imagine Ezekiel lying in his house tied up; he's mute, and he's being attended to by his wife all to get God's people's attention. He is embodying, you see, he is the prophet incarnate, not just speaking the Word of God; not just speaking God's judgment, but He is showing the whole family of Israel God's judgment upon Him.*

*But this discounts the spiritual intensity of Ezekiel's prophetic experience: he is a man totally possessed by Holy Spirit. We can believe without hesitation that the effects Ezekiel exhibited came directly from the power of God working in him.*

*Plus, the reality is, Ezekiel does speak to the exiles frequently, delivering messages as he receives them from God. His dumbness is not a physiological or psychological condition. God will suspend Ezekiel's speechlessness as needed.*

*Ezekiel's verbal and nonverbal behavior is governed completely by God's will.*

*How shall we understand the significance of the prophet's confinement and speechlessness? It basically means the time of intercession for Israel has passed. God has given Israel a time to repent. She's not repented and judgment is going to be coming. And so, God hopes that Israel will see in Ezekiel's confinement, that she too is going to fall under confinement of God's judgment; and so the curtain now falls.*

*(1) The family of Israel is in a state of rebellion against God (v 27b). Thus her judgment is set. The time of intercession has passed.*

*(2) There seems to be a correlation between the seven days Ezekiel sat among his fellow exiles, resisting God's call to be a prophet (3:15) and what turns out to be a seven-year speechlessness: one year of divinely imposed speechlessness for one day of self-determined resistance. Ezekiel is to serve as an embodied, incarnate living sign (a type) of Israel. (3) But God will open Ezekiel's mouth even in this period (v 27a) to speak God's word, for he will have the people's full attention when he does so. Until God so opens Ezekiel's mouth, Ezekiel will not engage in any casual chit-chat with the people. He will only speak when God says speak and only the word God gives. (d) The curtain now falls on Ezekiel's call. He is left isolated and alone from the other exiles. He's never seen out on the street or in the marketplace. He lives in a separate world, totally under God's direction and power. The only recorded conversation between prophet and people comes by God's command in 24:18-24. We can read the Book of Ezekiel as a spiritual diary of his encounter with God.*

*For all this time, Ezekiel is separated; he is living a life apart; he is in his house. So again, think of what a relevant Word this is to us. For the last six or seven months we have been largely shut up in our homes, right? We have had the pandemic. We have had to wear our face masks. We have been told to be extremely careful when we go out; and all those things are extremely true. We've endured this, more or less, for six or seven months. Ezekiel endured this for seven years! We might have a few more months. He was tied up and basically home bound for seven years. So, if God gave Ezekiel the strength to do that, well? I believe God will give us the strength to do this too.*

*In Ezekiel the only conversation between Ezekiel and the people comes by God's command in Ezekiel 24 and we will look at that another time.*

### **Theological Implications**

(a) The LORD is present with his messenger in this prefiguration of the Incarnation. In all three main stages in Ezekiel's call, the glory of Yahweh appears. We remember the glory of the Son of God on the Mt. of the Transfiguration.

(b) God's ways are often strange and inscrutable. We dare not question why God works as he does.

(c) The heart of the messenger may not interfere with his mouth. That is, whatever Ezekiel felt like saying to the people personally, his mouth could only speak what God told him to say.

(d) The prophet bears in his own body the signs of his own calling. Ezekiel bears the cross for the sake of the LORD. Ezekiel is God's message incarnate.

**Mark:** Questions, comments, observations. I get the feeling, like Ezekiel, your tongues are clinging to the roofs of your mouths. God says, "Speak My people, speak."

**Linda Handy:** Well, you should know that Linda Handy is going to speak!

**Mark:** Oh, good! Speak, speak, Linda!

**Linda Handy:** It occurs to me that he is bound, but the people know he's bound. They go, "Where did Ezekiel go; he's bound; he isn't speaking." And, there's a saying that goes, "Witness and evangelize for the Lord and if necessary use words." So Ezekiel is witnessing the Word of the Lord even if he wasn't speaking it. Sometimes our own words get in the way and we're called to live it, not necessarily speak it. So, he's still witnessing to those who would, could hear.

**Mark:** Well, that's a great observation, Linda. Thank you for unmuting your tongue. You're quoting there St. Francis who said, "Preach always, use words only when necessary," so that's a great parallel to what we're just finding. So, right Ezekiel was not doing much talking, but he was embodying The Word of God. So, again calls to mind, how are we witnessing to Christ with our actions? Of course, we want to speak The Lord with our words, but if we were muted; if people only observed our lives by what they saw; what we did or did not do, what witness would they have about that. So, (again) that's a great observation, thanks Linda, good.

**Linda Handy:** I'm unmuting again. The Tuesday Morning Ladies just discussed this this morning when we were talking about witnessing and how we stand in the gap when Jesus empties out the Temple because they were side lining the Gentiles, because they had filled up the court of the Gentiles. So the message this morning was, how are we robbing God and how are we doing with including others? And the ladies came up with a list of things at St. John that can be seen as reaching out and being inclusive. The Thanksgiving Baskets; the ministry for the healing if anybody has any medical issues with which they need help to heal; all of the missionary outreaches; the compassion Saturday that we just had. Those kinds of things are how we witness; and how we live our lives, hopefully in joy and trust in the Lord that people can see, and not fear and trembling.

**Mark:** Thank you; good; absolutely; thank you. (And then inviting others to speak up.)

### **Ezekiel's Wife Dies Ezekiel 24:15-27**

*It is a sad section, but it also says that if we are going to follow the Lord, we are going to suffer.*

**15** The word of the Lord came to me: **16** "Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. **17** Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet; do not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men." **18** So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded. **19** And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting thus?" **20** Then I said to them, "The word of the Lord came to me: **21** 'Say to the house



of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and the yearning of your soul, and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. 22 And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. 23 Your turbans shall be on your heads and your shoes on your feet; you shall not mourn or weep, but you shall rot away in your iniquities and groan to one another. 24 Thus shall Ezekiel be to you a sign; according to all that he has done you shall do. When this comes, then you will know that I am the Lord God.' 25 "As for you, son of man, surely on the day when I take from them their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes and their soul's desire, and also their sons and daughters, 26 on that day a fugitive will come to you to report to you the news. 27 On that day your mouth will be opened to the fugitive, and you shall speak and be no longer mute. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the Lord."

So, 'Ezekiel, the sign,' 'Ezekiel, the message incarnate.'

*Remarkable insight into the prophet's life and his family situation. God is announcing that the delight of Ezekiel's eyes; i.e., his wife is going to be taken from him. Now that one word, 'delight,' tells us that Ezekiel and his wife had a profoundly, godly, wonderful marriage. His wife was 'the delight of his eyes.' Whatever else is happening publicly in Ezekiel's life, at home he and his wife are ministering to each other together.*

*Up to this point, think how much she had to put up with. For women among us who are married, what would you do if your husband was tied up in your living room for seven years, not able to help with the dishes or the children or couldn't even take out the trash; wouldn't work; wouldn't bring in income. The cross that Mrs. Ezekiel bore, we are not told, but we can easily infer, was tremendous. Let's not ever ever forget the faithfulness of Ezekiel's wife. And, after all that ministering and her own personal suffering; watching her husband suffer and having to put up with his suffering, she dies suddenly.*

So, it's a harsh reality and God basically says, "Ezekiel you've got to stifle your own personal agenda here because there's a bigger stake that I've got. God says,

(1) *There's to be no wailing (mourning), weeping, or tears. It was the custom to hire women to come and mourn at a death of a loved one. None of that.*

(2) *Instead of wearing the garments of the mourner, Ezekiel is to put on his festive turban (a beautiful item of priestly clothing). He's not to put on the black garments of mourning but is to put on his festive turban. If you want to know what a festive turban looks like, next time you're in the Church building, take a look at the amazing painting that Sarah Rutherford has painted of a high priest; look at the high priest's turban on his head. So it was a beautiful festive hat of the priestly garment.*

22 And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. *He's not to eat the bread of men. He's not to eat the casseroles that people bring*

*over. You know when somebody dies they want to bring food to your house which is great; he's not to do any of that.*

(3) Ezekiel's wife dies the evening of the day Yahweh spoke to the prophet, and the next day, Ezekiel does as he is commanded. *God gives Ezekiel a Word in the morning and that same evening his wife dies. WOW!*

The people immediately ask, not about Ezekiel's welfare, but their own: "What do these things mean for us?" No one steps up to offer encouragement and support to Ezekiel. It's another indication of Israel's selfishness and lack of love. *WOW! Not, "Ezekiel, our hearts are breaking for you. Ezekiel, we're so sorry for the loss of your beloved wife. Ezekiel, we miss her too. Ezekiel, how are you doing? What does this mean for you, Ezekiel?" Listen to what they say! (they're own welfare!) "What do these things mean for us?!" Maybe, I'm reading too much into that, but that seems really callous and really selfish. And, I think it's another indication of how far their hearts have fallen from God because you see it always; it always is the case, the farther our hearts fall in love with God or from love with God, the farther our hearts fall from love of others. To turn away from God is to really begin to turn into one's self and away, not only from God, but from other people.*

2. In vv 20-24, Ezekiel answers the people's question. He does so by "the Word of the LORD." It is not The Word the people want to hear. *And what does he say? And, what does it mean for them; that God's going to take away the two great delights of their eyes; i.e., The Temple and their children.*

(a) God announces (v 21) the loss of their most treasured possessions: the temple and their children.

(1) The desecration of the temple brings grief most of all to God's own heart, for the temple says Yahweh is "my sanctuary." *And so this is going to hurt God more than the people, but part of the judgment is that the Temple is going to be destroyed.*

(2) The temple had become "the pride" of the people. They put their confidence in the external beauty and magnificence of the building, not in the presence of God within the temple. *The Temple had become the pride of the people; i.e, the exterior, the magnificence, the beauty, the largeness; they took such pride in the building but not in the meaning of the building.*

(3) The temple was the "delight of their eyes." What Ezekiel's wife was to him, the temple was to the people.

(4) The temple was their passion, longing, and hope.

(5) God will put an end to their vain hope in the temple—and to their children. Destruction to temple and people will fall on Jerusalem. *And God is also going to put destruction to their children; destruction of both building and people will fall until Jerusalem.*

(b) Ezekiel then advises (vv 22-24) the people how to respond in the face of the impending tragedies. He is their sign: they are to do what he did in the death of his wife.

(1) Ezekiel paid a high price to serve as Yahweh's prophet. He walks in the role of the suffering servant. He embodies the suffering of the whole nation. He prefigures the Suffering Servant himself, Messiah Jesus. *(Which points us, of course, to the great of all suffering servant, The Messiah Jesus Himself.)*

(2) Through all of this, Ezekiel points the people away from the temple and their children, as the main objects of their delight, to God himself. *So this is what can happen to us. We can become so enamored and prideful of our things; i.e., perhaps our Church building, our homes, our lives and we can put our children on such high pedestals before us that they tragically become idols to us, where whatever is best for our children is the only thing that we want to do in our lives. And, of course, we are called to love all children, but when they become more important to us than God Himself; when any one, anything becomes more important than God Himself we are right back in the seat of judgment where Israel was.*

(3) But only through these tragedies will come to the dawn of a new day for Israel, the coming of the Messiah. From the cross, comes new life.

(c) After the fall of Jerusalem, a survivor will come to the exiled community, signaling the loosing of Ezekiel's tongue (vv 26-27). *So, then we are told at the end of this section:*

(1) The arrival of this survivor marks Ezekiel as a true prophet: what he has prophesied has come to pass.

(2) The opening of his mouth indicates a new message is on its way from the LORD, a message, we can hope, of restoration. *Ezekiel's tongue will be released because they will now know that he's been a true prophet. What's the test of a true prophet? What he or she says comes to pass. And what he (God through Ezekiel) has said comes to pass so both Ezekiel and the Lord are vindicated, and now Ezekiel can begin to speak.*

### **Theological Implications**

(a) God's people in every generation face the serious sin and temptation of placing their faith and delight in religious symbols and idolatrous love of anyone and anything other than Yahweh himself. The judgment on Jerusalem in 586 BC is a warning to us all to repent of such sins. *So, let's make sure we examine our hearts. What is the order of our lives? Is it the love of God first and then spouse and then children. Do we understand when we come to the Temple of God's house that it's not about the building; it's about being with the Lord?*

(b) Nothing, not even the temple, is more sacred to the LORD than a sanctified people. *Later, Paul will say in 1 Corinthians 6 that don't you realize that you are the Temple of The Holy Spirit?*

**1 Corinthians 6:15-17 15** "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?"

Never! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” 17 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

*And, so ultimately the physical Temple of Jerusalem is perfected and fulfilled when The Holy Spirit enters into our lives; our bodies. And so, then in **1 Corinthians 12** that’s why Paul says, we are members of the body; we are each living stones of the Temple. And so, when we come together in corporate worship we are like putting the blocks of the stones of the Temple together; we are building the Temple of worship every time we join together.*

While the temple was the sacred, holy place of God’s dwelling on earth, what he wanted more than anything else was a relationship of worship by “the Spirit and truth” (**John 4:23**).

*So, these ideas that we find in Ezekiel get tremendous important reflection in the New Testament.*

(c) The message of God is proclaimed most powerfully when it is incarnated in the life of the messenger. *This is what Linda was saying just a few moments ago. Brothers and sister, no witness gives more glory to God than the witness of a believer going through a time of suffering and doing so faithfully. There Ezekiel’s wife dies. And what does he do? He embodies a witness to the Glory of God. I mean, that’s an amazing thing. But, ultimately his suffering, your suffering, my suffering is not in vain. It’s all then to open the way of hope and glory.*

Ezekiel bore the marks of suffering for his faithfulness to the LORD, especially in the death of his wife. Nothing results in the Glory of God more than when the faithful suffer faithfully.

(d) Ezekiel’s suffering ultimately led to the renewed knowledge of Yahweh among his people. His suffering was not in vain.

Questions, comments, observations? **Ezekiel 24:15-27**

**Ann Wolfer:** Pastor Mark, I have just one. We look at this and on some level we kind of recoil at the harshness of this judgment on the Jewish people. But, you know in this; in God’s wrath, He did remember mercy. I mean when we look at God’s destruction of The Temple and then His taking away of the children, even in that there was mercy. I think we should always remember that we’re in spiritual warfare, and had God let the people continue on that path, there would have been the end of Judaism and then there would have been no savior to come into this world. But, by removing the Temple; by taking away the children, who were the future of the Jewish people, it was like Stop! He had to do something so severe to get the attention of His people and that was the mercy in there. And, I think in my own life there have been times when God has had to

chastise and punish me and say ‘Stop, Ann, and turn around and back to me. I will not let you keep going down this road. I have to get your attention because I love you too much to let you continue on this way.’ And, if he hadn’t intervened, we would be living in a completely different world than we are now.”

**Mark:** Right. Thank you, Ann. Yes. Thanks, Ann, and that reminds me, of course, just working out what you’ve just said. When Jesus come, He’s like Ezekiel perfected; His own death becomes the way of our salvation. So, we see that throughout salvation history; suffering and death of faithful people becomes then the way of God opens the way of hope for all people. Thank you, (Ann).

Any other comments or questions? Anybody kind of struggling with all of this?

**Linda Handy:** Mark I went off on a side tangent maybe, but I was thinking that the Israelites put their hope in the Temple; in a place; in a thing; and their children. And, today, in our self righteous; self aware; self serving world, we are murdering our children. So, we don’t put our hope in God, and we say that this child, yes, will be my hope and not my salvation, but my prodigy, we murder them by the millions for the sake of, “I need to find myself; or this is harmful to self,” and the Lord must be crying.

**Mark:** Absolutely, so that’s another way of looking at this. So, that’s the beauty of studying Scripture. It brings to mind so many important truths. We’re going to finish this section of The Message Incarnate.

### **Ezekiel 33:21-22 Jerusalem Struck Down**

21 In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, “The city has been struck down.” 22 Now the hand of the Lord had been upon me the evening before the fugitive came; and he had opened my mouth by the time the man came to me in the morning, so my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.

This historical note reports two events of great consequence for both the exiles and Ezekiel. *And so, this fugitive comes and two great events happen or two important facts are known.*

The survivor from fallen Jerusalem arrives at Ezekiel’s house to announce that Ezekiel had been right: the city and temple were destroyed. This man is probably among the first wave of prisoners deported to Babylon after the burning of the city (2 Kings 25:11). By the dating listed here, it took the survivor about five months to reach the exiles. *First, the fugitive from Jerusalem brings word that the City and the Temple are destroyed. He may well have been among the first prisoners deported after the destruction of Jerusalem. It would have taken five to six months to get to Jerusalem to Chebar Canal where the exilic community was.*

*Here we learn too that Ezekiel has regained his normal speech. So, this then triggers the release of Ezekiel's tongue.*

*Now he could assume the normal work of a prophet again, interceding on the people's behalf before God and offering messages of hope for the future. So, now Ezekiel is going to be able to speak God's Word of hope to God's people.*

*Now the prophet stands before the people as a living, incarnated proof of the truth of the Word of God. Ezekiel's doubters and enemies are now the ones silenced (12:21-28).*

*But more importantly, Yahweh himself is vindicated. He is the Sovereign God over heaven and earth, in real time and history. He will not be mocked.*

*So a short section; but one, again, where we have at least two really important developments.*

**Ezekiel 33:30-33** **30** As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, 'Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.' **31** And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. **32** And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. **33** When this comes—and come it will!—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.

*So, we hear the final vindication. Yahweh gives Ezekiel encouragement at the conclusion of the first phase of his ministry.*

*We get a rare glimpse now of what's happening. His wife has died? He is now living alone in his house; and his fellow exiles seem like they just have free reign; his doors are open. If they want to go inside; they can all go inside to visit Ezekiel.*

*They're all talking about him; they're coming to his house for a Word of the Lord, but they're refusing to take it seriously. Why are they refusing to take it seriously?*

*The people's presence is motivated by a seemingly craving for the sensuous and sensational news, like those who read the National Enquirer or watch The Jerry Springer Show. They are coming, not to hear The Word of the Lord to them, repentance and faith, but they just want to hear some good stories that will be titillating to them.*

*And secondly, they are motivated to seek out Ezekiel because of greed. They wanted to gain economic advantage from getting a word from the prophet, like those seeking*

*an insider's stock tip for their own selfish gain.*

*Ezekiel is treated like a pop star (v 33), an entertainer, the hottest ticket in town. The people once more want the superficial entertainment rather than seeking by repentance and faith a real relationship with the LORD. But, they will realize that Ezekiel is much more than an entertainer when God brings His judgment to pass.*

#### 4. Theological Implications

(a) Messengers of God are not called to success but faithfulness. *We've said that many times and it's true. Think about Jesus who started out with twelve apostles and ended up at His death with eleven. So, it's not success; it's faithfulness. The Church may get smaller because God promises a remnant who will be saved, but we are not to worry about being a successful Church or a successful people, but always a faithful one.*

(b) God—and his true messengers—are not here to entertain us but to call us to repent, to take up our cross, and follow and worship the Lord in faith and obedience. *One of the biggest constant criticisms I get of worship is, "It's boring; I don't want to go; I don't like worship; it's boring." Whenever somebody says that they have fallen into the trap of entertainment. It is an ancient trap, no less than what was happening in Babylon in the days of Ezekiel.*

(c) Messengers trust in the security of God's love for them. No one or nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. *As Paul says in chapter 8 of Romans.*

Overall questions, observations, concerns comments? What's the one takeaway from these passages for you today? What do you imagine will be the one thought God will keep on your mind until we get together again in our class? Anything at all?

**Lilly O'Brien:** I think for me I am really drawn to this verse in Ezekiel 33:31; I have not been able to move my eyes from this phrase, "31 And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain." Especially as a millennial who works with generation Z or the "I" generation, we see this. This idea of like, "Oh, it's love; it's all about love." Christian friends of mine talk about this watered down version of love; like just do whatever you want and accept everyone as they are. And, I see people who preach this are really selfish, actually, when I look at the fruit of their lives. Yeah, they're very selfish to proclaim this "Love everyone narrative." That's just drawing my attention a lot right now.

**Mark:** Thank you, Lilly. As the youngest one in our Bible Study, I appreciate your insights and your honesty and your conviction. One of the biggest challenges we have as Christians in the 21st Century is to really be able to tell the world what true love is. And, true love is sacrifice, obedience, commitment; it is not feelings and saying everybody is okay just the way they are. In fact, that's the opposite of Biblical Love. But, Lilly we need to pray for you because it's your front line ministry with our students,

our teenagers. Brothers and sisters, let's all remember to pray this week for Lilly and to pray for our youth. They are just so bombarded with the self-focused on social media and everything else.

**Mary Peg:** I just had something to add onto what Lilly said. I had a chance to spend some time working in the nursery with one of our young helpers in her 20's. And, it really was amazing to me that she was almost in tears when she spoke (this is paraphrased) when she essentially said that she is so tired of people being rude to each other; people not caring about each other; people at school doing stupid things; sick of this and then they got into the whole political thing and on and on. And then it was, "Why can't people just be nice to each other and what is wrong with our world?" And that came out of the mouth of a twenty something who is right in the middle of it all and just overwhelmed. She's not a member of our Church but overwhelmed at what she sees around her being torn by all the material things and just struggling to the point of just almost being furious with what is going on with our world is what she was saying. And, it breaks my heart because that's our future generation. She's lost but she's trying, you know what I'm saying, and it's heart breaking and scary, you know.

**Mark:** Well I'd love for her to sit down with Lilly and Will who also work with our young adults so, Mary Peg, if an occasion comes to tell this young woman, "Hey, I want you to meet with the O'Brien's to talk to you about these things." "Lilly, you don't mind me saying that do you?"

**Mary Peg,** Okay, the occasion will come....

**Closing Prayer,** "Lord, thank You for this time together. We pray that You would find us faithful to You as You are always faithful to us. Lord, let us be people who stand in the gap; in the breach. Let us be people who seek Truth and not just superficial things; but, Lord, seek You and not just entertainment. Let us, Lord, know what true love is all about as we see the Love that You came to give to us. We pray this in the Name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.

Bless you; see you next week, God Bless you!

**End of Class 9 November 10, 2020 Handout and Zoom Recording**



**Class 9 - November 17, 2020**

**Prayer:** We pray to you Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of Your Holy Spirit in Thanksgiving that you speak to us once again through Ezekiel. We pray Lord that we will listen closely and whatever we need to hear for our lives, for the sake of the Church, this nation, this world that we will be obedient to following through on what Your Word says to us. By Your Holy Spirit anoint us today that we may have Your illumination as we study The Word. In Christ's name, Amen.

We are moving now to a new section as we've divided up Ezekiel into different aspects of ways that God works through him. So today we're starting the section called "The Visionary." We will be looking today and next week at several of the ongoing visions that God gives to Ezekiel. And, of course, as we begin Ezekiel 8, the background to this vision is the opening vision that you will remember from Ezekiel 1; that amazing vision of God on this divine throne and the Glory of God. And so, that opening vision in Ezekiel 1 leads now into all the other visions that God through Ezekiel gives to us.

We hear in the Bible a lot about visions, and God says to the prophet Joel that in the last days men and women will see visions and dream dreams; there will be visions given. And so, is it a timely thing that we're studying Ezekiel and the visions of Ezekiel at a time such as this? I believe so.

We certainly know that the United States is not Israel. Israel is unique. We do know that it's the only nation; the only people through which God has made a divine eternal covenant. At the same know that the United States is under the authority and sovereignty of God; that He has called us to be faithful as well. So, as we read this vision; and we see the abominations in Jerusalem; and we see how leaders have led the nation into deep deep sin, I, for one, cannot help but think, "Lord have mercy." What is the direct parallel that we're reading in Ezekiel to our nation today?

So, those are questions that, I think, we should ponder as faithful believers, but then let's look at the text. We are going to try to get through **Ezekiel 8 and 9**, and next week, hopefully, we will finish, by the grace of God, the other parts of this section we're calling "The Visionary."

We come to a vision that Yahweh The Lord gives to Ezekiel about God's departure from the Temple of Jerusalem, and today and next week, we're going to see that this vision has three parts.

The first is that God is going to give a vision to Ezekiel of His glory departing from Jerusalem. Secondly, we are going to get a real insider's view of the abominations in the Temple. So, let's keep in mind that the sins that we are going to see, and they are deep and dark and evil, are being done in the very inner part of God's dwelling place on earth. And, then we're going to see God's awful and comprehensive judgment against His people for their sins.

So, in the midst of that, we are going to have a disputation with some of the leading men; there's going to be an oracle. So the vision that now we're getting is very complex; with lots of different moving parts to this vision. So, it's not a linear kind of experience but very much a back and forth kind of experience. And, underneath this is that God is not only going to leave Jerusalem; He's going to leave The Land, which for an Orthodox Jewish person would be the worst possible judgment that he or she could imagine. We are going to look at the preamble. There are going to be four visions in the Temple and this sets the visions up.

**Ezekiel 8:1-4 Abominations in the Temple** **1** In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there. **2** Then I looked, and behold, a form that had the appearance of a man. Below what appeared to be his waist was fire, and above his waist was something like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming metal. **3** He put out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head, and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy. **4** And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the valley.

*Quite a preamble to these visions.*

### **Ezekiel 8:1-4, The preamble to the first temple vision”**

*This preamble serves three distinct and important functions leading into the vision:*

*We can date this; it gives us the historical context. We know exactly when this vision happened. This is one of the things that really amazes me about the Book of Ezekiel. On the one hand, it is intensely spiritual and mysterious and unbelievable. On the other hand, it is very grounded in real history. So, we know that this vision happened on September 18, 592 BC. Isn't that amazing. So Ezekiel has been with the exiles now for a number of years, and in the fall of September 18, 592 BC, God's hand comes upon him.*

*The occasion of the vision is a visit by “the elders of Judah.” They come to Ezekiel's house. They were probably looking to Ezekiel to say, “What's really going to happen,” because they had heard that back in Jerusalem there had been a great showdown between Jeremiah and Hananiah. Remember Jeremiah and Ezekiel are contemporaries; Ezekiel's a little bit younger, but they certainly know and respect each other. There had been a showdown in Jerusalem between Hananiah, the false lying prophet who told the king, “Don't worry; nothing's going to happen; all is well; you've got nothing to worry about” and Jeremiah. And Jeremiah had said, “Repent because God's judgment is coming.” Therefore, the elders of Judah, no doubt, wanted to know which side of the coin Ezekiel was on. And they wanted to know which side of the coin Ezekiel was going to side with—Hananiah, the false prophet, or Jeremiah, the true prophet? They had heard that the (false) prophet Hananiah in Jerusalem had predicted the exile would*

soon end, while Jeremiah said it would continue (cf. **Jeremiah 28-29**).

*Also, this takes places about a year after Ezekiel's calling. So again keep in mind and remember, he's lying in his house in ropes. Remember, he's tied up? They say, he is sitting in his house. Well he is sitting but he is bound. He is bound by God; he is bound by the Holy Spirit; he is bound by the Word of God, both spiritually as well as actually.*

*And so, if the elders want to hear something from Ezekiel, they have got to come and make a house call because Ezekiel is not able to leave his house right now, not physically. And so that's the occasion and then the nature of the vision is described as "The Hand of God came upon me and lifted me up."*

*Then we see in the middle of this preamble in Ezekiel 8:2 and following that this figure comes and lifts him up. And so, who is the luminous figure of a man? Well, it could be an early prefigurement of the second person of The Holy Trinity, Jesus Himself, the pre-incarnate Christ, the Son of God. But more likely, this is The Holy Spirit whose hand is upon Ezekiel, which I prefer that understanding. And I think it's right because in Ezekiel 8:3 the hand takes Ezekiel by his hair. Now imagine that. God is not being gentle. He lifts Ezekiel up with his hair, and like He's dangling him. And the next part of that sentence is, "and the Spirit lifted me up." So I think we can say that this is the third person of The Holy Trinity; this is The Holy Spirit who is lifting Ezekiel up, which makes sense because he's a man totally consumed by The Holy Spirit. And so, the reason I like that is that it really teaches us the doctrine that The Holy Spirit is not an "It." The Holy Spirit is a "He." Now, we know this, but it's good to be reminded. We say "The Holy Spirit is the third person of The Holy Trinity, He." I know sometimes in Scripture, The Holy Spirit is described as A Dove, Bird, Wind, Breath, but The Holy Spirit's basic identity is a person, "The Third Person of The Holy Trinity."*

*So, The Holy Spirit then takes Ezekiel to the north gate of the inner court of the Temple in Jerusalem. And, this is where Ezekiel can stand and look and see in the very middle of the Temple where the Holy of Holies is and where the seat of God is inside that. So, Ezekiel is looking into the very heart of God's Temple, and what he sees there is astonishing. He sees blatant, evil idolatry right there in the Temple of the Lord God Almighty.*

*And so, Ezekiel sees a statue; that's the image of jealousy in Ezekiel 8:3. The "image of jealousy" could be translated "statue." And so, it was a statue that is placed in the middle of God's House, and it's going to provoke jealousy because God is a jealous God. He is jealous in terms of His love of His people and He wants complete fidelity with His people. God has promised to be completely faithful to them, and He expects a reciprocal faithfulness. And so, what are we talking about here? Underneath the whole Book of Ezekiel is the Marriage Covenant. You could wrap marriage around the whole book to understand Ezekiel. God has said to Israel, "You are My bride; I am your Husband; we have a marriage covenant together and anything that you do, Israel, that would break that covenant, causes deep and painful jealousy in My heart that you would go after other lovers.*

*This is what's happening, Israel is committing adultery by worshiping idols and pagan images. But the carved image is a pathetic contrast to what Ezekiel says because you have then the this pagan statue, the image of jealousy, and beside that was the Glory of God of Israel. And so, Israel has no business whoring after other gods! She is supposed to be completely faithful to Yahweh but, that's not happened. It's like she has brought her lover into the house and her husband comes into the house and sees her with her lover and that's a terrible situation as we all can imagine.*

*It's going to be God or no God. Either God is our God or He's not our God at all. He is 100 percent or no. The Lord cannot be 90% of our life. He cannot be 99 percent Lord of our Life and still be who He is. It's a 100 percent or nothing.*

*So that's the preamble. And then we begin the first of four scenes of abominations in the Temple. Let me stop here before we go into Ezekiel 8:5-18. Any questions, comments, observations. If so, please unmute and speak up.*

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I have a quick question. What is the Glory of God; the second thing that Ezekiel sees? It's described as "the Glory of God," but what is it? Is it a shining light or what is it?

**Mark:** That's a great question. I think that phrase is..because there's no way really to define that—splendor, fame. It's to say that God is so great that the only way to understand God is to think of glory and the shining bright light of this magnificent appearance that really defies human language. It is a phrase that puts in our hearts reverence and awe. And, it's also to say that while God reveals Himself to us, especially, through The Messiah Jesus, at the end of the day the only word we can use is beyond description "The Glory of God." So, I don't know of a more specific way to define that other than the shining appearance that would be dazzling to you.

**Vickie:** God is allowing Ezekiel to see Him when He wouldn't allow Moses to see Him, for example.

**Mark:** Well, we do know that up on the mountain Moses did meet with God face to face. Remember, He came down and His face was so luminous he had to wear a veil. That is a connection that The Glory of God was so great that it impacted Moses' own face. When we do see a revelation of God's Glory then we are to be filled with awe. The closest to this in the New Testament is Jesus' transfiguration where He was transformed/transfigured into His Glory and Peter, James and John fall on their faces in absolute worship and awe and fear of The Glory of God. Good comment, thank you.

There are four scenes. Keep in mind that God is leading Ezekiel around the complex of the Temple, and God is making His case against Israel. It's the Lord who is giving a tour through the Temple in this vision and God is pointing out why it will be, in **Ezekiel 9**,

that His deep judgment is coming. It's not without cause that God is going to judge Israel.

There are three different expressions that describe the Temple:

Ezekiel 8:6 The Temple is called "My Sanctuary" meaning "The Lord's Sanctuary;"

Ezekiel 8:14 and 16 The Temple is called "The House of Yahweh; The House of God."

The Palace of Yahweh; The Palace of the Lord." These are deeply important understandings and identifications of the Temple.

Let's look at scene one in the Temple, Ezekiel 8:5 Then he said to me, "Son of man, *which of course is God's favorite expression to refers to Ezekiel*, lift up your eyes now toward the north." So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. 6 And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see still greater abominations."

Scene one "Ezekiel sees this pagan idol," basically refers back to the preamble. Ezekiel sees this pagan idol, statue of jealousy, that's been erected in the inner part of the Temple.

Scene two **Ezekiel 8:7-13** 7 And he brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, there was a hole in the wall. 8 Then he said to me, "Son of man, dig in the wall." So I dug in the wall, and behold, there was an entrance. 9 And he said to me, "Go in, and see the vile abominations that they are committing here." 10 So I went in and saw. And there, engraved on the wall all around, was every form of creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel. 11 And before them stood seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the smoke of the cloud of incense went up. 12 Then he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, 'The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.'" **13** He said also to me, "You will see still greater abominations that they commit."

*Scene two is more shocking visions. We see the location of the abominations. These abominations, these evil activities are being done in a dark secretive room as if they can hide their idolatry from the Lord. Secondly, the participants in these abominations are seventy men who are elders of the house of Israel. Now this is an amazingly awful understanding that the very leaders of Israel would be the ones now leading Israel into this abject idolatry. Remember back in the days of Moses, he was not able to fulfill his leadership so God raised up seventy elders of Israel to support Moses. And later in the New Testament, we read about the seventy leaders of the Jewish people in the elders so seventy is a very important number of men who would be in civil leadership, as well as religious leadership of Israel. But then, most shocking of all, he sees a man in particular that he remembers. No doubt, Ezekiel knows this man personally from all his days in Jerusalem before the exile.*

*Jaazaniah, we know, as we look at other parts of Scripture, was one of four sons of a man, as we saw, named Shaphan. Three of Shaphan's sons were very godly men who supported Jeremiah back in Jerusalem. But this fourth son, the one who is named here in Ezekiel 8:11 is part of the seventy who are leading into idolatry. So, a son of one of the leading men of Jerusalem in the very midst of this dark room burning incense, which means worshiping these pagan idols that have been set up in the secret room in the Temple.*

*And so, the focus of the abominations is that each of these seventy men stand before one of the idolatrous figures. These are probably figures of animals and other creatures that have been carved in the wall of this secret room or, perhaps, inlaid with tiles, or perhaps wooden images that have been affixed to the walls. This is a large room so you can imagine these men are standing around this room and facing their idol, either a painted or somehow affixed to the wall in front of them. Each man then stands in front of his idol with his censer, which was his incense holder, offering incense to the pagan god.*

*Now, we know that incense was a big part of Israel's true worship. In the Bible it says that the smoke of incense is to be a sacramental sign, if you will, of our prayers coming to God. So the incense was a tangible sign that God was actually receiving our prayers and praise and worship. In pagan worship censers and incense were also used. But in pagan worship, the smoke was used in order to placate the gods. In other words, it was thought in pagan religions that the sweet smelling incense made the god in a better frame of mind and would be more well disposed to the person burning the incense. It was trying to manipulate the god not to offer prayers to the one True God.*

*And, the rationalization as to why these men are in this dark room in this horrible idolatry is that they say that God has abandoned The Land. Well, God has not abandoned The Land. That was a lie. God had not left Jerusalem and the Temple yet, but it's going to be a self fulfilling prophesy. What has happened is they are desperate. The Babylonians are on the threshold of Judah and Jerusalem. They see that. They know that their lives and the lives of the nation are holding on by a shoestring. But instead of falling on their faces to worship the God of Israel, their God; in their fear, they abandoned Yahweh. And, they are pursuing these pagan gods, not one pagan god, but many many many different pagan gods and idols. So, at the very time of the greatest threat in Israel's history, they are in fear and they abandoned God.*

*You know, brothers and sisters, we examine our own lives. Until we're really faced with a life and death situation, we don't know how we (ourselves, individually) are going to respond. One day we will all be faced with that life and death moment, right? If we are alert as we approach our death, we pray, "Lord, let me not by fear abandon You. Let that be the time that I double down on faith in You."*

*So that's the second scene.*

The third scene comes in **Ezekiel 8:14-15 14** Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the Lord, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. **15** Then he said to me, “Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these.”

*In this third scene, we now come into the Temple forecourt, and there sitting in front of the Temple are a group of women weeping, the wailing for Tammuz, a mysterious pagan idol. We believe it is a reference to a pagan idol from the early Mesopotamia people who were there in The Land before the Jews came. In Mesopotamia religion, Tammuz was a god who had died and gone to the netherworld; gone to hades, losing his kingship and its power and was trapped down there. So, now we've got these faithful Jewish women who are not crying out to The Lord their God, but instead they are crying out to this bizarre terrible ancient pagan idol called Tammuz. And, they're crying out because they want Tammuz to come back alive and save them. They are crying out for Tammuz to escape from the netherworld; come back; for you alone have the power. I mean it's just an amazing scene to think about the depth and the breadth of Israel's apostasy.*

So, the men have left true worship the women have left true worship, and then we are in scene four **Ezekiel 8:16-18 16** And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord. And behold, at the entrance of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east. **17** Then he said to me, “Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their (*pronoun 'My' is a better word here*) nose. **18** Therefore I will act in wrath. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.”

*Like the second scene, in the fourth scene we see that the location, again, is the inner court of the Temple. This time we see twenty-five men involved in this pagan ritual. That number “twenty-five” might remind us of what we see later, of course, in the Book of Revelation when the twenty-five elders of the Lord fall down and worship Him. So you see the importance of reading Ezekiel and reading Revelation because we see the evil worship of the twenty-five. And then we see the holiness in the very court of the New Jerusalem of Heaven with twenty-five worshiping.*

*The nature of the abominations is that they are worshiping the sun which is explicitly forbidden in Deuteronomy twice. And God says, if you worship the sun; if you worship these false gods, violence will come to The Land. And then we get this strange idiom “put the branch up my nose.” Some people take that as giving the finger to God, which is to put it really crudely. Notice that the twenty-five men have their backs turned to the Temple of the Lord. And what are they doing as they worship? They are bowing down to their idol with their backs turned to God, sticking their rear ends up in God's face. And so, you could translate that “Behold, they put the stench of their idolatry up my*

*nose.” So, God is smelling the odor of their rear ends as they bend over to their god and expose their back to the one Lord God Almighty. However, you want to translate that, it takes the breath away of how much Israel has turned against God.*

*This is not just anywhere, brothers and sisters, this is in the Temple in Jerusalem in Judah in Israel. The whole nation is suffering from spiritual rot. Notice that the greatest danger to Israel is not coming from the Babylonians. It’s not external. The spiritual rot is coming from inside the very leadership of the nation. When leaders lead with abominations, the nation will fall and there will be spiritual rot. When people; when leaders, especially in the Church, no longer faithfully follow the Lord God Almighty, there will be spiritual rot in the Church.*

*God’s judgment is now set. The time of His Mercy has passed.*

### **Theological implications**

When the people reject the Lord God Almighty, moral and societal failure in the nation always results. It is no coincidence, dear brothers and sisters, that in the last ten to fifteen years the numbers of people in the United States of America saying they believe in the Lord has been decreasing and we’re down now more than 25 points in the gallop poll to what it used to be. In the same time, the moral decay of this nation is increasing. That is not coincidental. The fewer people who follow God, the more there is going to be moral decay in our nation.

The sin we do against God and neighbor done in the dark will always be exposed by the light of the LORD’s light and truth. Nothing is hidden from God. Jesus says this, right? That is why Ezekiel is such an underneath foundational book to the whole Bible. Jesus says, “Whatever you do in the dark will be exposed by the Light of My Truth.” You can’t get away from it. Now, where does Jesus build that teaching? Well, I believe He builds it from Ezekiel 8.

Now, notice this too. Paganism is a religion practiced individually centered on the self. Notice that these seventy men and these twenty-five men are facing their idols apart from anybody else. They are facing away from God. They are facing away from each other. They’re in this dark room as individuals before their individual gods. But, true worship is always practiced in community and always faces and centers on The Lord God. Paganism ultimately is a self-centered idolatry. But true worship is always a Christ centered community event. Later, in **Romans 1**, Paul, in part, says that men who lie with men as a man lies with a woman, homosexuality, is a terrible sin. Why? Because it is akin to idolatry. In a same-sex relationship, you are not looking at the other. You are basically looking at the self, right? Man to man; woman to woman. And, so you are turned away from God; you are turned on your self. And Paul says that is a way to think about idolatry which again we see here in Ezekiel.

Leaders have a particular responsibility to lead the nation in obedience to the Lord. A failure of such leadership opens the whole nation to spiritual decay. So we may want to think about instead of nation, the Church. Leaders have responsibility to lead the



Church in obedience to the Lord. A failure of such leadership opens the whole Church to spiritual decay; it works for both nation and Church.

Questions, comments, observations:

**Chris Miller:** I want to make a note that it is in Semitic culture that a person turns their rear to someone. I know that in anthropology that's a real statement of disrespect to turn your back on someone. Is that part of Semitic culture because even the Islamic people will bow to Ala and should we bow to the Lord and put our rears to the world?

**Mark:** That's a good question and observation, Chris, I am reading a book right now set in the 16th century in England and when you came into the presence of the king or queen you had an audience with the monarch, when you left that room you backed out to the door. You never showed your back to the Monarch. And, I think maybe that is drawn from this idea that you don't put your back to the king. Good observation.

**Annette Meyer:** I just had an interesting note in my Bible regarding Jaazaniah. His name means, "The Lord hears." In **Ezekiel 8:12** they talk about, "the Lord doesn't see us," the Lord's abandoned us," and yet this man who's pointed out specifically as one of the elders, his name means "The Lord hears." It is ironic that he thinks that they've been abandoned.

**Mark:** We need to look at what names mean in the Bible because that often has really important things to say to us. Thank you.

**Linda Handy:** Mark I just want to make a quick notation of the fact that we are temples of the Lord, and we are doing within ourselves the very things that we see that their sin is our sin. It comes from within us. We turn our own backs on the Lord and create our own idols in the dark of our souls. And all of it; we weep for false things; and we turn our back to the Holy of Holies to The Cross to our Salvation. It's a conscience choice and there will be a reckoning.

**Mark:** Amen. So, as Dr. Chris said, Let's face the Lord in faith and prayer and turn our backs to the world. That's **Ezekiel 8** and we see just how bad it is back in Jerusalem.

Moving into this vision let's look now at **Ezekiel 9 1** Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, "Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." 2 And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. 3 Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. 4 And the Lord said to him, "Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it."

*Now, that's a really important Messianic sentence. If you don't mind writing in your Bibles, please highlight that verse and we will come back to that in just a little while.*

5 And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. 6 Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the house. 7 Then he said to them, "Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out." So they went out and struck in the city. 8 And while they were striking, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, "Ah, Lord God! Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?" 9 Then he said to me, "The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, 'The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see.' 10 As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will bring their deeds upon their heads." 11 And behold, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his waist, brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded me."

*So as great as the sin of the city and in the Temple so great will the judgment and the punishment of God be. Yahweh responds to these abominations, and Ezekiel is the eye witness of what God is going to do.*

*The executioners are called forward with their weapons of destruction, **Ezekiel 9:1-2**. These are six men plus a seventh figure who is equipped with the tools of a scribe and dressed in linen to write things down and bring a report to God. Linen is the fabric used by priests and angelic beings, angels, are described as dressed in linen in the Bible. Who are these mysterious seven men and especially this seventh man? Probably an angel. You know when we talk about the Heavenly Host; that God is the Lord of the Host of Heaven. Host is a benign word, but what it really means is "army." It's a military term. When Jesus comes back with the Host of Heaven, He's coming back with an angelic army. These are not sweet little figures playing the harp all day. These are angels dressed for battle. Again, to look at what's really happening is breathtaking. We are getting a foretaste of the heavenly host; i.e., the heavenly advanced guard.*

*They proceed to the bronze altar which, of course, is the very center of sacrifice. Then in **Ezekiel 9:3** Ezekiel shifts his attention to the divine glory; the divine glory of the God of Israel. And notice the glory is starting to lift from the cherub. This is the first time we've seen the word cherub in Ezekiel, but you and I know that the term cherub and the plural cherubim appears almost 100 times in the Old Testament. On the Ark of the Covenant was The Mercy Seat and on The Mercy Seat were two cherubim images, a cherub on each side, and God sat in the middle. You can think of the altar at St. John as Ark of the Covenant and on top of the altar is The Mercy Seat and on top of the Mercy Seat are the two candles and in between the candles are the bread and the sacramental signs of the body and blood of Christ's presence with us. Really, the altar is a facsimile of what's happening with the Ark of the Covenant, but God's presence is*

*lifting from that, which means The Glory of God is going to leave Israel; leave Jerusalem very soon.*

*The most important role in the execution of God's sentence and judgment is assigned to the scribe with a writing kit there in **Ezekiel 9:4**. Now, notice that in the midst of this judgment, there is going to be salvation and who is going to be saved—the remnant. God promises the remnant of God's people, Jew and Gentile, will be saved together in the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Please keep that in mind, brothers and sisters, in **Ezekiel 9** where there is horrific punishment, there is then the promise of salvation for those who do not fall away from God. Now notice, who gets saved? Those who show repentance from the sins; from the abominations, are to be marked with a Tav on their foreheads, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And how do you sign Tav like a capital "T," a cross. Sometimes, it's also in the form of an "X" which is how you sign the name "Christ" in the Greek language. So whether you have a cross or whether you have an X, you have The Messiah, you have Christ, you have the blood of The Messiah on you. Just like the angel of death passed over the houses of Israel and Egypt and marked with the blood on the lentils of the house with the blood of the lamb. Those who were saved by faith through grace through repentance of sin are marked with Christ. And, they belong to God forever. Nothing and no one can snatch them from their Father's Hands. So, this is an incredible, incredible promise of salvation by grace through faith in The Messiah, marked with The Cross of Christ on your head. So, in the midst of this suffering, please, please look at that and hold to that hope and hold to Christ.*

**Ezekiel 9:5-6** Ezekiel overhears God's instructions to the executioners to slaughter everyone without the mark of the Tav on his or her head. No one is spared, even the defenseless the frail, innocent. The old men are killed first. Who are those old men—probably the seventy and the twenty-five in the dark room; the sun worshipers. But then Ezekiel cries out "Lord, are you going to destroy all of Israel, but he's forgotten that in **Ezekiel 9:4** the remnant will be saved.

*You know in war, brothers and sisters, civilians suffer terrible casualties, even women and small children and young men. But God's justice of unrepentant sin requires that sinners must die. This is terrible, but also a terribly important Truth in Scripture; God's justice demands that unrepentant sin is punished and unrepentant sinners.*

*The extent of the intensity of people's sin; the violence that fills the land; the injustice that fills the city; the charge that God no longer cares for them—all that comes together in this really hard **Ezekiel 9** chapter, but within this hard chapter, is the promise of salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of The Messiah.*

### **Theological implications**

God will punish the wicked. No one escapes the LORD's final and eternal judgment and justice. This is one of the hardest and most hated doctrines in the world today.

Many of us spent this summer reading through a book “Devil’s Redemption” on the heresy of universal salvation—“everyone will be saved no matter what you believe; saved no matter what; nothing makes any difference; automatically saved. People hate the Truth that without Christ they will be eternally judged. But, that is a deep Biblical Truth.

God desires to spare the righteous and the punishment due the wicked. God wants our salvation and has given A Way to salvation if only we will believe in Christ.

The fact that the destruction begins with the weak and defenseless highlights the total depravity of the people from young to old.

As in the days of Noah, the judgment must be thorough; the slate must be wiped clean.

Those who are marked for protection against God’s wrath are not merely the innocent who cease from evil. Notice they are the ones to moan and groan over the abominations that their fellow Jews commit.

Are we crying out to God against the sin that we see? Are we crying out to God against the sin in our own lives? Are we crying out to God against the sin of the nation? Or, do we just say, “Well, okay, people are going to do whatever they’re going to do. I’m just going to be okay with Jesus. I’m not going to pay attention. Or, do we moan and groan that we have fallen so far from God and so many of our beloved neighbors and families and friends have fallen so far from God. I think every day we (are to) call out to the Lord, “Please, Lord, forgive us; our sin is great.”

The righteous are marked for salvation; the wicked are marked for destruction. God’s judgment is set.

Only by being marked with the blood of The Messiah, by grace through faith in Him, are we saved from God’s wrath and the eternal sentence of hell. Jesus died on a cross to save us from hell; Jesus rose from the dead to save us for Heaven. He took on the wrath of His Father on the Cross against sin. We see the wrath in **Ezekiel 9**. Jesus Christ took all the **Ezekiel 9** chapter on Himself for you and for me.

Moreover, we all fall short of the Glory of God. No one deserves to be saved. Salvation is only by the mercy of God. God sends His warning of judgment out of His love for us, that we may repent from sin and turn to him by obedient faith.

Questions, comments, concerns in the time we have left?

**David Leamon:** It’s been said correctly that God chose Israel. I’ve also heard it said that this nation chose The Lord to be its God and that was true to seemingly a significant extent at the beginning, but we are rapidly leaving that.

**Mark.** Right. So when you say that, David, it reminds me of **Genesis 12**; God comes to Abram by grace and Abram responds by faith. And so, yes, God first reached out to Israel, “You are My people,” but there needed to be the response of “Well, You are my God then.” So that’s a good observation.

**Linda Handy:** I notice that God is calling them to repent **Ezekiel 9:1**. He wasn’t whispering the warning. He’s giving a very loud, graphic warning to the people. Repent and turn around and I will have mercy. And, if you persist in your stubborn neck ways this will be the result. We have a conscience choice like David just said. We either worship our own idols or we worship the Lord.

**Mark:** We see that Jerusalem is in a crisis mode, and so many in crisis sadly turn away from God to other things; they’re desperate. We’re in a crisis mode in our country—pandemic, stresses, tensions, so many threats. And we will just pray that more of us will turn to Christ and not to other things to try to get through this.

**Alan Denekas:** Mark, it just reminds me of what you said back in the beginning that we need to be like little Ezekiels and Jeremiahs just calling and moaning over the sins that we see around us and calling people to repentance and in us too; and that’s very true.

**Mark:** Amen; it starts in our own hearts and moves out. One of the great spiritual dangers that we face from generation to generation—is that we will become immune to sin—we are fish and we’re just in the water—we don’t even know that there is water. The other analogy is the frog in the kettle that we have all heard. So, part of this is for God’s people to really be stirred and to wake up.

Two things in **Ezekiel 9** really caught my attention. One is the mark of the Cross for salvation. Wow! Thank you JESUS! And, the other is “moan and groan over sin.” Don’t just say, “Well, that’s just the way it is.” Don’t ignore it. Cry out to God in your daily prayers. That is a great teaching, I believe, to all of us.

**Prayer:** Oh, Lord, thank You for this time that we pray that Your Word would lead us so that we will might pray and worship You and hold to you by grace through faith, Jesus. We do pray against our own sin; we confess and repent from that. We pray, Lord, for the sins that we see all around us, even in the church, in the nation and the world. So, please, O, Lord, hear the cries of Your people that Your righteousness may guide all people before it’s too late and your judgment is set. We pray this in the name of the One who gave His life and His blood to save us, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

God willing we will see you next week. Thank you all.

**End of Class 9 November 17, 2020 Handout and Zoom Recording**

**Class 10 - November 24, 2020**

**Prayer:** We pray to You Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in Your Holy Spirit and great thanksgiving for this Tuesday in which we can gather, as Your people, Lord, as brothers and sisters together in Your family to study Your Holy Word. Lord, help us to understand what You are saying and doing through the prophet Ezekiel 2,500 or so years ago. And, by the same prayer, Lord, we pray that You would have us know what You would have us to learn for our day and age, that Your Word endures from generation to generation. And for that, we are most grateful. We pray Lord in great thanksgiving for Terri's mom's birthday, for her mother Louise and for her dad and for 90 years on earth and 69 years of marriage. We thank You too, Lord, for Toni and how well she's doing after her big surgery. We pray, oh Lord, that You would keep us all in body and soul, that we may continue to praise You now and forever. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.

I love this about Ezekiel. It also drives me crazy about the book. We're all over the place. Today in Ezekiel 10 we are one year after the opening amazing vision in Ezekiel 1. Remember Ezekiel 1; i.e., the chariot, the wheels, the eyes, the living creatures in this mind blowing opening vision. Ezekiel 10 opens about a year later. We are going to revisit the vision but with new details, which makes sense, right? You see something the first time and pick up on certain things, but you're so in awe and blown away by the experience that you can't take it all in. God then gives the vision a second time in Ezekiel 10. This time Ezekiel is more able to discern details and understand why the living creatures had coal in their hands. Today, we are a year after the inaugural vision. We are going to be there in Ezekiel 10 and in this last part of Ezekiel 11 and then we're going to skip 20 years to Ezekiel 43.

So, we have the inaugural vision Ezekiel 1. We have the vision recast in Ezekiel 10, a year later; and then we're going to go 20 years until Ezekiel 43 where this amazing juxtaposition between Ezekiel 10 and God's absolute abandonment of the Temple in Jerusalem and His people of Israel. The Glory of God has left. And then, 20 years later in Ezekiel 43, what do you know? The Glory of God returns not just to the Ark of the Covenant, not just to the Holy of Holies, not just to the Temple but to the whole City. And, suddenly 20 years later, the Glory of God not only comes back but it is more glorious than it ever has been. By the time we get to the part of Ezekiel 43 that we hope to get to today, we're going to see, that not just the Temple but the whole City of Jerusalem is indicative and is a sign of God's Holy Presence.

Now, just push the pause button because you and I are living in an amazing time that past generations did not have. We're living in a time in which the Promise of God's Glory in Jerusalem, that He would not abandon the City, has returned and Israel is once again Israel in 1947 and 1948. And Jerusalem in 1967 became, once again, the Capitol; the Holy City of Israel. And, just last year the American Embassy finally, finally, by the grace of God, moved to Jerusalem and so other nations are seeing it. And we're going to see more of this, I pray, we see more of this. I hope there's no retrenching from this.

It just tells me that what we see in Ezekiel then is that there can be abandonment and there can be long stretches—20 years in Ezekiel—2,500 years, but God is so good to His Promise, brothers and sisters. He will not abandon us. The Glory of God returns. His Word goes forth. It does not return to Him without the purposes for which It was sent. So, let's keep the judgment and the restoration in their proper alignment. If we read just the judgment of God in Ezekiel 10, we are going to go, "Lord, on top of everything else right now, with the pandemic and everything else, I'm just full of despair." But, if we read just Ezekiel 43, we are going to say, "Oh, great! All is well. There are no problems. God's Glory is here!" But, when we read them together, we get the true reverence and awe of the judgment and the salvation of our Lord, which is the proper alignment for God's people. Now, that's a long preamble.

Ezekiel 10 divides quite obviously into two parts. Ezekiel 10:1 "Then I looked, and behold," and then skip to Ezekiel 10:9 "And I looked, and behold." And so, those expressions, then, are great literary ways to understand what's happening. In Ezekiel 10:1-8 God is saying, "The disaster is going to come to Jerusalem, and its imminent and there's going to be an earthly judgment on the City. And then, there's going to be a Heavenly judgment when The Glory of God departs.

Let me just say a quick word about "glory." Technically, sometimes I will do this; other people will do it. We hear the phrase "Glory of God" and we think of the word the Shekhinah. That word Shekhinah actually does not appear in Scripture. That is not a Biblical word. Shekhinah was the word that the Rabbis gave in the Talmud, which is the Rabbinic commentary on the Torah, "to the Glory of God." The word means "the dwelling of God." So the Rabbis said, "We see this phrase throughout the Old Testament, "the Glory of God, the Glory of the Lord, the Glory of Israel" and so they gave it a name that the glory is called the Shekhinah, which is fine name, but it's a Rabbinic interpretation. In the Hebrew, the word "glory," is "kebod," which means weightiness; heaviness, so the idea is that the Glory of God is weighty, serious, heavy. Unlike, the so called glory of the pagan gods, which was light and frivolous and vaporous, nothing to it. So, in the Bible there's this contrast between "glory" and "glory." A light vaporous non-meaning glory; and but the weightiness of the Glory of God. And, later Paul, in Corinthians will make a famous statement and C. S. Lewis wrote and gave a very famous sermon about the weightiness of the glory. And, Paul's referring, as a good Rabbi, a good Messianic Jew, to the kebod.

*Nov 1, 2011 — The Hebrew word for "glory" is kebod, and in the Old Testament it can ... The word itself in the Hebrew language literally means "heavy/weighty."*

A quick word, just to say, the Glory of God's heavy, brothers and sisters, and we are to pray for it, but when it comes; when God gives His presence and His glory exudes, it is a time of fear and reverence. It is a time, like Ezekiel, that we fall on our faces in confession and praise and worship.

So Ezekiel 10:1-8 judgment is coming, an earthly perspective and a heavenly perspective. And then in the second part of Ezekiel 10:9-17, we are now going to get a reappearance of the divine throne chariot of God, and we're going to find out more about it. So now in Ezekiel 1, the divine throne and chariot of God descends in this amazing presence and glory, but now in Ezekiel 10 that the divine throne chariot is going to ascend away and abandon the Temple and the City in the judgment of God.

So those are the brief opening comments and questions, comments, observations before we get into the text at this point?

**Chris Miller:** I have a comment. If anybody would be interested in reading this. A Persian Jew during World War II, the woman I did my dissertation on. She wrote a book called, "Gravity and Grace," and gravity I think really has something to do with this heaviness of God's, like you say, God's glory. I'll put her name in the chat box.

**Mark:** Thanks, Dr. Chris, for that good suggestion. That's a very provocative title, "Gravity and Grace." It seems like I've heard of it, but I know I haven't read it so that's for putting that in the Zoom chat.

### **"The Visionary" Ezekiel 10:1-8 The Glory of the Lord Leaves the Temple**

**1** Then I looked, and behold, on the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire,

*In your Bible you might have a footnote that sapphire is, Lapis lazuli, which is the same gem that we saw in Ezekiel 1.*

in appearance like a throne. **2** And he said to the man clothed in linen, "Go in among the whirling wheels underneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city." And he went in before my eyes. **3** Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house, when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. **4** And the glory of the Lord

*There's the kevod of the Lord, the glory of the Lord, the weightiness of God.*

went up from the cherub to the threshold of the house, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord. **5** And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks. **6** And when he commanded the man clothed in linen, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," he went in and stood beside a wheel. **7** And a cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim, and took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed in linen, who took it and went out. **8** The cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings.



*You got that? Whoa! This is an amazing thing! Like I said many times and I am repeating myself. I have tried dutifully to read through the Book of Ezekiel in my reading of Scripture over all these years, but I have never just stopped and said, "What does this really mean?" And this is the first time; and, by the grace of God I can hardly get enough of it. It just expands our understanding of the awe and the mystery of God. If Ezekiel does nothing else, brothers and sisters, let it destroy the box that we put God in. We tend to make God so small and so limited. And, Ezekiel just blows the boundaries away. And, God is so far beyond anything we can even imagine even in the vision of Ezekiel, as mind blowing and expanding as that is. God is even more majestic and mysterious and wonderful.*

### **10:1-8 Yahweh's abandonment of the Temple.**

*The principal features that Ezekiel saw in Ezekiel 1 he sees again. He's familiar now. It is a year later so he has some experiences. In Ezekiel 1:15, he saw the vision and he saw four living creatures, but now in the second coming of the vision in Ezekiel 10, a year later, Ezekiel recognizes and is much more specific that the living creatures are actually cherubim. Now, we see cherubim from Genesis to Revelation. You may recall after Adam and Eve sinned and were banished from the Garden of Evil (**Genesis 3:24**), God placed the cherubim at the threshold with swords to make sure that mankind, humankind could never enter the Garden.*

*When I hear the word, "cherub," I think of a little cute baby with little pink cheeks or a cute little entity, maybe dressed in a little linen cloth, just so cuddly, right, like a little cuddly new puppy that you just want to put on your lap. Listen!! the cherubim have swords in their hands with faces of a man but bodies of mysterious animal and they've got wings and they've got power and you don't want to mess with a cherub. DO NOT think of a cherub as a cute cuddly little thing that you want to mess with! If you see a cherub; if the cherubim appear to you and they might; they did to Ezekiel, then please take them seriously and do whatever they say to you because they're not to be trifled with.*

*When God tells Moses to build the tabernacle we see the cherubim in the Book of **Exodus**. Now, remember, the Ten Commandments say, "You are to make no carved image," no idols, and that's an absolute commandment. But God does have Moses make the image of two cherubim on top of the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant, but they are not idols. Those are visual reminders of the reality of the angelic host; that God is going to sit on the Mercy Seat and God is never alone. Why? There's one God in three persons. There's one God and He's in between two cherubim. It's a beautiful picture of the Holy Trinity. And, then we see in the **Book of Revelation 4 and 5**, the living creatures are always worshiping God. Now, those living creatures in **Revelation 4** are cherubim first appearing in **Genesis 3, Exodus**, throughout the Book of Ezekiel and then into the very throne of Heaven. So, these are very important angelic creatures.*

Now we hear about cherubim and we also hear about seraphim. The seraphim only appear in the **Book of the prophet Isaiah**. And, the seraphim have six wings; the cherubim have four—the main difference. So, the seraphim are a different type of very important angelic host; i.e., similar but not the same as the cherubim, one has four wings; one has six, and we know more about the cherubim. All this is to say that when we get to Heaven, we have no idea! I mean, we have no idea how amazing it's going to be. Heaven is not boring. Your loved ones who died in the Lord and now await the final resurrection in paradise, they are encountering beings and majesty and glory that we just cannot conceptualize at this point, it is so great. So, just remember that Ezekiel is teaching us that Heaven is such an amazing place.

The creatures that were living creatures in **Ezekiel 1** he now recognizes as cherubim, images on the Ark of the Covenant. Solomon also made two about 25 ft. tall cherubim in the entrance into the Temple of Solomon, gigantic cherubim as you went into The Holy of Holies. So here in **Ezekiel 10:1** he realizes that the cherubim are the living heavenly realities that the sculptures on the Ark in the inner sanctum of the Temple symbolize.

They have come now from the heavenly throne room. They've come from the presence of God to transport the kebob, the heaviness, the weight of "the Glory of God" out of The Temple, the visible sign of God's presence, out of His earthly dwelling place; out of the Temple of God.

The cherubim are extremely powerful beings, and they are going to help lift the Glory of God, because it's so heavy, remember, out of the Temple; out of Jerusalem; back into Heaven and judgment.

**Ezekiel 10:1** simply announces the appearance of the throne/chariot, but in **Ezekiel 10:3-5** Ezekiel records these exact details. So you may want to ask the question in **Ezekiel 10:3** "Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house, when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court."

Now why would God in the Holy Spirit make sure that Ezekiel records these exact details? There are no throw-away details in The Word of God; every word counts. Why on the south side? Because on the north side was the statue of jealousy. The chariot parks on the right (south) side of the temple. So it's opposite the "statue of jealousy" on the north gate (**8:5**) and the place of the executioners (**9:2**). Remember last week we talked about this terrible pagan god image statue that God's own people had erected in the Temple—that was on the north side and that's where the execution of God's judgment happened when the angelic men came in. So, God is not going to be where the idol is. He and the cherubim are coming on the south side, so that's a really important kind of thing, just to keep the whole picture in your mind. Right now if you close your eyes can you imagine the Temple edifice. If we were in person I would have a handout for you.

*You know the Temple edifice was one of the wonders of the ancient world, even Solomon's, but then Herod expanded it. When you come in there would be the court of the Gentiles where, if you remember in the New Testament in the Book of Acts, there was a Roman centurion named Cornelius and he was a God fearer, which means he was a Gentile who was attracted to the God of Israel's Temple. So God fearing Gentiles could come in to the Gentile Court and then there was a gate and wall. And then if you were a Jewish woman, you came into the court of women and then there was a gate and a wall and if you were a Jewish man, you would come into the court of men and then there was a gate and a wall and then the inner place where the priest went and then a gate and a wall and there then was The Holy of Holies, a building separate in its own enclosure, very tall, where the High Priest would go in just once a year to exchange the showbread and to relight the lamps because that was where the Ark of the Covenant was and that was the very seat of The Lord God Almighty on earth. So, Ezekiel is seeing all this and he's seen all these places in different parts of the Temple.*

*Today, in Jerusalem, on what the Jews call the Temple Mount, where the Holy of Holies was is the Rock of Moriah where Abraham had the near sacrifice of Isaac and later David buys this; it was a threshing floor, and there Solomon builds the first Temple. And so, the Muslims have built that golden dome, an iconic image of the City of Jerusalem with the Dome of the Rock and the gold roof. They built that right over The Holy of Holies. They do not allow Jews to go up there because they are afraid they are going to go over there and start praying and worshiping and try to tear that dome down.*

*Geography, land, real estate are terribly important in salvation history and in Biblical history and in our faith lives today. If and when World War III breaks out; we pray it doesn't, but if and when it does, it will be over that. It will be because something will happen, and the Dome of the Rock will be taken down; and that will then trigger a major world war. That's where it's going to happen. If it happens, that's where it's going to start.*

*The cloud fills the inner court. This is the cloud of, what the Rabbis call from the Talmud, the cloud of the Shekhinah glory, but we know it to be the kebob, the weight, the dwelling of God.*

*(The glory rises from its position and moves to the threshold. above the cherubim in the inner sanctum, and moves to the threshold of the Temple. So, the Glory of God was in the Holy of Holies and the cherubim helped to lift it out of that into the threshold to leave the Temple.)*

*The temple is filled with the cloud, and the brilliance of God's glory fills the court. The sound of the cherubim's wings reverberates throughout the temple. The cherubim are eager to be off.*

*In the meantime images of divine glory merge with images of the man dressed in linen **Ezekiel 10:2**. Remember back last week in **Ezekiel 9**, we had these figures of men that we determined were angels that came to do the execution of the elders who*

*were worshiping the idols. And then there was a man dressed in linen who had a writing board and a stylus and he was noting and writing down things. This is an angelic figure; a man dressed in linen, but we understand that this is a mysterious angelic being.*

*The man, the angel, is commanded by the LORD to go among the whirling wheels and get some of the fiery coals from between the cherubim.*

*Whereas, earlier the reference to the fiery coals seemed to be obscure. Like, what were those fiery coals doing in Ezekiel 1? Now we know in Ezekiel 10 their purpose; i.e., from the inaugural vision in Ezekiel 1 to Ezekiel 10 their function is clarified. The wheeled vehicle transporting the throne of God has become the bearer of judgment. The throne has brought the coals which signify the destruction of Jerusalem.*

*So the cherubim hands the man in linen the coals, and all of this is a vision that awaits Jerusalem when the Babylonians will destroy it.*

*Again, the man is commanded to scatter the coals over the City. The future judgment on Jerusalem will fall. Focus on the man resumes in Ezekiel 10: 6-8 as one of the cherubim hands the man the coals. All of this is a vision of the future that awaits Jerusalem and the Temple when God's judgment comes through the destruction wrought by the Babylonians, somewhat concluding Ezekiel 10:1-8.*

Questions, observations, concerns?

**Diane Denekas:** I just have a question about the coals because when I think about the coals what comes to my mind is when the seraphim touch Isaiah's lips with the coals and that like brings purity or atonement. That's when Isaiah's sins were atoned for. So it's interesting that here it is more of a judgment rather than an atonement like in Isaiah.

**Mark:** Diane, that's an excellent observation, and there you go with the seraphim. When I hear you say that, it reminds me of another image in the Bible, "water." On the one hand water is destruction, judgment; **Genesis 6**, "Noah; the flood." And on the other hand water is "Living Water," "Life," and "Salvation," "The Holy Spirit," "Baptism." I think it really epitomizes the whole Book of Ezekiel. You've got judgment and you've got restoration in one book. You've got fiery coals purifying and you've got fiery coals judgment. Once again, I think God would have us understand that we can never separate the judgment and the separation. They all go in His Holy, Divine, Righteous and Just Love. That's a great observation.

**Alan Denekas:** It just seems to me like there are lots of different world views describing suffering in different ways, but the suffering we are suffering in our God is redemptive. It is not just fatalistic; it's redemptive and always has a purifying effect.

**Mark:** That's excellent; that's excellent, yes!

**Alan Denekas:** Another observation is the cloud seems to be the same cloud that was over the people of Israel and also the same cloud that appeared at the transfiguration.

**Mark:** Yes! Yes!, it's the same cloud, absolutely, good; thank you, right. So this cloud thing is really important. The Glory of God; the cloud, is what we would call a theophany, an appearance of God; God's presence. And how can you describe that except in things like analogy? "It was like a cloud of glory." You can't really say what it is exactly because God is beyond our exact reckoning, but we can say, "It's like that." "The Cloud of Glory," right, is throughout Scripture. And, so the question would be, "When have we seen the Glory of the Lord. When has the kebod, the Glory of God been in your life? Can you think about a time when you said, "The Glory of God was here?" I am not necessarily saying for you to speak up right now, but I think it's important for us to say that we had a visit of that. And, my guess is it wouldn't take us long to say, "Wait a minute. Now that I think about it, maybe that experience that I thought was one thing, maybe that really was the Glory of God." We need to praise God for that and give God thanks.

**Ezekiel 10:9-17 The chariot wheels 9** And I looked, and behold, there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub, and the appearance of the wheels was like sparkling beryl. 10 And as for their appearance, the four had the same likeness, as if a wheel were within a wheel. 11 When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went, but in whatever direction the front wheel faced, the others followed without turning as they went.

*Remember these amazing wheels in Ezekiel 1? I just have to laugh when I read this. This is beyond, beyond.*

12 And their whole body, their rims, and their spokes, their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes all around—the wheels that the four of them had. 13 As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing "the whirling wheels." 14 And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was a human face, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. 15 And the cherubim mounted up. These were the living creatures that I saw by the Chebar canal. 16 And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them. And when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels did not turn from beside them. 17 When they stood still, these stood still, and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in them.

*Whoa! This is really hard to kind of parse out, right? This description both helps clarify the appearance of the chariot and highlights the chariot's role in the coming events.*

**Ezekiel 10:12** is particularly confusing as images of wheels seem to merge with images of cherubim. Are the wheels now transformed into some type of angelic figures with four faces and body parts? No, I don't think so. I think it's more natural reading to apply the bodies, the back, the heads, the hands, the wings to the cherubim.

*So, we need to keep in mind that this is a vision of God and so these details are not always going to be just obviously discernible to us, keeping in mind that this is a visionary experience, and surrealism may overwhelm realism.*

**Ezekiel 10:14**, the description of the cherubim's faces differs from the earlier account. Whereas **Ezekiel 1:10** ascribed four different faces to each of the cherubim, the plain reading here points to four identical faces for each cherub, with each cherub having a different set.

Whereas **Ezekiel 1:10** had followed a human-lion-bull (ox)-eagle sequence, **Ezekiel 10:14** here it's cherub-human-lion-eagle. This reordering raises two questions: Why was the bull (ox) face displaced, and how is the cherubic face to be perceived? No answers will fully be satisfactory; we cannot fully answer this because it's a mystery.

The cherub's face is identified with the bull(ox). But why this change from bull (ox) to cherub? The ancient rabbis said that Ezekiel implored Yahweh for mercy since the bull (ox) was associated with the golden calf of sin in the wilderness (**Exodus 32**), and God thus in **Ezekiel 10** in the second vision giving, God changes the bull to a cherub.

The ancient rabbis really struggled over this because they knew this is the Word of God and the Word of God is never wrong. It is never wrong! There are no errors in Scripture. Right? We even use the word inerrant. So they could only say that in the year between the visions they came up with, "Ezekiel said, 'Lord can't You just get rid of this bull (ox) because that reminds me way too much of the sin?'" The rabbis further assumed that the cherubim had human faces.

Again, you've got the wheels; you've got the cherubim; you've got the coals and this is all to transport and lift the Glory of God, God's presence Himself, out of the Temple; out of Jerusalem for the sake of judgment.

**Ezekiel 10:18-22 18** Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. 19 And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the Lord, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.

*That's a unique phrase. We only hear it in Ezekiel; i.e., "the glory of the God of Israel."*

20 These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the Chebar canal; and I knew that they were cherubim. 21 Each had four faces, and each four wings, and underneath their wings the likeness of human hands. **22** And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the Chebar canal. Each one of them went straight forward.

**10:18-22, God's abandonment of the temple**

*Ezekiel is making the connection between the inaugural vision and the vision given again here a year later.*

*Ezekiel watches (**Ezekiel 10:18-19**) as the divine glory rises from the threshold of the Temple and moves to the spot where the throne/chariot is parked, and comes to rest above the cherubim; and then they take off with the Glory of the Lord in the chariot. With their divine cargo in place, the cherubim lifted off and go to the east gate of the temple.*

*The departure of the glory signals the end of a relationship between Yahweh and His people, Israel that had existed for 400 years. The Divine King has abandoned His residence on earth.*

*Now, I want you to circle, "It's the east gate." There are ten gates into Jerusalem through the City wall. It doesn't say just any gate; this is the east gate and it's going to be terribly important because in just a moment, by the grace of God if we get there, in Ezekiel 43, God's going to come back 20 years later through where? The east gate. And then, on Palm Sunday, the Glory of the Lord incarnate and The Messiah Jesus comes into Jerusalem through what? The east gate! And so, when The Messiah comes back in His second Advent to judge the living and the dead, He's going to come through the east gate.*

*And guess what's happened now in Jerusalem at the east gate? The east gate is now part of the Muslim quarter. The City has been quartered. The Muslims have control over a fourth of the City where the east gate is; and I've said this many times. The Muslims know prophecy and they know the Bible much better than a lot of Jews and Christians know it today. And so, the Muslims have locked up the east gate with concrete and block and they have planted a cemetery in front of the east gate because they know that an Orthodox Jew would never step through a cemetery because that would make them unclean. So, these are two ways that the Muslims are trying to block the entrance of The Messiah to come back. Now, if only you and I believed as much as the Muslims do in the second coming of The Messiah The King of Kings because He's coming back to Jerusalem.*

*People say, "Well, how do we know that Jesus has not already come back? Maybe He's here already!! No way!! We'll know it. He'll come in the appearance with the Heavenly Host which is His army. He's not coming to Roanoke. He's not coming to New York City or London or Johannesburg, He's coming to Jerusalem and He's coming in the east gate, and we will know it. And, that's why Israel and Jerusalem had to be restored. And, that's why God will never abandon His Promise to Israel because it all connects to the dots of the total plan of salvation history, and that plan includes the east gate of the City of Jerusalem. This is amazing stuff!*

**Ezekiel 10:20-22** confirms that the cherubim Ezekiel saw in **Ezekiel 1** by the Chebar canal in **Ezekiel 1** are the same ones he sees again here in the Temple courtyard. Now he realizes that the chariot, not only serves as a vehicle to proclaim Yahweh's glory and his sovereignty (**Ezekiel 1**), it also provides the means whereby the LORD will abandon His Temple and His people. Amazing..

Let's continue now to **Ezekiel 11:22-25**, the epilogue to the Temple vision **Ezekiel 10**. Remember now that Ezekiel is non-sequential; i.e., there are a lot of things in between everything else so we've got to skip all the way to **Ezekiel 11:22-25**.

**Ezekiel 11:22-25** 22 Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. 23 And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the City and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the City.

*What is that mountain on the east side of the City? Mount of Olives; Whoa!! See how the dots connect; that's where Jesus comes in to the east gate; where He has spent the night at the Mount of Olives. So, Ezekiel is just all over the salvation history.*

24 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me. **25** And I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had shown me.

*Notice that we get no response from the exiles. Remember, Ezekiel is bound in his house and they've come to visit him; and he tells them all this, but we don't get any record of their reaction, which I would love to know what they said.*

### **Ezekiel 11:22-25 The epilogue to the temple vision**

*This marks the final stage of the itinerary of the Glory of God observed by Ezekiel to the mountain east of the city (**Ezekiel 11:22-23**).*

*The Mount of Olives represents this east side of the city. There God's "incarnated divine glory" of the Messiah will be arrested and taken away.*

*We now assume that throne/chariot conveys the glory back to its abode in Heaven; and there where the Glory of God always is trustworthy. Even if God abandons us on earth, we can always petition the Lord because His glory's in Heaven. We see that in Daniel; and we see that in the **Book of Revelation**. Later Daniel will have a vision of the Ancient of Days (**Daniel 7:9-10**), and the **Apostle John** will see the enthroned Lord in **Revelation 4:1-11**. The glory of the LORD fills heaven.*

*Ezekiel has seen the Glory of God leave the Temple and head off in an easterly direction.*



*It will not reappear until 20 years later when the glory returns. In a marvelous vision of Israel's hopeful future, history is reversed and the glory returns from the same direction by which it had left (**Ezekiel 43:1-5**).*

***Ezekiel 11:24-25** signal the end of the vision. The Holy Spirit brings the prophet back to his house in exile and back to reality. He shares the experience with the elders sitting before him. Again, no hint of their response is recorded.*

*WOW! That's a lot of material; pretty amazing stuff.*

### **Theological Implications**

Just keep in mind, the vision in Ezekiel. These visions in Scripture are terribly important, not to confuse us, but to just fill us with awe and wonder at the majesty, the power and the weight of God's glory. So wondrous things in Heaven await us, brothers and sisters. The vision gives us a glimpse of the wondrous things of heaven—cherubim, divine glory, an unspeakably beautiful throne/chariot! Majesty and mystery and wonders upon wonders await us in the new earth and new heaven and new Jerusalem of the heavenly realm.

Thus, we can never completely see or understand the LORD and His ways from our mortal, earthly perspective, even as He, from time to time, gives us glimpses and visions of His glory. God is revealed in Christ, but so much remains a mystery, as it well should.

As God judged his own nation, Israel, so He will judge every nation and people if they do not repent and turn from their sin to Him. The judgment of God is severe; He will not be mocked, especially by those with whom He is in covenant. And, as the famous preacher Jonathan Edwards in a famous sermon, but it's also in the Book of Hebrews, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God."

The LORD remains sovereign over His own destiny. Yahweh abandons the City by His own decision, for His own reasons, in His own time, and by His own means. He is not driven out by the pagan gods. But only the eyes of faith can perceive that the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians was not a sign that God had failed, but that God's sovereign judgment and justice had fallen.

It reminds me of the crucifixion of The Messiah. Without the eyes of faith we look at Jesus on The Cross and (unbelievers might say) say that is a defeated, brutalized dead man; dead, dead, dead. But, with our eyes of faith we say, "It's been prophesied since **Genesis 3**. It's the Tree of Life and The Cross is His Throne, and that's The King of the Jews; that's The King of the World."

God is not tied to any place or shrine. He had indeed chosen to reside in the Temple in Jerusalem, but He will not be boxed in there. His true abode is in Heaven. And, remember **John 4:21-24** Jesus says to the woman at the well, "It's not in Samaria; it's

not in Jerusalem; but true worship is wherever there is Spirit and Truth.” Human rejection may cause him to leave his earthly palace, but he remains enthroned in the heavens, from where he is able to respond to all who call upon him.

When God abandons his people, they lost all right to his favor and His protection. From Ezekiel’s perspective, the turning point in Israel’s history came not with the capture of Jerusalem but with the departure of the divine glory of the King of Heaven from His Temple. Historical events are indeed reflections of realities determined in the heavenly plane (cf. Ephsians 6:10-20). And so what’s happening in history reflects Heavenly realities.

Questions, comments, concerns?

**Terrie:** What are the people of Jerusalem doing in these 20 years? The glory is gone from the earth. Are they mourning; longing for It; praying for It to return. Are they sinning? Just what is the mood of the people?

**Mark:** We are deep now in the period of the exile, of course. The destruction comes around 586 BC. Ezekiel came to Babylon around 597 BC. So he gets the inaugural vision right after he gets to Babylon. **Ezekiel 10** is a year later. So now we’re in 596 BC. So it’s going to be ten years before the destruction happens in 586 BC. Then, it’s going to be 20 years in 566 BC that we will get to in **Ezekiel 43** where God promises to come back to restore His glory and the promise of the restoration will happen. The whole total exile is about a 70 year period.

The Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem then in 597 BC, but they kept a puppet King on the throne in Jerusalem for ten years before Nebuchadnezzar finally pulled the plug and said, “We are just going to destroy you.”

And so, it’s a very dispirited atmosphere. Remember, Jeremiah is a contemporary of Ezekiel. So Ezekiel is the prophet in the exilic community; Jeremiah is the prophet back home in Jerusalem. Jeremiah is being beleaguered, rejected, physically assaulted. Half the people are going, “All is well.” Half the people are going “My life is going to hell in a hand basket.” It’s just a terrible time. And so you can’t really say, one size fits all, because they were all kind of dealing with that in a very different way.

Finally, in 586 BC, the Babylonians will then cart off the next wave of exiles. They only leave in Jerusalem the elderly and the infirmed; the poorest of the poor. And, they live among the ruins. And so by the time Ezra and Nehemiah come back to restore Jerusalem, the City wall is broken down; the Temple’s been destroyed; their homes have been destroyed. Basically, it’s just a pile of rubbish.

And, remember the exiles, the very deeply mournful Psalm that we are weeping beside the rivers of Babylon. It’s a really tough time.

Good question.

**Vickie Smith:** I have a question. I am looking at your point that we were just talking about, and it makes me feel that what's going on there is so much like what's going on today, and I guess my question is? Were there no true believers left? I mean if there were actual true believers who were still left there even if it was just a remnant, did God abandon them? I kind of feel like God's abandoned our country right now. I kind of feel like (looking up) and asking God, "Where does that leave us?" You know. I guess that's my question.

**Mark:** Unfortunately, I really agree with you, Vickie, that there's so much in Ezekiel that I am making application to today in the United States. I wish I didn't. I wish I could say, "Oh, that was just then; by the grace of God, go..that's not us," but part of the power in Ezekiel is that it brings right to our perspective what's happening in our own nation. We abandoned God. Has God abandoned us?

So, you said the word that's terribly important, and that's the word, "remnant." There's always a remnant. In Jerusalem there was a remnant. There was Jeremiah, probably a very small group around him, but a very small group of faithful people. So many of the priests of Israel had abandoned God and gone into idolatry, but there was still a remnant of faithful priests. It's always going to be the remnant in the midst of any kind of disaster like we see here. In the community of exiles there was Ezekiel, obviously a faithful man and a small cadre of remnant with him.

So, has God abandoned the United States? He may be pulling way back, but He's always trustworthy. There'll always be the remnant. We must never give up our hope that God is not with us. He promises to be with us, but I think times are going to get a lot harder even.

**Vickie:** I guess maybe He's with us individually as opposed to as a nation. Like, He abandons the nation but stays with us individually maybe?

**Mark:** Israel is unique in the history of God's salvation. Israel is the only nation in which God has entered into a Holy covenant as a nation even as our forefathers, and foremothers. Both Jamestown and Plymouth were both Christian endeavors. For a long time people said that Plymouth Rock was a Christian pilgrim endeavor but Jamestown was a secular thing. But, now we know from archeological discovery just about eight of nine years ago that the first building that the Jamestown settlers built was their church. So, clearly they had a faith mission in mind in Jamestown. So our nation started along the east coast with a faith Christ based impulse. So the argument can be made that of all the nations of the world; i.e., Europe and other nations, the United States has been the bulwark of the Judaeo Christian faith. But, now it looks like that has really moved to some nations in Africa and Asia where The Spirit of God is really on fire. So, has God said, "Okay, I've had enough of The United States poking Me in the eye?" Remember that phrase last week that they put a stick up God's nose? That terrible colloquial saying, "Nuts to you, Lord?" You know, some missionaries are now saying that if you really want to know where God is working, you have to go other places.

But, at the same time, like you said, Vickie, I mean, as a people, a remnant, look at you; look at all the people in our class. You all are faithful disciples of the Lord. God has not abandoned you. And so, we need to be that remnant to call the nation back. Maybe a faithful Church can do that. I hope so.

These are big questions. I don't have any big answers, I'm afraid. But, it's good you're making the connection because we need to confess and say, "Lord, not only save me, but Lord, save this nation." Everyday we need to be praying for our nation. We are so blessed to be Americans. But, it is such a burden for a faithful American because we can see where our nation may be going and has gone.

**Marnie:** I just want to say that I am strangely encouraged. Josh and I, over the last month, have seen and been a part of great amounts of prayer. We were talking this morning. With all different groups within the Church and having Zoom prayer calls. We're not talking about small groups—thousands; thousands of people repenting; thousands of people praying, and I am so encouraged by it.

We just celebrated 400 years of The Mayflower Compact. And, there was a group that went back to Plymouth on that 400 year anniversary and wrote The Mayflower Compact Covenant Renewal. It was on the internet. They actually went there; rewrote that covenant; and recommitted our nation to God and it was really moving. So, I just want you all to be encouraged that it's not all doom and gloom. There is a lot of repentance. You know, we don't know how God's going to work this out, but there's so much good going on right now and there's so much prayer. And, opportunities to pray abound. So they're out there. I don't feel at all like God has left us. We have left God, but I am so encouraged that I feel He's going to do a miracle. God always comes in at the last minute, and I'm hoping that He does that again.

**Mark:** Amen! Thank you, Marnie, that's a great perspective and that's a good word for us to understand that there is great prayer going on; and in the midst of it all, things are happening that never would have happened without this. And, I read something about that recommitment to the Mayflower Covenant Compact, and it is quite powerful. So, praise God!

Well, we're not going to get to the good part today, but that is a good part. Marnie has whetted our appetite that God is not going to abandon us; that God is going to perform a miracle. So, next Tuesday, God willing, we'll pick up with **Ezekiel 43** for God's return to Jerusalem. He's coming back and He hasn't forgotten His people. We'll pick up with **Ezekiel 43** and then move on.

I pray that all of you have a safe and delightful Thanksgiving. I pray that whoever is at your table, or you're having Thanksgiving by yourself or with family or even if you are able to be with some friends, I pray and just know that God shares your table and that He is the Lord of all things and we can trust Him.

**Prayer:** So, thank You Lord for the reasons that we have to be thankful; that in the midst of sin and evil we see Your Hand at work in ways that are amazing. You are calling more of us to prayer; more of us to recommitment and, Lord, we pray that for this nation indeed. May our hearts be filled with Thanksgiving, not just Thursday but always. To you be the glory now and forever, Amen.

**Class 10 completed prior to the beginning of Class 11 on Zoom Recording**

**December 1):** If I remember correctly, this next section is under the category of “Visionary.” We’ve been dividing the text up into the different hats that Ezekiel wears. Our prior study November 24 was all doom and gloom—God’s judgment against Jerusalem, that the Babylonians would come and destroy it for her (Israel’s) sins and for breaking the covenant with Yahweh.

Let’s start with the good news and then in Class 11 we are going to flip back to bad news with the next section. This is the pattern in the Book of Ezekiel; judgment/restoration; restoration/judgment, all a part of God’s saving work; ultimately a part of His jealous love for His people. But, we’ve got some more hard material to go through in Class 11 so it’s good that we are finishing up Class 10 with some good news.

If you can remember from Class 10 that the prophecy would be destroyed. It came to fruition, of course, in 586 BC. Now, we’re 20 years later from Ezekiel 11. God left the Temple; He left Jerusalem, but now 20 years later, The Lord Yahweh is coming back to His Temple to His people.

Let’s look at **Ezekiel 43:1-9 The Glory of the Lord Fills the Temple**

1 Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. 2 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. 3 And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. 4 As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, 5 the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple. 6 While the man was standing beside me, I heard one speaking to me out of the temple, 7 and he said to me, “Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoring and by the dead bodies of their kings at their high places, 8 by setting their threshold by my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them. They have defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed, so I have consumed them in my anger. 9 Now let them put away their whoring and the dead bodies of their kings far from me, and I will dwell in their midst forever.

*God has come back after 20 years to reclaim His Temple, but He does not come back without Holy requirements and commandments once again. It’s not coincidental that*

*Yahweh returns to Jerusalem through the east gate, the gate that Messiah Jesus entered Jerusalem Palm Sunday the last week of His life on earth. It is the same gate where Jesus will return to Jerusalem at The End of the Age.*

*Ezekiel is brought back to the east gate to observe an event, the significance of which cannot be overestimated. It has been 20 years since he saw the vision of the divine glory departing from the temple. This east gate leads straight to the Holy of Holies in the temple. Again, when Jesus returns in his Second Coming, He will enter Jerusalem through this same east gate.*

*“The glory of the God of Israel” is back! One of the central themes of the salvation oracles (chapters 34-37) is being fulfilled. We have not gotten to it yet but those chapters are in the middle of the Book of Ezekiel where these oracles of promises of salvation are the fulfillment of The glory of the God of Israel’s return to the Temple.*

*Our chronological movement through Ezekiel is quite a zig zag. You remember the old cartoon Family Circle where the person would start at a point and you would see the footsteps go all through the house and finally it would end up where it needed to be. That’s kind of what we are doing with Ezekiel—we are a family circle and our little footsteps are going back and forth and back and forth. But, that gives us a flavor of how the judgment and restoration of God work in concert daily in our lives and in the life of the Church as well.*

*God Yahweh is reestablishing his residence in the Temple and when we read that, I think we’re also supposed to read here that this is a promise of the eschatological vision and that “eschaton” is the Greek word meaning, “last things,” and so “eschatology” is the study of the last things. When God comes back to His Temple in Jerusalem, it is a prophetic utterance that in the last days God will dwell with His people in the New Jerusalem. We see in the Book of Revelation 21 where He will be our God and we will be His people. Where is that? It’s back in the New Jerusalem. So, what happens on earth and in Heaven and what happens in the future and in the past and the present all come together under God’s sovereign rule.*

*Ezekiel, then encounters God, 20 years later, as faithful as he was to God in the beginning. He falls down in reverence and fear and in worship to God. Ezekiel has not slacked off over this long hard life that he has had as an exile faithful to God.*

*Ezekiel is reminded of Yahweh’s departure in **Ezekiel 8-11**. He is also reminded of his initial vision in chapter 1. As Ezekiel falls on his face in worship and fear, we see that he has not lost his faithfulness after all these years between the visions.*

*In **Ezekiel 43:5-6**, the Holy Spirit conveys the prophet to the inner court. Who is the man who suddenly appears beside Ezekiel? What is his function? Some have suggested the man is Yahweh. But the man might be better understood as the guide who has been in previous chapters orienting Ezekiel to the Temple.*

**Ezekiel 43:7-11**, the divine speech divides into two parts: an explanation for Ezekiel. If we were to read the Hebrew here in **Ezekiel 43** those are going to be very royal Hebraic words that a king would utter. God, in royal language, is saying that it's not just going to be the Ark of the Covenant, The Mercy Seat atop of the Ark that will be His seat. That now, the Temple, the whole City of Jerusalem, will be His dwelling place. And so, the Glory of God left Jerusalem, but 20 years later, the Glory of God comes back to Jerusalem even more so. And so, God's Glory's expanded from The Mercy Seat to the whole City which is an amazing and hopeful proclamation.

Again, we're living in the day that Jerusalem has been restored. The capital of Israel is a prophetic fulfillment that we must never underestimate. It is one of the most amazing and powerful and prophetic fulfillments in all of salvation history, that after, not just 20 years, but after almost 2,500 years from the time of David now to our time, Jerusalem has been restored. And so, things are working, brothers and sisters, not necessarily in our timeframe, but in God's perfect timeframe.

When God comes back He does not soften His ethical, moral and spiritual demands. He's going to come back, but He's hoping and praying that His people will be chastised so that this time they will be faithful to Him and not repeat the past.

**Ezekiel 43:10-12 Here we have the epilogue to the Temple vision. 10** "As for you, son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and they shall measure the plan. 11 And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple, its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, that is, its whole design; and make known to them as well all its statutes and its whole design and all its laws, and write it down in their sight, so that they may observe all its laws and all its statutes and carry them out. 12 This is the law of the temple: the whole territory on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the temple.

And so, with the epilogue to the Temple vision, Yahweh concludes by giving the measurements of the Temple complex to his fellow exiles with a command to Ezekiel to transmit the measurements of the Temple complex to his fellow exiles.

What an encouragement to the exiles even down to its footprint! They had witnessed the Temple and city's destruction 20 years earlier. But now they are assured that God's house is once again measurable.

At the same time, look at how that works. The Temple's restoration is also going to be a monument to the people of Israel to always remember their sin. The fact that God comes back and restores His Temple has two effects. It is obviously a fulfillment of grace that He has come back and that He has not broken His covenant promises. While at the same time, The Temple is a perpetual sign that there once was great abomination; and the people must always remember that. The people are to be ashamed, humiliated by this assurance and must come to accept their guilt in the Temple's destruction. And, in their humiliation in their remembrance, to call upon the

*Lord for faithfulness. They are sinners visited and loved by God. They are invited back into His holy space by grace alone. They have not earned God's favor. He returns on His own initiative and for His own purposes.*

**Ezekiel 43:12's** interesting description of the Law of the Temple (of course, we know in the Hebrew The Law is Torah), The Torah of the Temple. **Ezekiel 43:12** This is the law of the temple: the whole territory on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the temple." Again, there's that phrase "the law of the Temple.

*And so, God now gives the Torah of the Temple. Basically, what that means is that in the Temple God's priests, Israel's priests are never again to pursue abominations and sin within the Temple. Remember in the past how there were the 70 elders in the Holy of Holies worshiping these pagan idols and shrines and terrible abominable things were happening IN the very house of God. And, now there's going to be a new law; a new Torah is given, that never again is this Holy place to be violated by God's people and certainly not by the priests of The Lord.*

*So, God has come back but He's laying down some new house rules. And, He's coming back, not as if nothing had happened, He's coming back in full view of what happened in saying, "Okay, I'll give you another chance but don't forget how bad it was."*

*Again, we see the announcement of the New Torah. Israel's priests must return to faithful service to the Teaching (Torah) of the LORD, not repeating their past abominable sins as these extreme measures are now in place to maintain holiness.*

### **Theological Implications**

This vision proclaims the ineffable holiness of God. We cannot really put words to the holiness of God; it is beyond human description; we can just simply be in awe of God's holiness.

Secondly, this vision proclaims the great and glorious mercy of God. He invites sinners to come to Him by grace and enter into a relationship with Him and always in obedient faith.

And thirdly, this vision exposes the sinfulness of human beings, even for those who pride themselves in being God's own people. And so, why is it then that week after week, Lord's Day after Lord's Day, you and I, who have been saved by grace by faith by the blood of Christ, why is it that we, who have the eternal security of our salvation, which we do in Christ; I hope you know that. Why is it, then, that we have to kneel or sit in some prayerful posture every Sunday and confess our sins? I've heard people say, "Well God's forgiven my sins! Why do we need to take time in the service for that? That's been done with; we can move on to other things."



*Well, here's a Biblical theological reason why God's people, of all people, are called to confess their sins at the foot of The Cross every week. It's because The Temple was that very stone as well. The Temple, like The Cross, is God's sign of His Holy Presence. The Temple and The Cross are signs of God's grace and mercy. God is with us; He loves us; our sin has not cast Him off. Because of our sin He has come to be with us and to claim us.*

*At the same time, The Temple and The Cross are eternal signs that God had to die because of our sin. And, at no time should the people of God ever say, "I am beyond confession; I am beyond the need to come before The Cross." Yes, we are eternally forgiven. We have eternal security while, at the same time, day by day we say, "Lord, we also then confess these shortcomings." Paul says, "I do the things I don't want to do and I don't do the things I'm supposed to do." So, even the apostle Paul in Romans 7 wrestles with this. And it's a call for sanctification; a call to say, "Lord I know I am forgiven, but I know I need more forgiveness. I have the Holy Spirit, but Holy Spirit, I want more of You." And so, The Temple and The Cross, you see, serve as both of these signs of God's grace but our call is to humble ourselves and call upon His forgiveness once again.*

*In view of the divine holiness of the LORD, penitent sinners rightly feel ashamed because of their rebellious ways. God calls his people to put away their idolatrous ways and to sanctify His name through righteous living.*

Questions, comments, observations?

**Ann Wolfer:** Pastor Mark, in regard to your last comment about our need, not only corporately to confess our sins daily and individually to come and confess. I know personally that I do need that confession of sin because I know myself; I know my sinful human nature and if I give satan an inch he'll take a mile and I know pride comes in. And I know daily I have to submit myself to the Lord and confess my sins and humble myself to the Lord and just out loud state who's child I am. I know if I don't do that I am giving a foothold to satan. So, every day it's a personal reminder, even though I am eternally saved, committed to the Lord, every day I need to get up and humble myself to God because pride is a sign of satan and it's an ever present sin even for believers.

**Mark:** Well said, Ann, thank you yes. Yeah, pride goes before the fall. That certainly is a good reminder for all of us, thank you.

**Linda Handy:** I want to piggyback on my sister Ann's comment because if indeed the charge from God is for His people was not only to keep themselves holy but indeed the Temple and the reputation of God holy. If we are the Temple of the Lord through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, I piggyback on Ann's comment, that indeed we have to constantly clean our Temple and stay penitent and in The Word and close to The Word especially in times like now where we are being accosted by satan as we are every day

but now he keeps to be gaining increasing strength in the world we live in. We need to stand even stronger in the temples of our own spirits for the Lord for His indwelling.

**Mark:** Good; That's a good point, thanks, Linda. Yeah, that's a great point, I mean where's the temple today and where to do. Wow! you and I. Our bodies, are the temple of the Lord; the Holy Spirit dwells so it's not just about the people remaining faithful, it's about each person remaining faithful, So, that call of faithfulness is a very personal one even as we think of the whole community.

Thank you, Ann and Linda, great comments.

**End of Class 10 November 24, 2020**

**Class 11 - December 1, 2020**

**Prayer:** Father, we pray to You through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in Your Holy Spirit in great thanksgiving for this day and for the opportunity to study Your Word and to draw Your insights into holy living. Lord, let us learn from the past, from Your work through the Prophet Ezekiel that we may be better prepared to be Your servants in this day and age. We pray this in JESUS name, Amen.

**(Location 24:00** begins Class 11 on December 1, 2020 Zoom Recording)

Just remember we just had some good news in **Ezekiel 43**, but hold onto your hats; we're going back to some really really tough stuff. We're starting a new section as we've collated the book. We call this section "The Dramatist." The reason we call it "The Dramatist," is that we are going to see Ezekiel act out his sermons. Biblical scholars call these "Sign-Acts." We used to do children's sermons at St. John; remember those days a long time ago about 20 years ago when little kids and adults could be that close together. Children's sermons are often sign-acts where you will have some object, something you refer to, some practical way to make the sign-act more concrete for the children to understand the point you're making. Children sermons are inherently sign-acts; they are acting out a message. And, that's what Ezekiel's going to be doing on a much more sophisticated and an adult mature level.

Just to kind of get a running start on that, we've got a whole page of comments before we really dive into the text itself. **Ezekiel 4 and 5** dramatize the fall of Jerusalem; and so Ezekiel is going to preach with his whole body. These sign-acts are to his fellow exiles, and, he is bringing God's message of doom that Jerusalem back home and The Land and The City are going to fall under Israel's enemy. And, what makes this even more breathtaking is the enemy in **Ezekiel 4 and 5**. It's not the Babylonians. The enemy of Israel is God; God, The LORD, Yahweh. "I AM Who I AM," God said to Moses, Yahweh. He becomes Israel's enemy. The Babylonians will be an instrument of The LORD's wrath, but ultimately God is the enemy of Israel.

And still again, the Book of Ezekiel has the hardest material in all the Bible to wrap our minds around. And, it has the most glorious material in all the Bible that you can't get your mind around because it just is mind blowing. So, Ezekiel is the "Book of Extremes." There is no middle muddled ground; it's either all in or all out. Then, by the time you get to the Book of Revelation, the Church of Laodicea is going to be judged, why? Because they're lukewarm; they're taking the middle ground and when you take the middle ground you take no ground for God.

In Ezekiel 4 and 5, it's God working through Ezekiel to undermine what may be called the Jerusalemite theology. Remember from our first class in Ezekiel 1, we talked about four pillars that undergirded Israel's confidence that they were God's chosen people once and for all, but they're going to be moved off The Land.

Ezekiel's messages for his fellow exiles begin here in **Ezekiel 4**. These are messages of doom for the city, temple, people, and land. As such, they are intended to dismantle official Jerusalemite theology by undermining the four pillars upon which Jerusalem and Judah's false sense of security was built:

The LORD's covenant with Israel, but here that's going to be undercut. They're going to be moved off The Land. One of Ezekiel's tasks will be to announce that by their persistent rebellion, Israel had forfeited the benefits of being in a covenant relationship with God (e.g., see **Ezekiel 12**).

Yahweh's commitment to His Land. As their divine landlord, Israel thought God was obligated to defend their land. But Ezekiel insists that God himself is handing over his land to foreigners (e.g., see **Ezekiel 21**).

Yahweh's commitment to Jerusalem, but Jerusalem will be destroyed. God had chosen Jerusalem as his residence on earth. Israel saw Jerusalem as their "security blanket": the city was proof of the LORD's love and protection of them. However, Ezekiel's message will be that Jerusalem can and will fall (e.g., see **Ezekiel 4 and 5**).

The LORD's covenant with David, but the kingship of the Davidic line is going to be suspended. According to **2 Samuel 7**, Yahweh promised David that he and his descendants would have eternal title to the throne of Israel.

But Ezekiel will announce that this covenant too has been suspended (see **Ezekiel 12**).

So the very foundational pillars of Israel in **Ezekiel 4 and 5** will all be questioned and undermined and put aside, one after another.

So the idea, brothers and sisters, is that we can never have a false sense of security in things outside ourselves. How do we have security that we are with God and God is with us forever and ever? It comes from our relationship of love and faith with the Lord. It comes from just a daily calling upon Him so that we are not putting our security in external things, but we have that confidence from our heart outward that God is with us and that we belong to God.

So Israel had taken for granted these external things; i.e., The Land, The City, The Covenant and they had run then into great abomination thinking they had security when they had none.

According to Ezekiel, himself already in exile, the promises of God offer no security for those who refuse to take seriously the responsibilities that come with the privileges of covenant relationship. How are we saved? What is our whole relationship with God based upon? **From Genesis to Revelation**, it is summarized simply as this. We are saved by grace through faith. The apostle Paul will run with this in **Romans and Ephesians and Galatians** as the whole Bible runs with it. **Genesis 12**, God comes to Abram by grace; Abram comes to God by faith. That sets the covenant foundation for

the rest of salvation history, but it's never one without the other. And, whenever one of those elements of grace or faith are severed, then covenant then has fallen apart. And that's what's happened now in Israel; and the enemy is God Himself.

This underscores the foundational biblical revelation that God saves us by grace through faith—neither the one without the other. Since Israel is a house in revolt, God is absolved of all obligations to Israel.

As I shared earlier, **Ezekiel 4** begins a whole series of sign-acts as God commands Ezekiel to engage in a series of “sign-acts” to demonstrate the inevitable fate of Jerusalem; to act out what his message is. In **Ezekiel 4:3**, the prophet's action is explicitly called a “sign” for the family of Israel. Indeed, Israel will see her enemy as God Yahweh Himself, and His hostility will not cease until his wrath has been fully poured out.

The earliest sign-act(s) in the Bible can be found in **1 Kings 11:29-39**. This is the earliest of this example of preaching with the whole body to visualize—a sign-act is to visualize the sermon, if you will since many of the prophets prophesied through various sign-acts. Sign-acts were dramatic performances designed to visualize a message from the LORD and in the process, to persuade the people to change their beliefs or behavior.

**1 Kings 11:29-39 ESV** 29 And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. 30 Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. 31 And he said to Jeroboam, “Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes 32 (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel),

*There's more to that that follows but that's the earliest sign-act in Scripture where this faithful prophet who we only know in this very short incident, Ahijah, has a message for Jeroboam and in order to press upon Jeroboam the importance of this message he rends and tears his garment into these numerous pieces so that visually Jeroboam gets the point, and that is what's happening now on steroids in the **Book of Ezekiel**, not just one sign-act but one after another after another.*

33 because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. 34 Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes. 35 But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. 36 Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. 37 And I

will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. 38 And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. 39 And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever.”

So here in the text that we’re going to start reading in just a moment, there are at least **nine such sign-acts** in these **Ezekiel 4 and 5** or in one long chapter. You see the nine here::

In 4:1-5:4, no fewer than nine sign-acts are recorded, making this a complex passage to parse: (1) the siege of the brick (4:1-2); (2) the building of the barrier between Ezekiel and the brick (4:3); (3) Ezekiel’s lying on his left and right sides (4:4-6); (4) the baring of the prophet’s arm (4:7); (5) the binding of Ezekiel (4:8); (6) eating and drinking rationed food and water (4:9-11); (7) eating cakes baked over feces (4:12, 14-15); (8) having and disposing of Ezekiel’s hair (5:1-2); and, (9) the isolation of a remnant of hair (5:3-4).

So you see that God is having Ezekiel act out this message in some unusual, and for Ezekiel, uncomfortable ways. To be bound for 390 days on your left side and on your right side; bound with cords and to have a starvation diet. We’re going to look at Ezekiel’s diet. For 390 days plus 40, he eats what’s basically a starvation diet of eight ounces of food a day and about 20 ounces of water a day. And so that, Dr. Alan Denekas could probably tell us, but that is pretty much starvation level. Again, this is to impress upon the exiles what’s going to be happening back in Jerusalem.

These sign-acts are very complicated though because they are not in chronological order. There’s interpretation; i.e., “How could these things really happen? How are we to understand them?” And so it’s very complex and so maybe we can think of them as “clusters of sign-acts”

- several of these subdivide into smaller segment
  - the sign-acts point to different events in Israel’s history
  - the acts are not presented in chronological order
  - interpretive comments interrupt the reports of the sign-acts
  - It’s difficult to make sense of how these sign-acts work out:
- How could Ezekiel lie on his side for 390 days?
  - What’s the connection between baring his arm and lying on his sides?
  - How could Ezekiel perform these acts when the LORD had him tied up? etc.
- Sign-acts relating to the siege of Jerusalem (4:1-3; 4:7; 4:8-11; 4:16-17; 5:5-9)
  - Sign-acts relating to the destruction of Jerusalem (5:1-2; 5:12-17)
  - Sign-acts relating to the deportation of Jerusalem’s population (5:3-4; 4:6; 4:12-13)

Taken together, the prophet's aim was to destroy the people's false bases of security and to dash all hope among his fellow exiles of an early return to their homeland.

**The first sign-act: Ezekiel 4:1-3 The Siege of Jerusalem Symbolized** 1 "And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem. 2 And put siege works against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it. Set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around. 3 And you, take an iron griddle, and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. **This is a sign for the house of Israel.**

So, obviously then, we see what a sign-act entails. Ezekiel is getting to work to visualize the message. And, he's going to take a brick, and this was an ancient Babylonian custom. Remember they're in Babylon in captivity. And he is going to etch a map of the City of Jerusalem on this brick. So, that's pretty easy for us to imagine.

*Yahweh suddenly commands Ezekiel to dramatize the imminent siege of Jerusalem by etching on a brick a map of the city and then besieging the city. Such etching was a common activity in Babylonian culture. Yahweh then instructs Ezekiel to construct siege models and place them around the brick. Ezekiel's actions reflect the dynamics of siege-warfare in the 6th century BC.*

**siege wall** – a series of mounds around the city from which the attacker could observe movements of the defenders inside the city; Ezekiel probably created his model wall by heaping up rows of sand or earth with his hands

**army camps** – several army camps positioned around the city to block any route of escape by the city's inhabitants

**battering rams** – invented by the Assyrians, these rams were tipped with metal points to penetrate the walls of a city made with mud bricks

*So, Ezekiel puts this brick down in his house and then like a little child.. My grandchildren love playing with Legos; and they even love playing with my ancient tinker toys. Remember tinker toys? Those are my toys are from when I was a kid, and now they're quite the collectors item. Visualize Ezekiel playing with Legos and you get an idea of what's happening. So, he takes this brick and he puts it down in the middle of his dirt floor of his house in exile. And then he's going to take his hands and with the dirt and the clay and the mud around his house. Remember they're living in very very primitive, we would say, impoverished kinds of ways. He's going to physically take mounds of mud and place around that brick as if that brick were really Jerusalem. And, he's pretending that he's a little boy; and he's pretending he's playing army; and he's making siege walls around them.*

*And then he's going to make a ramp out of materials in his house. Again, visualize this; Ezekiel on the floor; on the ground; with the brick; there's Jerusalem; mounds around,*

*which an army would use to look over the enemy's walls and to peer down into it. And, then he's going to make a ramp. These are all military tactics of 6th Century BC. The ramp is going to come up against the walls so that you could put a battering ram against the wall. Then, he's maybe going to cut out little figures of soldiers and put army camps around the City. And then, he's going to take a little tiny battering ram; maybe he uses a Q-tip, and he's going to pretend like these little soldiers are running up the ramp with their battering ram to hit the wall of Jerusalem.*

*And, finally he's going to place an iron griddle between himself and the city, which symbolizes that God Himself has placed this iron griddle between Himself and Jerusalem. This is to symbolizes the firmness of God's rejection of His people. And so, all of this is to visualize that Yahweh has laid siege to His own City of Jerusalem.*

**griddle**—*a utensil to bake flat cakes over a fire. Here it represents the wall that Yahweh Himself has placed between Himself and Jerusalem, as God has become His people's enemy laying siege against Jerusalem.*

Remember, Ezekiel's in his house and the leaders of the Exilic community are in there; and they're his audience. And, they're standing around, these Jewish leaders in exile; and they're listening, but they're also watching as Ezekiel acts out the siege of Jerusalem and none of them would miss the point. None of them would go, "We don't know what that ramp is for; we don't know what that brick is for." They all go, "We know exactly. We can see it with our eyes even though we are hundreds and hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem." So that's the first sign-act so you get a sense of what God is asking Ezekiel to do.

**Next sign-act Ezekiel 4:4-8** 4 "Then lie on your left side, and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it. For the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their punishment.

*Now that's the first sign-act in this section. Notice in Ezekiel 4:4 the ESV translates this very complex Hebrew word, punishment. You may have a footnote in your Bible on the word punishment and the footnote might say iniquity. This is a very technical, specialized Hebrew word that means the broadest possible sin. There are specific sins for specific things; for moral lapse; financial malfeasance; blasphemy. Those kinds of sins have particular words associated with them. This word that is translated here "the punishment," is a very broad word that means every sin that you can possible imagine. "Carry all the sins of My people on your left side, Ezekiel." It's like the actions of the Priest the Day of Atonement placing symbolically the sins upon the lamb and then the scapegoat that was sent out into the wilderness.*

5 For I assign to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment. So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel. 6 And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah. Forty days I assign you, a day for each year. 7 And you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with your arm



bared, and you shall prophesy against the city. 8 And behold, I will place cords upon you, so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege.

- So now Ezekiel is going to have to act out a message that requires **extreme** discipline and sacrifice on his part.
- Does this mean that Ezekiel is going to lie on his left side 24 hours a day 390 days consecutively?
- Well, we don't necessarily need to think that.
- Surely he had to get up and go to the bathroom or maybe take a break.
- But the point is for 390 days he was basically lying on his left side.
- And, for 40 days he was basically, if not the whole 24-hour period, at least most of it, lying on his right side.
- Why 390 days? Well, we don't know for sure. It has something to do with the sins of the Northern nation of Israel. Scholars have given various answers:
  - A sign of future judgment, which would begin with the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC and last 390 years.
  - A period of wrath determined by adding the 390 days on his left side to the 40 on his right side, yielding a total of 430 years. This is virtually identical to the duration of the first temple. Thus, when the combined years of Israel's and Judah's sins have equaled the duration of Solomon's temple, then the new temple may be built.
  - The 390 days represent **390 years** of punishment, but the calculation should be retrospective. Counting 390 backwards from **586 BC** yields a starting point for the period of Israel's iniquity of **976 BC**.
- Remember Solomon? What a cautionary **story Solomon is. The son of the great King David** starts out so well. You know he writes "**The Song of Songs**" as a young married king beloved to one wife.
- He writes the **Book of Proverbs** at the height of his godly kingship and wisdom.
- And then toward the end of his life, he writes the **Book of Ecclesiastes** because Solomon looks back and says, "You know, I did well for the first 20 years and then I fell into deep sin the last 20 years."
- Remember he goes from The Song of Songs and his beloved wife, to 700 wives and 300 concubines. Whoa! What happened to Solomon!
- Some scholars, then will say, that really begins the inquiry of Israel when Solomon fell into apostasy; i.e.
  - he worshiped pagan gods because of the influence of all his wives, etc.
  - So if you count from there from the time of Solomon's temple during Solomon's time, to the time that Solomon's temple is destroyed, that's about 390 years.
  - This is when the glory of the Lord moved from the tabernacle to the newly constructed Temple. Solomon, to whom God had given the command to build the Temple, was also responsible for beginning the court-sponsored apostasy. For 390

years, therefore, Israel would provoke the wrath of God by her worship of other gods. It's inescapable that Ezekiel is to spend a day on his left side for every day of Israel's sins.

So you can see that Ezekiel is a prophet, not just in word but also in action. I mean, he is holding nothing back from God, which is a great teaching for us. You know you've heard the colloquial expression, "If you talk the talk, you need to walk the walk," right? That's what Ezekiel is doing. Ezekiel talks a good talk, but he even walks a better walk. He is putting everything into it. He is not just giving lip service to God. He is giving his whole body to the service of God.

And then in **Ezekiel 4:6** he's going to turn over to his right side, for 40 years for the sins of Judah. And remember, that 40 almost certainly refers to the wilderness. Why 40 years in the wilderness? Well, that's not arbitrary, in **Numbers 14:33-35**, the Israelites were sentenced to 40 years in the wilderness. It was one year in the desert for every day that the spies had spent exploring the land of Canaan and came back. Remember ten were bad and two were good. Remember, that children's song, "Caleb and Joshua were two good spies?" and the ten bad ones? Like in the wilderness, this 40-day period represents the passing of one generation so that a new generation can come back into the land.

**The third sign-act** is redirected to the siege of Jerusalem in **Ezekiel 4:7**, "And you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with your arm bared, and you shall prophesy against the city." This is a military gesture of a warrior, basically kind of rolling up his sleeves getting ready for the battle. Ezekiel is to bare his arm, a military gesture of a warrior preparing for battle. God is going to battle against Israel. So, it's the image of God Himself, the Holy Warrior from Heaven, getting ready to attack Jerusalem.

**The last sign-act in this section** in **Ezekiel 4:8**, "And behold, I will place cords (*ropes*) upon you, so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege."

Try to imagine Ezekiel, a man, dressed in a probably a very humble, simple, rag tag robe, maybe or maybe not with sandals on his feet, on a dirt floor in front of a little play set in Jerusalem with a siege against it; on his right side and then his whole body wrapped and bound with ropes and cords. He can't move his arms; he can't move his legs. He can't even turn over. That is what's happening in **Ezekiel 4**.

Now, if you want an amazing example of a person of faith, who would he do this for the sake of his love of God and to help bring his fellow exiles back into faithfulness? You've got your example (in Ezekiel).

Why is Ezekiel bound? Because, symbolically it means, he can't change what God's message is. Just like physically he can't move, he cannot then just put words into God's mouth. He has to speak only what God says. He is bound to the Word of God.

Brothers and sisters, just push your pause button right there. We too, I pray, are bound to The Word of God. I pray that The Holy Spirit would not allow our mouth to say anything that would be contrary to The Word of God. I pray our hearts have a tight cord at The Cross around them so that we cannot go left or right but we can only go straight ahead with the Lord. I pray that we, too, are bound by The Word of God so that this is not just something that God does to Ezekiel for Israel, but something that God does for each one of us for the sake of the world today.

Yes, The scene concludes with an affirmation that God will have the last word in the sign-act and in Israel's history, symbolized by his tying up Ezekiel with cords. By being tied up, it means that Ezekiel cannot change his message by changing his position. He is not free to say his own messages. He is bound to the Word of God.

Ezekiel now assumes a new role in another series of sign-acts. Instead of representing Yahweh, he now plays the role of a priest, carrying the burden God's people's sins on his body. This action recounts the actions of the priest on the Day of Atonement. Again, you can think about how Ezekiel points us to The Messiah and how Jesus carried our sins on His body. This account describes four separate actions as Ezekiel assumes this posture.

And, obviously, we do need to say this from time to time. Everything in the Bible points us to Jesus. It's all from Him; it's all about Him; it all returns to Him. And so, when you read this, just keep in mind that, ultimately, this is teaching us what The Messiah has done for us.

Questions, comments, observations?

**Alan Denekas:** In **Galatians 3** Paul also talks about The Law coming 430 years after God's initial overture to Abraham. Any parallel in the numbers there?

**Mark:** Thanks for pointing that out, Alan. In fact, I had that in my notes and did not even mention it. 430 is about the time of Israel's time in Egypt between Abraham and Jacob going down to Egypt and then Moses bringing them out. Thank you. That's another possibility; that the 430 would correspond to Israel's time as slaves in Egypt. So you've got at least four possibilities on that; and they all have their reasons for working or not working. Good, thank you.

**Vickie Smith:** I have a question. Did people take Ezekiel seriously? Did they realize that this was serious business? Because, I'm thinking to myself that if it were me today and I saw somebody lying on their side and tying themselves up and being bound and all. I mean, I would think maybe something was wrong with them. I don't know how seriously I would take a message from somebody who was doing that stuff, and I don't know if the symbolism meant more to them than it would mean to me today?

**Mark:** That's a great question. I mean, it is such an extraordinary scene that you just wonder what's going through the minds of the elders in his house, day by day, coming

for 430 days, every day stopping by, “Yep! he’s still there.” “Yep, he’s still on his left side.” “Yep, he’s still on his right side.” I mean, what’s going through their minds? So, I don’t know. We are actually not really told their reaction so God leaves that as a mystery. And, I guess, so the question really becomes, “What’s our reaction?” So, it kind of takes us from then to now as we read this; as we are drawn into it by The Holy Spirit, what does it say to you, Vickie? What does it say to me? What does it say to Martha or Elaine or any of us?

So I think that we have to assume that Ezekiel is not a crazy man. He’s not out of his mind. He’s not mentally unstable. He’s a man of faith. He was known to be a man of faith in Jerusalem, so he’s a known entity to the exiles. He’s not some strange prophet who came out of Babylon on the fly. Almost certainly he was a man who was respected in Jerusalem. He was brought to Babylon with the first group of exiles. So he bears with him some political capital, if you will. He’s already got the respect of the community. Keep in mind too that the Jewish culture was a very dramatic culture, even today.

If you go to Jerusalem with us on one of our trips and you go to the western wall, the only part of the Temple still remaining in Jerusalem. If you go on the Sabbath, Friday night, you will see thousands of Jewish men and women at the wall and they’re praying, but they are not praying like you and I pray. They are moving back and forth and back and forth, always moving. Circles and join hands and sing a song out loud going around in a circle dancing. They are swaying. They are bowing down. I mean their whole body is into it.

So, we tend to be a more cerebral kind of culture; i.e., talking heads, where we just talk and try to work things out. The Jews are a very embodied culture and so it’s part of the reason why the Orthodox Jews wear some, what we would call, bizarre clothing. Again, go to Jerusalem and watch the ultra Orthodox walk through Jerusalem. Depending on if they are from eastern Europe or Russia or other countries, the men will have these dramatic fur caps, in different styles, and these dramatic ....(lost sound and could not read Mark’s lips other than ‘beard’).

Do you know what the ultra Orthodox Jewish women do with their heads? They shave their hair and then they put a wig on because, it’s not in the Scripture, it’s in the Talmud, some ancient Rabbinic teaching that a woman should shave her head. I’m not really sure, but you’ll see these ultra Orthodox Jewish women. Some of them have extremely fine wigs and you don’t know they’re wigs. Others prompt one to say, “Wow, that’s a woman with a wig! Why does she do that? You know, it’s not like she is under some medication or something. So, why do they do that?” Well, they’re always acting out with their bodies, kind of an embodiment. So that’s a long answer to your question. But, probably culturally, this was less strange to them in Babylon than it is to us today.

But then, spiritually, the question is always. God had a message to the people through Ezekiel in the 6th century BC, but after we read this and pray about it, it’s imperative

that you and I ask, “What is God’s message to me today?” “What is God’s message to us today?”

**Vickie Smith:** Where you say, “God is going to battle against Israel,” I was thinking, “How would we feel if we got that message today? For us, I think maybe He’s trying to give us that message today also; that it’s coming. I just wondered if they were; that’s a pretty strong message to hear, and I just wondered if they took it seriously.

**Mark:** That’s a great question. I am assuming they did, but the text is silent.

**Will O’Brien:** Yeah, I think that’s such a good question. That’s something I’ve always wondered about. If something were to happen in some of these crazy things that are going on, would I be able to recognize it? Would I just think that something’s wrong? To me, it all goes back to what Mark said at the beginning of the lesson today about needing confession every day. And, I think one of the things that I’ve noticed, and I think ya’ll probably agree, is that if we don’t confess every day, we start having an issue with a hardened heart. I find that if I don’t confess every day, immediately my heart is substantially hardened than if I do. I think also with recognizing, being able to ask, what happened in Ezekiel? Is it glorifying to God? If our heart is hardened, we ask, “Is someone making a fool out of me?” And, I think if our heart is softened, we ask, “Is this glorifying to God.” And I think that helps give us a better vision; a better discernment in those situations too. I think ultimately God is good and He knows what we need to hear in order to know what’s going on.

**Mark:** Will, are you speaking from your Church office?

**Will:** I am.

**Mark:** Next time you’re in the building, just walk down the hallway and look in Will’s office. It is like the hyper coolest office. He is such a hipster young adult. I mean my office looks very much like a 63 year old man’s office. Will’s looks very hipster. Thank you, Will, you’re right. That’s a great point and maybe we should just pause right there.

Later in the text, I do want to emphasize the point that we’re going to see the full wrath and fury of Yahweh against Israel in Jerusalem. And we haven’t even gotten to the worst part of this, which is going to come up soon. But, ultimately you’ve got to keep Jesus in mind here, folks, and you’ve got to keep The Cross. And finally, it’s going to be The Messiah of Israel Himself who is going to take the full and final fury of God the Father against our sin. Jesus is the propitiation, the covering of our sin. Propitiate means He took the wrath on His chin. So, even as we read one book of the Bible, we’ve got to keep the whole Bible in view at all times of how it relates and brings us back to what ultimately God has done for us.

Next week we will pick up with **Ezekiel 4:9**. Thank you all for your comments and your observations. It’s great to be in a study with you.

**Closing Prayer** Lord, thank You for today, as we have discussed, we pray, that all that we read in the Bible will ultimately be a teaching for our lives today that we might be faithful to You, Lord, as You are faithful to us. We pray this in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit, Amen. God bless you; see you next week God willing.

**(Continuation of December 1 Class 11 and Handout on December 8 Zoom Recording):**

Now remember the context, Ezekiel here early in the book in **Ezekiel 4** is demonstrating through what we call “sign-acts” the message of God to the exiles of what’s going to happen back home in Jerusalem. Just a review, Ezekiel has been in the first wave of exiles around 597 BC who were sent to Babylon by the Chebar Canal, so we have an Exilic community there. But, Babylonians did not immediately crush Jerusalem. They allowed the puppet King Zedekiah to reign and to be kind of their puppet governor for almost ten years as a way to water down the people to get them acclimated to the Babylonians to see if they could make Jerusalem a “Vessel State.” So, probably the Babylonians’ political plan was a hope that Judah and Jerusalem would continue to operate, but obviously under their authority. It would give them a greater tax base. It would expand their footprint in the Middle East. They probably did not want to crush and destroy Jerusalem because that politically would not help them. But, as the case may be, ten years later the court as Ezekiel’s prophesying it was God’s plan that the Babylonians would do that we’re going to see today as we’ve seen before that the ultimate enemy of Israel is not going to be the Babylonians; they’re not in charge. Yahweh The Lord God Himself is going to be The One who becomes Israel’s enemy. It’s a breathtaking thing and it’s a sobering thing and it calls us to repent and call upon God in a new way today.

So, right now let us focus on this amazing work and Word of God through the Prophet Ezekiel. We have just kind of scratched the surface under this section we are calling “The Dramatist” which Ezekiel is going to preach by acting out (sign-acts). He is going to embody the message that Yahweh wants His people to hear.

Let’s get into **Ezekiel 4**. And just to give us a warning that early on in **Ezekiel 5** we are going to come to one of the hardest sections; maybe the hardest section in the whole book.

We are picking up at **Ezekiel 4:9-14**:

We have now, a new series of sign-acts and the first is going to be in **Ezekiel 9-14**. Let me just read these in smaller subsets. In this new sign-act, here is Act One in **Ezekiel 4:9**. Remember, Ezekiel’s already taken the brick; he’s already etched Jerusalem; he’s already made the siege walls around it so they (the exiles) get the point that Jerusalem is coming under attack:

9 And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and emmer,[b] and put them into a single vessel and make your bread from them. During the number of days that you lie on your side, 390 days, you shall eat it.

*As Yahweh immediately launches into instructions for a new series of sign-acts. God commands Ezekiel to get six different kinds of food with which he is to prepare his bread. Basically, what Ezekiel is told he must eat for these 390 days while lying on his left side is a siege diet. Of course, when a City's under siege you don't have the harvest coming in. You have to eat what's in the storehouse within the City walls, and the food that's listed here basically is kind of the bottom of the storage barrels kind of food. For example, you may have a footnote in your Bible under "emmer," a type of wheat. That's a poor man's wheat; that is like the dregs of the wheat harvest. This siege diet that Ezekiel is going to have to eat now for over a year, 390 days, is going to emphasize that Jerusalem is going to have food shortages. Think about the call of Ezekiel. Would any of us, even at this point in our study, want to take Ezekiel's place? I'm not signing up for it! (However,) It does emphasize that to be God's man or woman, it probably will mean more than just superficial faithfulness; it's going to mean mind, body and spirit. First the "siege diet" when he will combine these grains and vegetables to make dough and bake it as bread for himself as food will be so scarce that bread can only be made by scraping together the bottoms of the storage barrels. This loaf is to provide Ezekiel food for his entire 390-day period on his left side, again, emphasizing the food shortages that Jerusalem will know.*

10 And your food that you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels[c] a day; from day to day you shall eat it. 11 And water you shall drink by measure, the sixth part of a hin; from day to day you shall drink.

*Ezekiel's will be an extremely meager diet. The food allotment of 20 shekels is approximately eight ounces of food a day. His daily ration of water comes to two-thirds of quart a day. This is right on the brink of starvation as the City of Jerusalem will be brought to the brink of starvation.*

*I don't know what you had for breakfast or if you had a lot of coffee. Almost certainly we've all eaten way more than eight ounces of food a day and it's only 12:10 p.m. We have probably all eaten more than Ezekiel ate in a full day.*

12 And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung." 13 And the Lord said, "Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations where I will drive them." 14 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I have never defiled myself. From my youth up till now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has tainted meat come into my mouth."

*Whoa! Human dung. Here God commands Ezekiel to grill his bread cake over pellets of human excrement. It would again symbolize defiled food. It would also be something the priest, remember Ezekiel is both priest and prophet. A priest would never do it because it would be ritual uncleanness, Ezekiel is going to petition God that he would*

*cook his food over cow dung instead of human excrement. Ezekiel protests. He has never eaten defiled food! Yahweh's response to Ezekiel's response is sympathetic. He allows Ezekiel to cook over cow dung instead as God does relent. You can imagine, then, that Ezekiel's preaching that incorporated these sign-acts did not leave any room for misinterpretation. Ezekiel 4:15 Then he said to me, "See, I assign to you cow's dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread."*

16 Moreover, he said to me, "Son of man, behold, I will break the supply of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay. 17 I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in dismay, and rot away because of their punishment.

*That's the Lord God Almighty saying that their punishment is going to result in them (people of Israel/Jerusalem) rotting away. So, there is no doubt that this terrible doom awaits the City of Jerusalem. The only question is when is it going to come? When it does come, we know that, of course, the Babylonians took most of the Jews out of Jerusalem and Judah, but they would leave the most vulnerable. They left behind the elderly, the sick, the handicapped. They would leave behind even little children. Those that were left behind were the ones least able to fend for themselves in a time of disaster. So it was a terrible time of suffering, not only for the exiles but, perhaps even especially, for those who were not killed in the final siege but lived on. Reducing the bread supply so that each person will be appalled and succumb to famine on account of their sins, the interpretation leaves no room for doubt: the fate awaiting the City is the direct result of God's actions.*

This is where we have the fate of the inhabitants back in Jerusalem—that was the eating of the siege food; the drinking of the siege water as one sign-act; and now we have the second one.

### **Ezekiel 5:1-4 Jerusalem Will Be Destroyed**

5 "And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword. Use it as a barber's razor and pass it over your head and your beard. Then take balances for weighing and divide the hair. 2 A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. And a third part you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. 3 And you shall take from these a small number and bind them in the skirts of your robe. 4 And of these again you shall take some and cast them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will come out into all the house of Israel.

Here's another sign-act being introduced in **Ezekiel 5:1**. Ezekiel is to cut his hair using a sword and then to save a remnant of it. It's going to be very important that in the midst of this horror, there is a glimmer of hope—a remnant will be saved.

The hair is, obviously, to be divided into three parts. And, he has to shave his head, not with the typical barber's razor, but with a sword. Can you imagine shaving your beard



and your hair with a military instrument of war, a sword? It is a wonder that Ezekiel lived through this sign-act as he did so. It would cause shock and dismay among the exiles to see, Ezekiel, the priest with his head shaved. There were taboos in the Torah in Leviticus that priests were not to shave their heads. They were to leave their sideburns long. There was a prohibition in place against priests shaving the top of their heads so it's very complex and very technical (**Lev 21:5**). For Ezekiel to do this, it would be shocking to the exiles. Shaving one's head was also associated with mourning. It will become clear later that another hand shaves Ezekiel's beard, bringing to mind the fulfillment of a prophetic word in **Isaiah 7:20** that when the priest's beard is shaved, it is a sign that God has come with punishment. The exiles would have seen the physical shaving of hair and cutting of beard in all the obvious ways that they would have interpreted it. And then, Ezekiel is to weigh out his hair on a set of scales in three equal parts. That gives you an indication how long Ezekiel's hair would have been. Priests often had pretty long hair in obedience to God. And so the fact that he's able to weigh his hair in three parts, tells you that when he cut his hair off there was a lot of hair that came off. It signals that God metes out his punishment in deliberate, carefully measured portions.

The sign-act continues in **Ezekiel 5:2** with the description of how Ezekiel is to treat each part of the three parts of the hair that's been cut off. He is to set one third on fire, a common symbol of destruction; one third he is to chop up, symbolizing the violent death for those who escaped the City at the hands of the Babylonians; and, to scatter the last third in the air to the wind. So will the people be scattered. Yahweh Himself will unsheathe the sword. God is the chief mover here who is going to bring His own punishment against His people.

A new movement begins in **Ezekiel 5:3** From that portion of the hair consigned to dispersion, he is to select a few hairs and tie them in a kind of a braid to the hem of his garment or to the belt of his garment. And so, this is a glimmer of hope. There will be a small portion of the people, a remnant, if you will, who will survive the scattering, but only because of God's intervention on their behalf.

As a final act in **Ezekiel 5:4** Yahweh commands Ezekiel to throw some of the hair that he has tucked away into the fire. So, this is the remnant hair. He's tucked it into probably the rope around his robe. If you've seen Steve and I or Gerry and Myles in the past in the traditional services where you've seen us wearing a robe. Think of that as part of Ezekiel's garb with a rope tied around his waist. Now, he's to take some of that hair and he's to put it in the fire. Why would he do that? I believe it's because it is God saying that even to the remnant that's been saved, they must not become complacent exiles; and if they do, they too will be stricken. But, it is also an indication that some will be saved; and it's only by God's grace that they are saved.

By tucking away the remnants of hair in his garment, Ezekiel had announced that the future of God's people lay with the exiles. But simply surviving should not be interpreted as a guarantee of safety.

**Vickie Smith** - It sounds to me like even the remnant almost sounds like this is a question of works versus faith unless he's saying, "Don't let your faith become complacent." Because, it's almost like even the remnant has to make sure they're good enough. See what I'm saying. It's kind of scary to me if God is also speaking to me in the things He is saying, "Vickie don't become complacent. So, I saved you from this but you've got to still be basically perfect for you to be sure that you're going to be saved in the end." It almost like it's sounding works based to me; I don't know. Does that make sense?

**Mark:** Somebody else weigh in; that's a good observation that Vickie has. Does anybody else think that this is too works oriented?

**Chris Miller:** I don't think it's too works oriented but I agree with Vickie.

**Mark:** I think what we have to understand is that behind the judgment is that God had formed Israel by grace and He had done everything. He had married them as a Husband and Israel as His bride. You know, on Mt. Sinai when God calls Moses up to get the Ten Commandments, the ancient Rabbis interpreted the Ten Commandments as the wedding vows between God and Israel; that these were The Promises that Yahweh was making with His Bride, His people of Israel. And so, the reason I think there is such punishment and the reason why God is doubling down on this is that Israel was "no people," and Israel had become "His people." They were the smallest, least most insignificant people in all the world and yet they are the ones chosen. The Jews are God's chosen people. And, for them, after all that grace and blessing and calling and marriage, for them then to blaspheme and worship other gods and engage in the worse sorts of greed and sexual immorality, this was just too much for God to stomach, as we can understand. It does look like, you're right Vickie and Chris, God says, "If you want to be saved, you better get on with a life of faith." But, that's only, I think, after all these centuries of grace upon grace upon grace and all these responses of lack of faith, lack of faith, lack of faith.

**Lilly O'Brien:** One thing I notice in **Ezekiel 5:5-6** 5 "Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.

So you see that grace that the Lord has given to the Israelites just like you were saying.

6 And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes.

That phrasing "the wickedness" and when we read about wickedness, especially in Proverbs, where it talks about the ways of the heart; you know where the heart is already at. And then that leading to rebellion and disobedience. So, it's judging the ways of their hearts too, not just how they're performing.

**Mark:** Thank you, Lilly. That's good insight. It reminds me, Jesus will say to whom much is given, much is required. So that's kind of an overall background here. Much had been given to Israel; therefore much was required and they've given nothing.

These verses of **Ezekiel 5:5-17 the verbal proclamation of interpretation** are some of the most complex to understand in the **Book of Ezekiel**. Ezekiel is a very difficult complex book in terms of its literary presentation of the Hebrew. The content reflects a synthesis of verbal explanations and does not follow modern ways of literary flow. Scholars have scratched their heads over this for a long time.

**Ezekiel 5:5-6** 5 “Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. 6 And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes.

*The indictment of Jerusalem is why the City is drawn on the brick; why the siege is around it; and her (Israel's) status as the favorite nation has been forfeited. As God leaves no doubt: the city drawn on the brick is Jerusalem. This is again shocking! God had made Jerusalem the center of the nations. Now her privileged status among the nations has been forfeited. God has blessed Israel more than any other nation and yet she has rebelled against The One who has loved her; has rejected the LORD's judgments and laws; and no longer obeys the Word of God. She's become worse than all the nations. Again, we think of the marriage covenant and here God's beloved bride is the very one who has rebelled against Him. Her punishment will be worse than the punishment of those nations who did not know God because she did know and yet she rebelled.*

**Ezekiel 5:7-10** 7 Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules, and have not[h] even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you, 8 therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments[i] in your midst in the sight of the nations. 9 And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again. 10 Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers. And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds.

**Ezekiel 5:10** is a really hard sentence of The Word of God to read where God says cannibalism where fathers eat their sons and sons eat their fathers. Let's try to understand this.

*This is the first announcement of judgment upon Jerusalem*

To the sins of rebellion and wickedness there has also been added “riotous uproar.” Do you see what Israel is doing? Israel is boisterous in her sin! She’s partying her way into destruction. God has called her to faithfulness, and Israel is just partying. She’s just getting drunk and she’s doing whatever she wants to. She has no regard for God. The backdrop to this is **Genesis 6** where God looks upon the earth, and the whole earth is full of wickedness and evil except for one man and his family, Noah. And God says, “I want to just destroy and start over.” It’s almost like God now looks down on the one people He has saved; His own beloved Israel; His chosen people, and what are they doing? They have no faithfulness; they’re just partying themselves into destruction. The LORD is now against Jerusalem/Israel. He will bring the fight against His own people in the sight of the nations. Having announced that God would visit His people with unprecedented anger, the effects of His actions are described in the most horrifying terms: fratricidal cannibalism. His Word is always in concert together. One of the great reformation interpretative gifts that we have from the Protestant Reformation is that “Scripture interprets Scripture.” And so we know that Scripture works perfectly in concert with each other. Scripture is never in error. If we think it’s an error, it’s only because we have not understood it properly.

This is a fulfillment of **Dt 28:53-57**. Jerusalem will know unspeakable horror.

**Deuteronomy 28:52-68** 52 “They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the Lord your God has given you. 53 And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you.

*Now, this is Moses talking to Israel and Moses says he has gone through all sorts of great blessings if Israel obeys the Torah. But, then he goes through a whole list of punishment if Israel does not obey the Torah.*

54 The man who is the most tender and refined among you will begrudge food to his brother, to the wife he embraces, and to the last of the children whom he has left, 55 so that he will not give to any of them any of the flesh of his children whom he is eating, because he has nothing else left, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns. 56 The most tender and refined woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because she is so delicate and tender, will begrudge to the husband she embraces, to her son and to her daughter, 57 her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears, because lacking everything she will eat them secretly, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns. 58 “If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, 59 then the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting. 60 And he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. 61 Every sickness also and every affliction that is not recorded in the book of this law,

the Lord will bring upon you, until you are destroyed. 62 Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God. 63 And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

64 "And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. 65 And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the Lord will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. 66 Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. 67 In the morning you shall say, 'If only it were evening!' and at evening you shall say, 'If only it were morning!' because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see. 68 And the Lord will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer."

Some people have said, and I think they are probably right, that what I just read in **Deuteronomy** is the most gruesome portion of the entire Book of God, the entire Holy Bible; that those verses are the most gruesome picture in all of Scripture. And it is; we get it; we can't think of anything worse. God had told Israel this in the days of Moses, and Moses lived around 1400 BC. And now it's almost a thousand years later and Israel has known this for almost ten centuries. This is not God being arbitrary and changing the rules of the game in mid play. This is God having spoken to His people for ten centuries, and now it's going to come to pass because they have, not for a few years, but for a thousand years ignored and rejected The Word of God. What we're finding in Ezekiel is horrific stuff, but it's not shocking because we were told in the days of Moses this was going to happen.

**Alan Denekas:** Getting back to Vickie and Lilly's comments, I heard a professor say one time, "Israel following the Covenant was a sign of where their hearts were." They were saved by grace, but the works, in following the covenant and carrying out these specific specifications of the covenant, were a sign of where their hearts were. So, I think that's where Lilly picks up on that, was that because they were not carrying out the Covenant it meant that their hearts were far from God. And elsewhere; I think it may be in **Isaiah** where God says, "You're going through the motions, but your hearts are not with Me. So, who is this that's trampling My courts. I'm tired of your sacrifices. You know you're going through the motions but your heart's not in it," and I think that's what He's getting at here.

**Mark:** Thanks, Alan, that's a good observation. You are absolutely right. One of the great fallacies of Christians is that they think that the Jews believe they were saved by works. Scripturally, historically that is absolutely false. Israel will be the first to say,

“We’re only saved by grace.” I mean that’s **Genesis 12** moving forward..grace, grace, grace, grace, grace. But, that’s a good observation, Alan. Therefore, the obedience to The Law is not a way to be saved, but it’s a way to show their hearts are appreciative to God and His grace.

**Alan:** It made me think of James. It’s not works instead of faith, but faith that works.

**Mark:** Then the New Testament view; by the time you get to the Letter of Galatians, Paul is really going to put his foot down against what are called the Judaizers who were trying to get the new Christians, Jew and Gentile, to follow The Law in order to be saved. And, Paul is saying to them, they also have gotten it wrong; they have turned The Law into a way of salvation which it was never intended to be. The Law was only a venue, a vehicle to show one’s love for the grace of God.

**Lilly:** The first time I read **Deuteronomy 28**, I was so surprised at how gruesome it was and how could it even be possible and how could God let something like this happen. And, I was talking to a friend and she told me about how this is what sin does; this is how ugly our sin is and so often we think, “Oh, I could never do that. This is like so beyond humanity.” But God is revealing to us in this that this is where sin can get us to if you keep following certain trails of sin and evil; like we are capable of this; and God He is showing Israel, “You are capable of this if you are not following My ways.”

**David Leamon:** Let me comment on this, there’s an instance in our history in this country The Donner Party in the mid 1800’s got snowed in while in the Sierra Nevada mountains and were practicing cannibalism for some of them to stay alive. They were trying to get to California and they didn’t get there soon enough; the winter closed in on them.

Wikipedia: *“The Donner Party was a group of American pioneers who migrated to California in a wagon train from the Midwest. Delayed by a series of mishaps, they spent the winter of 1846–1847 snowbound in the Sierra Nevada mountain range. Some of the migrants resorted to cannibalism to survive, eating the bodies of ... discharged negligently, an event that seemed to make the decision for them; ..”*

**Mark:** That’s right, David, and we have other examples, of course, of people in desperate straits turning to cannibalism. So, again, this is a shocking development, but it’s not unknown even to us.

**Chris Miller:** Don’t we see this theme running through The Hebrew Bible and New Testament and Lilly is very perceptive in her remarks. What are the implications today in our worldview in the way God that works with us in our present age when we’re taking babies and selling their body parts.

**Mark:** Unfortunately, Chris, you make all too true a statement; you’re right. That’s a hard but important insight, Chris, thank you. We really can’t wag our fingers too much,

can we? Because today we have a million babies a year just in this one country aborted and then body parts; so sin is a terrible thing, especially sin that hurts children. So it does cause us, if nothing else, it better cause us to repent and say, "Lord, let me today begin to serve and love You love because Your grace is so wonderful.

**Here is the second announcement of judgment upon Jerusalem:**

**Ezekiel 5:11-17** 11 Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will withdraw. My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity. 12 A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in your midst; a third part shall fall by the sword all around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds and will unsheathe the sword after them.

13 "Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the Lord—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them. 14 Moreover, I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations all around you and in the sight of all who pass by. 15 You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes—I am the Lord; I have spoken— 16 when I send against you the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you and break your supply of bread. 17 I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the Lord; I have spoken."

**Ezekiel 5:11** Yahweh swears by His own life to bring this punishment upon his people. They have defiled His sanctuary. We recall here the abominations in the Temple described in **Ezekiel 8**. Remember those pagan idols.

The LORD's divine decree is divided into three parts.

In **Ezekiel 5:11b**, "therefore I will withdraw" is better translated in the Hebrew "I will do the shaving myself." God is obviously referring back to the shaving of Ezekiel's head and face.

**Ezekiel 5:12** God will show no pity, nor show mercy. The effect will be to divide the population into thirds. They will be decimated.

**Ezekiel 5:13** refocuses their attention on Yahweh's angry disposition toward Jerusalem. He will vent and spend his full fury against them. And again, the only way I can really stomach this; and I think appropriately Biblically, is that as we read through these hard parts of Ezekiel, we must always always see in the shadows The Messiah. And as we read the Bible, we must always see the shadow of The Cross falling across the page. If we could read Scripture right now somehow with our lights with The Cross so that an actual shadow of The Cross would fall across the very page of the Bible that

would be a great sign-act. Because, it's going to be Jesus The Son of God The Messiah Himself who is going to take the full and ultimate vent of the Father's wrath against my sin and your sin. Right now, Israel is going to be the one that gets hit in the face with God's punishment. But, ultimately, God is so loving that His own Son takes that. That's why He is called the propitiation as the One who takes the wrath.

The final statement in **Ezekiel 5:13** is the key to the chapter, if not to Ezekiel's prophetic ministry as a whole: Yahweh's announcement of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the decimation of its population has been driven by his passion—a jealous, divine fire. Because he loves so deeply, God must respond vigorously. His relationship with His own people has been terribly violated.

**Ezekiel 5:14-15**, attention shifts to Jerusalem's infidelity; she who had been elevated for praise, for fame, and for honor will become the butt of derision.

**Ezekiel 5:16-17** detail the agents standing at God's disposal to carry out the punishments: famine, arrows, vicious beasts, pestilence, bloodshed, sword.

### Theological implications

- In the context of a covenant relationship, the acceptance of the privilege must be accompanied by the assumption of responsibility. **cf. Luke 12:48.**
- Those who have presumed upon the light of God's grace must reckon with the darkness of His fury.
- The relationship between the LORD and His people is open to public view. The nations are watching to see if God's own people are obedient to Him—or not. This nation is watching the Church, God's people within the nation. Are we going to be obedient or not?
- The LORD alone is the master of life and death.
- Word of God is sure; He does not speak in vain; What He says will come to pass.
- 593 BC Ezekiel pronounced this word of judgment. In 586 BC it was born out.
- All of this must finally point us to the Messiah of Israel, our Lord Jesus Christ, who on the cross bore the ultimate pouring out of His Father's wrath against our sin. Jesus took the punishment for all—Jews and Gentiles—who would cling to his death for their life. See **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** and there you see what The Lord Himself has done for us.

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12 ESV** 13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. 14 As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind— 15 so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. **Isaiah 53:1-12** 1 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and



rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? 9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. 11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

**Diane Denekas** shares her heart rendering story about visiting a Holocaust survivor, a real life example of God's grace to enable her survival and hearing her speak of lying on left and right sides in tight quarters, reminding Diane of Ezekiel.

**End of Class 11 December 1 Handout and Zoom Recording**

**Class 12 - December 8 2020**

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to You Father through Your Son The Messiah Jesus in Your Holy Spirit in great thanksgiving, Lord, that we live and breathe and move only by Your will and by Your grace and Love. So Lord, we know that you've done so much for us already that if you never do another thing for us, You have done more than enough for our lives now and for eternity, and for that we are so grateful. But, Lord in the days we have on earth, whatever number of days that may be, let us also obey Your Word here. Let us be people who do listen with ears of faith and do see with eyes of faith that respond by lives of faith. Lord, let us learn from the sins of Your own people in Ezekiel's day that we, O Lord, may repent of our sins today and follow You most fully. Father, if our study of Ezekiel is just a historical remembrance, we are to be pitied. But, if our study of Ezekiel is a call to action today, let it be to Your Glory, and we pray that it will be. In Jesus the Savior's Name we pray, Amen.

We are still in the section called "The Dramatist" where we have now another set of sign-acts. We have two of them **Ezekiel 12:1-16** and the second sign-act in **Ezekiel 12:17-20**. **Ezekiel 12:1-16** will be a prophetic word by king Zedekiah, who was the puppet king put on the throne by the Babylonians back in Jerusalem. We'll see this in **Jeremiah 39** where Zedekiah is forced to march out of the City as exile. And, of course, he has been blinded by the Babylonians. That was a very common practice that you blind your captives, especially the leaders, so they cannot then lead anybody into escape.

"Packed for Exile" We find prophetic allusions to King Zedekiah's nocturnal escape from Jerusalem through the breach in the city wall and his blinding by the Babylonians (**Jer 39:2-7**). God's judgment will fall.

**Ezekiel 12:1-2 Judah's Captivity Symbolized** 1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.

*It's going to be about the fall of Jerusalem and their rebellious house. This house is the house of exiles and so they're no different than the people back in Jerusalem. But what God is saying is that He's given us the ears to hear The Word of God; He's given us eyes to see the acts of God and yet we are blind and deaf to Him. And so we have no excuse; no excuse to say, "God, we didn't know this was coming." He has given us every sensory perception that we would need, spiritually and physically.*

*Again, while the exact dating of this dramatic prophecy is left unsaid, it appears to have been told to the exiles and written down prior to the fall of Jerusalem. Zedekiah was taken captive and blinded in 589 BC.*

*"The rebellious house" is this "house of exiles" in Babylon. Ezekiel speaks a well-known proverb to them to highlight their main problem: They refuse to respond to external*

*stimuli. Their “sensory organs” have become dulled. They’ve failed to perceive all the divine signs pointing to God’s call to repentance—before it’s too late.*

*In essence, this prophecy says that the exiles are no different spiritually or morally from those left behind in Jerusalem.*

**Ezekiel 12:3-7** **3** As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. **4** You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile, and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who must go into exile. **5** In their sight dig through the wall, and bring your baggage out through it. **6** In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder and carry it out at dusk. You shall cover your face that you may not see The Land, for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel.” **7** And I did as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands. I brought out my baggage at dusk, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight.

**Ezekiel 12:3-7**, the sign-act is obviously to act out the siege of Jerusalem.

*First, Ezekiel is to pack an exile’s knapsack in preparation for a long journey. In other words, if you knew your house was on fire and you had a minute to gather whatever you wanted to gather before you rushed out of your house, the exile’s knapsack would contain the bare essentials from your house that you would want to take on a journey. The Hebrew word for this knapsack refers to a common item found in most homes. Most of exiles would still have theirs from their deportation from Jerusalem. It would have been a cloth or skin sack, filled with basic necessities that a person could grab on their way forced from their home.*

*He is to carry this bag out of his house in full view and set it outside his door in full view. Perhaps the exiles thought it meant that they would soon repack their bags to return to Jerusalem. But that’s not the case at all.*

*In the evening, Ezekiel is to go outside his house and begin digging a hole in the wall from the outside in. But notice: he’s to dig from the outside in. Now Ezekiel is has shifted roles. He is no longer representing the people inside the city trying to escape, but the enemy, the Babylonians. They’re the ones who made the breach into the City wall of Jerusalem.*

*Then at twilight, Ezekiel must carry the knapsack out of the house. (He apparently takes it back inside the house after making the breach in the wall.) He takes it back outside through this same hole. He walks off with sack, in the growing darkness, in view of the people. It would have been a foreboding sight.*

**Ezekiel 12:6b** adds one more detail: Ezekiel is to emerge through the hole in the wall with his face covered so he does not see The Land. It’s to prevent him from seeing the

ground, but the full interpretation comes in **Ezekiel 12:12**. Now, in Hebrew that is what it says. It does not say the ground. If we were to talk, you and I would say, "Well, my face was covered. I couldn't even see the ground I was walking on," right? But this is a very important understanding The Land means The Land of Israel is going to be washed of the people of Israel by God's punishment. The Land is so important in the Bible. And that's why today that we pray for Israel and the peace of Jerusalem. That's why we say that The Land of Israel is still under God's Covenant; not that the nation, the state of Israel is perfect. No. Governments are not perfect. But the government, the nation of Israel surrounds and protects The Land which is part of the Covenant. These things we believe are still Biblically and very much still in play.

**Ezekiel 12:8-16** 8 In the morning the word of the Lord came to me: 9 "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?'

*Morning comes, and the silence is broken. The exiles had eyes, but they could not see. God instructs Ezekiel to give the interpretation.*

10 Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it.'

*For the first time, we fully know that Zedekiah is the target of this sign-act. He's the current king back in Jerusalem. But Ezekiel calls him "prince," not even wanting to say "king." There is only one true King over Israel, Yahweh himself. Symbolically, the capture of Zedekiah points to the capture of the entire nation*

11 Say, 'I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them. They shall go into exile, into captivity.'

*Ezekiel is then explicit that he is their sign-act. The people back home face the same fate the exiles have experienced. The events of 597 BC will be repeated.*

12 And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder at dusk, and shall go out. They shall dig through the wall to bring him out through it. He shall cover his face, that he may not see the land with his eyes.

*Focus is on Zedekiah: He will pack his knapsack and leave Jerusalem at twilight. In the meantime, the invading army will breach the wall to capture the king. The king will leave with his face covered. The key here is that he will not see "the land." The king and his people will be forced from the land of Israel, a great punishment from the LORD.*

13 And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there. **14** And I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops, and I will unsheathe the sword after them.

*Here we learn that Yahweh is the prince's real enemy. Yahweh will capture Zedekiah like a hunter captures prey and bring him to Babylon. But Zedekiah will not see the land, for he will be blinded—a common practice in the ancient Near East. God will then scatter all of Zedekiah's troops. No one or nothing will support Zedekiah now.*

15 And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the countries. 16 But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the Lord.”

*This is a prophetic word that Zedekiah will be captured. Notice that he is called, “Prince.” Ezekiel cannot bring himself to say king because Ezekiel knows there is one king in Israel and that is Yahweh Himself. And so Ezekiel will be blinded. He will be brought out of Jerusalem. He will die, then, in captivity in Babylon.*

*And, then the goal of the judgment in **Ezekiel 12:15-16** is that the people will finally acknowledge that God is God. But the hope, the glimmer, is that there will be a remnant who is rescued and they will be saved only by God's grace.*

*Therefore, Yahweh's goal in the casting out of the people is to make them recognize his character and his person. When God completes his judgment, they will acknowledge him. But in an unexpected turn, Yahweh holds out a glimmer of hope. He will rescue his remnant! It's only by grace they are saved. They will then recognize God's character and acknowledge their own sin.*

### **Theological Implications**

The danger of spiritual atrophy is greatest for those with the richest spiritual tradition. In other words, we are people who do have ears to hear and eyes to see. And if we, of all people, like Israel, refuse to hear and obey the Word of God and follow His directions, well, the spiritual fall is even greater for us.

Those who have “no eyes or no ears” may be forgiven for their oblivion to divine reality. But for those in covenant with the LORD, yet refuse to see or hear the truth, God's judgment comes. We cannot turn or twist the Word of God to suit ourselves. God's Word must be heard and understood on his terms. It IS The Word of God and we cannot make it into a Word that is easier for us to understand or to follow.

The LORD remains sovereign over history, in spite of any appearance to the contrary. The goal of His discipline is always that we may acknowledge our sinfulness, confess our righteousness, and submit to His Lordship. That we might believe, repent and follow Him again. His punishment is never just for punishment. It's always for the purposes to bring His people back to Him.

Well, God bless you. I will be praying for you; hope you stay well. We'll be worshipping on line; hope you can join us on our YouTube Channel this Wednesday and the following Wednesday at 6:30 for The Advent service and the same for Sunday Worship

on YouTube. We are hoping to regather for those who feel comfortable on December 20th so we hope that's going to be the case.

**Closing Prayer:** So, Lord, thank You for Your Love; that You love us so much that You warn us that today, O Lord, we may be people who listen and return to You. We pray, Lord, for all those who are not following You. We pray especially for those who know Your Word and yet you have intentionally rejected it. Father of Mercy, we pray especially that they will hear and return to You before it's too late. For this world, O Lord, for all who are sick, for Donna Powell in our Church preparing for surgery on Friday. For the blessed births of Jennifer and Champ Knight's twin boys and their well being and for all those others on our prayer list, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

Bless you, brothers and sisters, let me know if I can do anything for you *“remotely” (with a smile)*.

**(Class 12 December 8 and Handout continues at the beginning of Class 13 Zoom Recording with transcription remaining with the Class 12 content until complete):**

We are going to finish up this brief section from last week. Again God is telling the exiles back home in Judah that the judgment is going to fall. And we are going to finish up **Ezekiel 12:17-20**. Again, we're looking at the sign-acts that Ezekiel, “The Dramatist,” is acting out The Word of God.

**A pantomime of horror, Ezekiel 12:17-20** **17** And the word of the Lord came to me: **18** “Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink water with trembling and with anxiety.

*God commands Ezekiel to perform another sign-act. The quaking while eating and drinking is an ominous sign of coming horror. “Quaking” is the same word for “earthquake.” It produces a deep and foreboding anxiety and trembling. We can see Ezekiel eating and drinking in front of the fellow exiles (“the people of The Land”) with his hands shaking and his whole body trembling.*

**19** And say to the people of the land, Thus says the Lord God concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink water in dismay. In this way her land will be stripped of all it contains, on account of the violence of all those who dwell in it. **20** And the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

*We learn here that the inhabitants of Jerusalem upon The Land of Israel will be the ones shaking and quaking. The Land itself will suffer. The covenant curse of **Leviticus 26:43** is realized. When the inhabited cities lie in ruins and The Land itself is wasted, then the exiles will acknowledge the person and presence of the Lord God Almighty.*

*And so, it is pretty obvious that this sign-act is that Ezekiel is to take food and take water and he is to eat it with his hand quivering and his body trembling. He is acting out a kind of earthquake of God's wrath, if you will, with his whole body acting out this fear that the judgment of God is coming. And, in one of the most severe judgments that God could ever do is to fulfill the curse of **Leviticus 26:43** that The Land itself will suffer. The Land is central to the covenant and promises of God to Israel, and we believe that that's still in play. And, the fact that The Land itself will suffer shows us the depth of the peoples' sin. It's only then, you see, that through the wrath of God that the people will know that The Lord is Lord. And, they have wasted His grace upon them; and the only way now He can get their attention is through His wrath.*

### **Theological Implications**

And this goes back to The Laird's question prior to Class 13: In God's system of justice, I think that God's judgment is always just. Whatever He does is just because He is God and He cannot carry out judgment or wrath in an unjust and improper way. The sign-act serves as a solemn warning to those who call themselves God's people or consider themselves religious and cultured but show their disrespect for God through violent and inhuman and blasphemous conduct.

Even in times of crisis, people may live under the illusion that all is well but, obviously, that's just an illusion and ultimately it's only by feasting on the Bread of Life by faith in Jesus Christ, The Bread of Life, that we can have life. And, still today, for those who refuse now all the promises of Israel fulfilled in The Messiah Jesus and for those who reject Jesus, the Scripture ends in the Book of Revelation without any doubt that they fall under God's eternal sentence of suffering and death and hell. And so, the Book of Revelation's final prophetic vision of the Scriptures in which we see so much of Ezekiel fulfilled and completed, Revelation is both one of the most amazing, glorifying Christ filled Love of God books in all of Scripture, right along beside; it's one of the hardest, harshest most judgment filled books in all of Scripture. So, it all comes down then, "Who is Jesus? Will we believe in Him that we may have life now and forever.

In summary, we do not live by bread alone—or simply eating and drinking. Life is found in following the example of Ezekiel, that is, finding nourishment in the revelation of God and living by IT. Jesus The Messiah is the Bread of Life. To those who live in, by and through Jesus, God pronounces the sentence of life. To those who refuse, He utters the sentence of death.

Questions or comments about that short section before we get in to Class 13's lessons for the day in **Ezekiel 12**.

**End of Class 12 December 8 Discussion, Handout and Zoom Recording**

**Class 13 - December 15, 2020**

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to You, Father, through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in the Power of the Holy Spirit in thanksgiving that You have gathered us in the midst of all the other stresses going on in the world; that we can have this time with You, Lord, and in Your Word and with each other. Of course, we are always mindful of the those in need who are not with us today. Especially, we pray for Solomon; for Andy; we remember Steve and John; we pray, Lord, for Jim; pray for Bailey; for George, for Greg and for all those who we name in our hearts before You now. In Your Holy Name, we pray, Amen.

I received a very interesting and thoughtful email a few minutes ago from Terrie and Steve in Florida. Good afternoon, Terrie and Steve. And, they wrote saying that “You’re kind of impatient to get through all this God’s wrath stuff, huh? It’s not the funnest part of Scripture, right?” So, I hope that we can end today on a better note, but the Laird’s ask, if I may read this to the group that, “Ezekiel’s audience, of course, is before the Messiah actually comes (although today we’re going to see some Messianic hope that’s built into Ezekiel.) The question that The Lairds have is this, “Is God’s wrath less harsh because now that The Messiah has come we are cleansed by the blood of Christ? Does God view us differently today than He viewed Israel in Ezekiel’s time?”

Anybody want to weigh in on those really searching questions? So, when you read about the wrath of God being poured out throughout the Book of Ezekiel, I guess the question then is, Steve and Terrie, are you asking then that now that Christ The Messiah has come, are you asking if God’s wrath has been backed off; if it’s been satisfied or what?

**Terrie:** “Steve says, yes.”

**Will O’Brien:** “We did a study in young adults through John and we would always ask the same questions as we were going through it. At the end of each chapter we would ask, “Is the Old Testament and the New Testament teaching the same thing?” And, we ask that because we need to be able to answer that question. One of the things that Jesus would do was He constantly would refer back to the Old Testament..things that were said..things that were written. Every single thing that was mentioned in the Old Testament would come to pass. Like God’s Promises and everything He said would come to pass, and that includes anything that would be God’s wrath; God’s judgment. I mean, from what I’ve seen from Jesus, He says, you know, in **John 10** He talks about being The Gatekeeper and saying, “There is no way to the fold except through Him and every other way is just going to be completely futile.” To me that sounds like the same God. His yes is yes and His no is no; I think His judgment is good, but also I don’t think His wrath has become lesser.”

**Martha Ratcliffe:** Personal opinion; I can’t quote the Scripture of anything. I think God sees sin today as He saw sin in those days. Sin is sin, whether it was before Jesus’



grace was upon us or after. I think, when we look around the world, we can see places of God's wrath. We see Christians persecuted because of angry unbelievers. If we see persecution in the past; we see persecution in the present. We see God's wrath in the past; we see God's wrath in the present. I think as more and more nations turn away from God, we will see more and more of God's wrath. We may be, as Christians, collateral damage in that process or we may be the remnant. But, I don't think God has changed in His opinion of sinful individuals and sinful groups and sinful nations.

**Mark:** And so, these are good questions and I know that this past summer, Gerry McDermott led us through a book study in Michael McClymond's book about the heresy of universal salvation, which in our day and age, if there's one doctrine of classic Biblical Christianity that is probably the most fought against is the doctrine of hell. People just cannot tolerate the idea that there could be hell and judgment. But, of course, the person who says more about hell than anyone in Scripture is is The Lord, Himself.

So, I appreciate what Will and Martha have said, and I agree with both of you. And, I will put it this way, Steve and Terri, I think God's view and God's wrath have not changed, but we just see them in a new way because ultimately we see that the full wrath and the fury of the Father was cast then against His own Son, Our Lord. And so, The Cross is indicative of the Father who has not changed. He cannot tolerate sin and He has great wrath against it. But, He Himself in this great mystery of The Trinity, His own Son has taken that wrath on the chin for us. And so, God's wrath against sin has not changed, but we just see it in a new Light with The Cross. And, if anything now, the wrath of God in The Light of the Cross magnifies the Love of God. And so it's the great paradox that now we see that the wrath of God is so great against sin that He would give His only Son for us just magnifies the glory and the grace and the Love of God. And so in the New Testament we have a lot about judgment and wrath and ultimate sentencing to hell. So, God's wrath hasn't changed, but we just see it in new light in The Cross. Obviously, He's given us a new way to look upon grace and to receive grace through Christ.

Good question. You all are so thoughtful and so faithful, all of you, and I really appreciate that. Thank you, Steve and Terrie for sending that email. If you have questions like that, let The Lairds be a good example to us that I would love to hear from you.

**The Dramatist section continues in Ezekiel 21.** We are going to pick up at **Ezekiel 21:18-20** (*following the opening prayer and discussion*) where there's a sign-act; a dramatic acting out. Let's remember what happens then in the first part of **Ezekiel 21** entitled, **"The Lord has drawn His sword."**

In the first half of **Ezekiel 21**, the LORD promises to draw His sword of judgement against Judah for their wickedness. Now, He commands Ezekiel to act out this coming judgment. This works together to produce a clearer image of "the sword of Yahweh."

**Ezekiel 21:18-20 18** The word of the Lord came to me again: 19 “As for you, son of man, mark two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come. Both of them shall come from the same land. And make a signpost; make it at the head of the way to a city. **20** Mark a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites and to Judah, into Jerusalem the fortified.

*First, Ezekiel is going to make a crude map in the dirt. And then, he's going to make a signpost, remember he's acting these out; the exiles are sitting around. And the signpost is going to say, "Coming from the north is a signpost either going left, which is to Amman, Jordan; or right to Jerusalem in Israel. It is probably then Damascus that sits at the head of this fork in the road. Ezekiel is drawing a map to show the king of Babylon is going to come across from the east; he's going to come then north of Israel to Damascus; and, he's going to look down from the north and as he looks down from the north to his left is east and that's going to be Amman, the Ammonites; and to his right is west and that's going to be Jerusalem. And so, Ezekiel is acting out this sign that God's going to bring the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, and he's going to have a choice. Will he attack Amman or will he attack Jerusalem? And, they are both fortified cities.*

*So imagine, then, you're looking up; you're looking on top of the map from the north to the south; and you're seeing these two cities and you're deciding, if you're the king of Babylon, which city you are going to attack.*

*On our pilgrimages to the Holy Land, some of us have been to Amman. Now, obviously, Rabbah of the Ammonites is the capital of the Ammonites.... Amman and Jericho and Damascus are probably the three most ancient, probably in our part of the world, the three most ancient inhabited cities in the world. There have been people there for a long time. Here the exiles are seeing this prophecy being acted out.*

*The dramatized sign-act consists of two principle actions. First, the prophet is to make, or draw, a map with two roadways, originating in the same country, presumably by scratching lines in the soil with a stick or finger. Second, Ezekiel is to make a signpost and place it at the fork in the road.*

*Damascus is most likely the place at the fork in the road represented here. At Damascus a traveler from the north (such as the king of Babylon) would need to make a decision: left to east of the Jordan or right to west of it.*

*Rabbah of the Ammonites is the full designation for the Ammonite capital. This (modern Amman) is the only Ammonite city named in the OT, located 23 miles east of the Jordan. Judah is described as a "fortified city," sitting west (right) of the Jordan when viewed from the north, thought the fortifications will stand no chance against the LORD.*

**Ezekiel 21:21-23 21** For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination. He shakes the arrows; he consults the

teraphim; he looks at the liver. 22 Into his right hand comes the divination for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth with murder, to lift up the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build siege towers. **23** But to them it will seem like a false divination. They have sworn solemn oaths, but he brings their guilt to remembrance, that they may be taken.

*An interpretation is now introduced of the sign-act and we come to understand that this is a military map, not a travelog or sketch of trade routes, and it's the king of Babylon who's going to bring his sword on the people of Yahweh.*

*Now we hear these practices in the ancient world of divination; i.e., how can you discern the will of the gods if you are a pagan.*

*The insertion highlights that this is a military map, not a sketch of trade routes. It is the road by which the sword, that is, the battle, will come. Furthermore, it provides the first clear indication in Ezekiel that God has chosen the king of Babylon to bring this sword. King Nebuchadnezzar must decide whether to direct his attack against the Judahns or the Ammonites. He stops at Damascus in hesitation.*

*In customary ancient practice, he resolves the issue by divination, that is, how do I discern the will of the gods if you are a pagan. Three of the ancient practices we find here in a series of procedures designed to determine the mind of the gods. So he resorts to three such procedures:*

*First he "shakes the arrows" – a practice known as "belomancy" (belo means arrow; "mancy" means to discern). It would be like drawing straws. And so, he would have arrows broken in different lengths and choose an arrow which would be Ammon or Jerusalem. Belomancy consisted of shaking two inscribed arrows and then drawing one as one draws a lot, on the assumption the gods had determined which one was selected.*

*He "consults the teraphim [that is, the idols]." Technically in the Hebrew teraphim means household gods. You may remember the other place in Scripture where the teraphim are mentioned is in **Genesis 31** when Rachel steals the teraphim, the household gods of her uncle Laban. We know that even the Israelites lapsed into paganism; and they would fill their house with little statues of a variety of gods in little niches where they could bow themselves and pray to.*

*And so now Nebuchadnezzar is consulting his household gods. In his baggage of his military train from Babylon over to Damascus to attack Jerusalem, he's going to have bags full of little gods, and little statues. He is going to carry his household gods wherever he goes.*

*A modern parallel to this, thankfully, I do not hear much about it now, but it used to be that people would have a rabbit's foot in their pocket; maybe on their keychain and somehow having a rabbit's foot brought them good luck, whether they believed that or*

*it was just tongue in cheek. But, that's a similar practice where you would have something in your pocket for good luck—a rabbit's foot, a special coin, something and that would be kind of a parallel to consulting the teraphim.*

*In the third one he “examines the liver” – known as “hepatoscopy;” “hepato” means “liver,” “scope” means “to view.” This was a very common ancient practice of the Babylonians especially who practiced this form of divination. The priest would divide the liver of a sacrificed animal into a series of 50 sections would be mapped, and any marks or irregularities or blemishes in these sections would supposedly reveal the divine will to the inquirer; somehow it would help one understand the will of the gods.*

*The most important to Nebuchadnezzar was this third practice when the king examines the liver, the omen appears on the right side. This told him that he must attack Jerusalem. We then learn of the horrifying consequences of this divine decision **Ezekiel 21:22**. A siege of Jerusalem will begin. So, at the crossroads the king does what the pagans do. He practices his ways to understand the gods and then he followed suit.*

*Now, the exiles would have been sitting there with their mouths open, like, “We can't believe this! Jerusalem is going to be the one that's going to be attacked?! Surely, God would protect Jerusalem.” But no.*

*The reactions of those in Jerusalem are predicted. They refuse to take the results of the divination seriously. They assumed the city could not fall, both because of the fortifications and Yahweh's protection. They also assumed the Babylonian king would recognize the oath of loyal that Zedekiah had pledged.*

*So here's the irony that drips from this scene. A pagan king uses strictly forbidden techniques of divination and discovers the will of God, but the people of God reject this omen and seal their own fate.*

*The Israelites would have been forbidden to ever do those things. The exiles would have known that the Babylonians were poised against Jerusalem as they listened to and watched Ezekiel. They would have been horrified.*

*So, it's an ironic tragic scene. The people of God have The Word of God; they've got the Torah; they've got God Himself; they've got the Temple and yet their eyes are blind to all those. And here's a pagan king Nebuchadnezzar using forbidden practices, and somehow he's able to discern the will of the Lord?*

**Ezekiel 21:24-27** We've got the crimes of the people; why Jerusalem's going to be attached **24** “Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have made your guilt to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand. **25** And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment,

*Ezekiel launches into a tirade against Zedekiah who ruled as a puppet king for over ten years until he was blinded and taken in chains in exile. unequalled in this book or any prophet for its harshness; one of the harshest tirades against any of the kings of Judah and Israel and all of Scripture. He pulls no punches. Ezekiel sees Zedekiah's acts as sacrilege.*

26 thus says the Lord God: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted. **27** A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it. This also shall not be, until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to him.

*It is a particular tirade against Zedekiah as the crimes of the people are revealed, and they are exposed as guilty. It is one of the harshest pronouncements on any of the kings of Judah, of Israel in all of Scripture.*

*Ezekiel prophesies and calls on the king to relinquish authority by removing the insignia of royalty, his turban and crown, the signs of Zedekiah rule and authority will be removed and everything will be ruined. Moreover, Ezekiel foresees a wholesale revolution affecting all strata of society. All will be ruin! Yahweh is turning the world upside down.*

*To refer back to Steve and Terrie's earlier question, there is a glimmer—a glimmer of hope. I think this is a Messianic sign. God is coming to whom real judgment belongs and we are grateful that it's going to be King Jesus ultimately and we can place our lives into His hands.*

*While Nebuchadnezzar will be Yahweh's agent, as **Ezekiel 21:27** underscores, many have also seen a Messianic sign here: to "He who comes" belongs the judgment. Such belongs ultimately to Messiah Jesus!*

A new oracle that begins with **Ezekiel 21:28. Ezekiel 21:28-32 28** "And you, son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord God concerning the Ammonites and concerning their reproach; say, A sword, a sword is drawn for the slaughter. It is polished to consume and to flash like lightning— 29 while they see for you false visions, while they divine lies for you—to place you on the necks of the profane wicked, whose day has come, the time of their final punishment. 30 Return it to its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you. 31 And I will pour out my indignation upon you; I will blow upon you with the fire of my wrath, and I will deliver you into the hands of brutish men, skillful to destroy. **32** You shall be fuel for the fire. Your blood shall be in the midst of the land. You shall be no more remembered, for I the Lord have spoken."

*So, Babylon brings the sword against Israel by the will of God. Babylon now is the one that is going to be judged. Eventually the sword will be turned on Babylon—on king Nebuchadnezzar, even though he and his military served the purposes of God, this incident does not mean they were morally absolved of the falsehood of leaving and not*

*following the law of God. Since they did not, they will be judged. And, we know that in 539 B.C. King Cyrus of the Median Persian Empire came and destroyed the Babylonian empire in 539 B.C. And, it's going to be king Cyrus who is going then to allow the Jews in exile to go back home. And so, we see that the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar is an agent of God's judgment and we see then later that another pagan king called Cyrus is the agent of God's restoration and grace.*

*It gives me great confidence that in our day too the Hand of God is sovereign over all leaders.*

*Ezekiel is commanded to issue a prophecy concerning Amman. They would have been relieved to learn that the sword is not pointed at them. They taunt Judah with their "sword song" **Ezekiel 21:29**.*

*In **Ezekiel 21:30-32**, attention returns to the sword itself, Babylon. They are to return to their own land. God had created Nebuchadnezzar for this very purpose, and now his purpose will be completed. Now he must go home to face the judgment of God himself. Nebuchadnezzar's call to serve as God's divine agent did not absolve the king of his own moral responsibility and conduct.*

*In the end, Babylon will receive the great and hot judgment of God poured over them.*

### **Theological Implications**

Here's a sobering one, God becomes the enemy of those who claim to be is people but refuse to accept the responsibilities accompanying the privilege, which reminds me of Jesus in the gospel when people come and say, "Lord, we belong to You; Lord, Lord." And He says, I don't know who you are, depart from Me."

So, there is a sense, brothers and sisters, now that Christ has come, we know, beyond any shadow of doubt, the love of God; that He would love the world so much that he gave His only begotten Son. But because Messiah has come we absolutely have zero excuse not to believe and to be a part of His kingdom. And so, it has raised the bar.

The notion of divine wrath itself is reprehensible to many. That it should be directed at His own people is intolerable. But God's application of His sovereignty is not affected by human feelings. If "His people" spurn His grace, they cannot expect to be spared the fate of the wicked.

The Lord is faithful to His Word. He is faithful to His Word of salvation and He is faithful to His Word of judgment. This applies not only to promises of well being (shalom) but also to His warnings of judgment for apostasy and infidelity. When God's sword fell on Israel, it was in keeping with the covenant's promise of blessing—and judgment.

The achievement of the divine agenda is not bound by human definitions of propriety. God's will was revealed here through pagan practices. However, the commissioning offers no divine immunity from God's scrutiny as His agent. Those charged with fulfilling God's commission must account to Him how they have executed the charge.

God is going to carry out His will in whatever means He finds necessary, even if it means employing a pagan king in practices of divination.

In **Ezekiel 37** we're going to find the last of the sign-acts, the last of the dramatic sermons that God stirs Ezekiel to preach. The first half of **Ezekiel 37** is the very famous and beloved and important vision of the dry bones in the valley. One of the most amazing visions of hope in all The Word of God, and we'll get to it after Christmas. So just keep that in mind that the vision has been cast; that the dry bones will come alive and then God's people will be restored.

From a human point of view, Ezekiel's vision of remnants of the original 12-tribe nation streaming back to the hereditary homeland seems impossible. The northern tribes of Israel had been vanquished by the Assyrians 150 years earlier. Plus, those Judah had long repudiated their northern kinsman. Like the dry bones being restored to life, every phase of the restoration of Israel required direct and miraculous divine intervention.

And, now we're going to look at the second half of **Ezekiel 37** in which Ezekiel is going to act out the promise of God's restoration. The sign-act is going to show the exiles, perhaps, the most miraculous unbelievable promise they could ever think of. That is, God is going to unite all Twelve Tribes, both Israel and Judah will be His united people again under one king. And, if you're in exile in the 6th Century you think that is beyond impossible. Because Israel, the Northern Tribes were annihilated by the Assyrians and the Assyrians mixed their Jewish people with Assyrian people in **722**. And so, Judah had long ago said that Israel no longer belongs to God. To think that God's going to restore ancient Israel, north and south, all Twelve Tribes, that's incredible.

Throughout Scripture we are told over and over, "With God nothing will be impossible," and, of course, that's what Gabriel said to Mary with the virgin birth. And, at some point, brothers and sisters, we just have to believe it; that with God nothing will be impossible; that with God there is nothing in our lives right now that will be impossible for God to do if it's His will. That to me is one of the great promises and realities of The Word of God that the Lord really wants us to hold onto.

**Ezekiel 37:15-20** **15** The word of the Lord came to me: **16** "Son of man, take a stick and write on it, 'For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him.' **17** And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. **18** And when your people say to you, 'Will you not tell us what you mean by these?' **19** say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him. And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand. **20** When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes,

*Dramatizing the new national reality, Ezekiel is to take two pieces of wood; holds them up and joins them together to represent how Israel and Judah are going to be united. And he inscribes on them the names of Judah and Joseph, bring them together to create a single piece, and holds it up for all to see.*

*So, with these sticks; these wooden pieces in his hands, Ezekiel then inscribes Judah and Joseph on them, respectively. Joseph was the father of Ephraim and Manasseh, the two dominant of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel. The united pieces of wood are to be carried about as a visual reminder of Yahweh's promise.*

Ezekiel's interpretation in **Ezekiel 37:21-28 21** then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land.

*Ethnic reunion will not be enough to restore the national integrity of Israel. Now a second pair of promises announces Yahweh's determination to return the exiles to their homeland. Only the "land of Israel" will do to restore territorial integrity.*

22 And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.

*God further promises the restoration of Israel's political integrity by restoring the monarchy. A single king will rule over all the tribes together. This promise assures the exiles that the full-fledged and unitary nationhood is included in Yahweh's plan for Israel.*

23 They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the back slidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

*This is music to our ears after all the wrath that we've encountered.*

24 "My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. 25 They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. 26 I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. 27 My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **28** Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore."

*So, some of the great promises, not just in Ezekiel, but in all the Bible.*



*These sticks of wood can also be translated as boards of wood or panels. If that's the case then it would make sense that Ezekiel could write out on each piece what the interpretation stands for. And so **Ezekiel 37:21-24** represents the first piece of wood that God's going to create a single nation from the two nations. And, He's going to do that in four ways.*

**Ezekiel 37:21-28, proclaiming the new national reality**

*Ezekiel now gives God's explanation of the sign-act. One plausible view about the sticks of wood Ezekiel uses is that The Word actually refers to wooden writing boards. If so, the boards would have been readily available to write out the interpretation for all to see. Indeed, these verses result in two panels of interpretation almost equal in length.*

**Ezekiel 37:21-24** give us the first panel; first piece of wood showing that God's going to create a single nation from two nations.

**Ezekiel 37:21a** *Yahweh promises to restore the ethnic unity between Israel and Judah. He will create the "descendants of Israel" for Himself, not just Judah or Ephraim.*

*Remember, the Judeans rejected Israel after the Assyrians because Assyrians' practice when they conquered a people, was the inner-mingling of other conquered peoples in that land. The Jews who were left in Israel would have married non-Jewish people. And so over time this is where the Samaritans come from. Samaritans are the descendants of the people left in Israel inner-mingling with pagan people. That's why the Samaritans were so hated in the Lord's Day because they were considered ethnically inferior and profane. God says, "I'm going to make you one ethnic people. No longer will you hold judgment against each other."*

*Secondly, The Land will be restored, praise God, The Land of Israel will be restored.*

*Thirdly, there's going to be political unity and political integrity. Because God's going to restore the Davidic monarchy; there will be one king from the Line of David.*

*And, finally in **Ezekiel 37:23-24a** there is going to be spiritual unity and integrity; there's going to be a covenant of renewal.*

*When we hear that phrase in the last part of **Ezekiel 37:23** "and they shall be my people, and I will be their God," that we hear throughout the Old Testament, that's covenantal language. And so God is going to say, There's going to be a new spiritual unity because they're going to be united under the Davidic king in the covenant.*

*That's why at St. John when we used to have bulletins for worship—pre-COVID-19 days when you could actually safely hand out a piece of paper, you might remember that on those bulletins it would say, "The Covenant Renewal Ceremony" or something*

like. I forget even what the wording is. The idea is that every Lord's Day we come together to renew the Covenant.

Worship is a sign-act. There is so much about Ezekiel that teaches us about worship. Why do we stand and kneel and sit and come forward for Communion and bow? Why do some of us even cross ourselves or raise our hands? Why do we close our eyes? Why do we act out all those things? Why is there so much liturgy? Worship is a sign-act of what we believe and so that people who are not Christians can come in and say, "What does this mean?" and we can give an interpretation to them.

God further promises the restoration of Israel's spiritual integrity. The departure of God's glory from the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem reflected the rupture between Israel and God in **586 BC**. Ezekiel's vision of a restored Israel must also include righting this wrong. Yahweh will rescue and cleanse his people. It will be a covenant renewal ceremony: "they shall be my people, and I shall be their God." Furthermore, the spiritual renewal will be concretized by the appointment of David as king in Israel, in accordance to the promise in **2 Samuel 7:16**. The new ruler in David's line will be a true shepherd/king over God's people. Of course, we hear the promise of the ultimate King, the Messiah, in this passage.

**Ezekiel 37:24b-28** gives the interpretative material of the second panel. The theme shifts dramatically from the unification of the nation to the permanence of the restored God-nation-land relationships. It is highlighted by the fivefold use of "olam" – "forever." Our coming salvation will be forever! The key word here is "olam," one of the most important words in the Bible. And that word means "forevermore." The word "olam" appears five times in this section; that God is the forever God; that He will forgive us of our sins forever; He will bring us into salvation forever. He is true to His covenant forever. I love that word, "olam." It is one of the reasons why The Land of Israel is so important because "olam" is associated with The Land as a forever promise of God.

- **Ezekiel 37:24b-25** gives the evidence and source of Israel's renaissance and renewal which will be the covenant of peace. First, the nation will have a new commitment to the will of God; the covenant of shalom.
- Second, the Israelites will occupy their hereditary homeland forever. The land is defined historically as the same land the nation occupied in the past. The exile will be reversed.
- Third, Israel will enjoy the rule of David, Yahweh's servant, forever. What happened to Zedekiah in 586 BC will never happen again.

**Ezekiel 37: 26-27** we learn the source of Israel's renaissance. God will make a "covenant of peace" with them. This will be the one covenant between God and his people renewed. The basis of the nation's eternal hope is Yahweh's eternal, immutable covenant with the ancestors. God will dwell with his people forever. We hear this completed and perfected in the great vision in **Revelation 21:1-6**.

**Ezekiel 37:28**, we learn of the impact of Israel's renaissance. Of the four olam gifts, renewed obedience forever; Israel's title to the land forever; a Davidic rule over God's people forever; God's divine presence with His people forever. **All those "forevers" are fulfilled in The Messiah Jesus.**

*The last one of His divine presence and promise is climatic. God's sanctuary in the midst of His people will finally convince the nations of his sanctifying power. His sanctification of Israel will be the final proof of His election of them as His holy nation, consecrated to Himself for his glory. This will receive much greater attention in our last several and final classes in **Ezekiel 40-48**, which is one of the longest sections in The Bible on The Temple of God and His dwelling with His people. And, that final point needs to be underscored because ultimately God's glory's at stake here. And the point is, He's going to restore Israel for Israel's sake. But, it's also, even more importantly for the Glory of God because the other nations see that Israel's been restored and that is forever for God, they are going to want to say, "Well maybe we want to follow that God too."*

*And that's happening...wasn't it last week that Morocco and one other? These muslim countries that had been officially at war with Israel are laying down their arms and coming along beside of Israel.*

*And so, brothers and sisters, if you're looking for signs that things are coming to a close, look to Israel. Don't look down the road; don't look in London; don't look in Johannesburg, look at Israel and Jerusalem and there you will see the signs.*

### **Theological Implications**

This oracle reinforces Ezekiel's exalted view of God. God is in control. He is the "forever olam God." I love that His renewed commitment is the covenant of peace, assuring us of God's guarantee of his eternal work of grace in a covenant of peace. God wants to bring us peace.

You know most Sundays, we end the service saying, "May the Lord lift up His whole countenance upon you and give you His peace, shalom. It is the covenant of peace being renewed.

The designation of his renewed commitment as a "covenant of peace" symbolizes the goal of Yahweh's salvific (*leading to salvation*) activity. "Shalom" results from the restoration and renewal of the covenant.

Yahweh's restoration of Israel is motivated by a concern for His reputation. He wants and deserves to be glorified. When the nations see that God is true to his covenant with Israel, they will come to Him, too. Israel, like you and I, is saved by grace and grace alone.

This oracle reinforces Ezekiel's realistic view of God's people. Israel, like you and I, is saved and formed by grace and grace alone. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever say you can work your way into God's salvation. Grace from the beginning.

This oracle also reinforces Ezekiel's complex view of the Messiah Jesus. The Messiah will be the fulfillment of all the forever promises of God come to pass, the one true King promised of old.

Tuesday, **January 5, 2021**, we will begin a new section. We have been in Ezekiel since September 15, 2020 so we have had almost four months. Any question, comment, observation today or over the past four months before we take the two-week break?

**Martha:** I have one question regarding today's lesson. "God's sanctuary in the midst of His people." Exactly what is that sanctuary and when is that sanctuary.

**Mark:** I think, Martha, it works two different ways. First, the Temple that is going to be destroyed is going to be restored. Ultimately, the sanctuary is in The Holy Spirit in your heart, in your life. By the time we get to the apostle Paul, he's going to say to the **Corinthians**, "Don't you know that your body is The Temple of the Lord and the Holy Spirit dwells in you?" And so, I think ultimately then that the promise is that The Temple will be restored, but even when that's restored by the Romans in 70 AD, the Body of Christ becomes The Temple together and each of us with The Holy Spirit. And so, it's not predicated on a physical Temple that is required for God to dwell with His people. Thank you, Martha, good question.

**Annette Meyers:** Mark, I have a question about king Nebuchadnezzar. I know he recognized God; like Daniel's God, he recognized there was this god. But, back in **Ezekiel 21** where you mentioned Nebuchadnezzar discovered the will of God by using all those techniques of divination. He never really accepted God though, right?

**Mark:** No, I don't think we are led to believe that Nebuchadnezzar ever personally accepted God as Yahweh. He was the agent of Yahweh. He was the servant of Yahweh even though he wasn't always aware of it. But, I don't believe Scripture says that Nebuchadnezzar himself ever truly became a believer or a trust in Yahweh. It magnifies, then, the sovereignty ultimately of God over all people whether they believe in Him or not, His will will be done.

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I have a question. Is this where God has created the single nation from the two nations and brought all the twelve tribes back together? Is that supposed to be what happened in Israel in 1948? And, if that's the case has Israel's spiritual integrity not come about yet? Because, other than the Messianic Jews, the majority are either secular or don't believe that The Messiah has come yet, right?

**Mark:** That's true. It's a complex question, but yes, those are great questions. I would say that with the restoration of the State of Israel in 1948, I think we have to read that

as a prophetic fulfillment. And, now that you mention it, goes right back to Ezekiel. In that sense the Twelve Tribes have been united on The Land that was promised. Now, not all The Land promised is under Israel's state control but a lot of it is.

We also are reminded of even what the apostle Paul said back in the 1st Century in **Romans 9-11** that not every Jew is a true Israelite. In other words, Paul is lamenting, crying out to God, "Why are there so many of Your own people, Lord, who don't believe in You and follow You?" And so, Paul, even then says that just a remnant of Israel is truly in the covenant with God.

And so, I think today we see that even more clearly when sadly the majority of Jews do not see and believe in Jesus as Messiah. Although there is a growing Messianic Jewish community. I think we've said it before, Baruch who is our tour guide in Israel on all of our trips. His name was Brian and he took a Jewish name and married a Messianic Jewish woman and they pledged to spend the rest of their lives and raise their seven children as Jewish believers in Israel as a Messianic presence. He said that 25 years ago maybe 5 percent of Jews in Israel were Messianic, but now clearly it is up to like 15 percent.

Paul does say that in Israel there's going to be a revival; that more will come; and all the true Jews will see Jesus as The True Messiah; and then He will come back again. So, again our eyes are on Israel and we say, "Lord, give us discernment." What's happening there is going to be the final key to all these prophecies being fulfilled.

We will resume, by the grace of God, on January 5th, 2021 and it looks like we will probably be finished with the Book of Ezekiel sometime in the middle of May.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, we give You thanks that You are the fulfillment of the Promise of the King of Kings; that You are the forever God who, by Your blood, You've given us the way of salvation so, Lord, let us learn from the past; let us believe in the present and let us hope for the future. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

God bless you and Merry Christmas. I may not see you so if I don't, Merry Christmas.

**End of Class 13 December 15 Discussion Handout and Zoom Recording**

**Class 14 January 5, 2021**

**Pastor Mark** begins with, I want to take just a few minutes at the beginning of our time to review and get caught up since we have had a two-week break. So “Lord we give You thanks for this first Tuesday of a New Year. We know, Lord, that this day comes to us only by Your Grace as a gift to us, so we pray that we would not misuse or neglect the gift of today, but that we would grow closer to You. And, we pray, O Lord, for all those around the world who are drawing closer to You. We pray more will do so. We pray for the salvation of all those, especially families and friends who are not walking with You, Jesus. We pray that 2021 will be the year of their salvation. But, for today we pray Your Holy Spirit will illuminate Your Word that It may be to us Your living presence. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

So, we’ve had a two-week break and thank you all for being back today. Just to review for a moment as we reach almost the halfway point of our study. And, it looks like we are on track to finish in mid May.

We’ve talked about The Book of Ezekiel; and we are looking at the different kinds of ways that God uses him. We’ve talked about Ezekiel as “The Messenger of Yahweh;” “The Watchman to Israel,” as “The True Prophet,” (because there are a lot of false prophets). He incarnated, embodied the message by acting out The Word of God; he is “The Visionary,” “The Dramatist,” (where again he’s acting out The Word of God).

And today, we’re starting a new section, “**Ezekiel the Spinner of Parables and Riddles.**” As we think about the past three or four months of our study, just one question comes to mind for me right now. Are you finding that our study in Ezekiel is having any impact or making any difference in your daily discipleship? In other words, has the study of Ezekiel become more than looking back to the sixth century BC? Has it also, at the same time, become the Word of God that in some way is shaping your walk with Jesus today. And, if so, one or two of you just share if there’s any daily impact that Ezekiel is having in your life.

**Diane and Alan Denekas** share about how God has used, especially Ezekiel 34, in outreach to a cousin; i.e. family member.

**Joyce** shared that through Ezekiel God’s Holy Spirit has provided bolder dialogue in outreach and a growing sense of urgency.

**Mark:** Well, good, that’s my prayer for all of us is that our study of Ezekiel will have personal daily impact upon us. Certainly, that is one of the primary purposes of The Word of God to shape us and to save us.

I think, for me, the two things that stand out so far are the juxtaposition or this beautiful tension between, on the one hand, God who is transcendent and awesome and fearsome with the Chariot and the creatures with the four faces and the cherubim and

that opening vision of God on His Divine Chariot just kind of still blows my mind. At the same time, God is the God who is right here in history with us. God who is working even with pagan kings and kingdoms for His divine purposes; God who was there with Ezekiel and the exiles in the Chebar canal in Babylon.

So, we have God who is ineffable, who is transcendent, who can only be described in images that just blow our mind. He is so much more than we are, and yet He is the same God who is standing right with us side by side. So, again we think about Jesus and we say that He is truly God and truly man. I think that doctrine of who the Lord is is clearly born out through the Book of Ezekiel; i.e., God and Man; God who is beyond us and The Man (God) who is with us, God in the flesh.

Those are some of the reasons, I think, that while Ezekiel is never directly quoted in the New Testament, I think it is safe to assume that Ezekiel is undergirding foundationally all the New Testament; that here are so many applications that are indirect and in the background.

Today, for example, as we come to this new section “Ezekiel the Spinner of Parables and Riddles,” well, who is the greatest Spinner of Parables whose ever lived? And that’s obviously Jesus Messiah Himself. Once again, we see how Ezekiel, not only points us to Jesus, and in **Ezekiel 17** today we are going to get one of the great Messianic promises, prophecies in Ezekiel today. Not only does Ezekiel point us to Jesus. Ezekiel, in many ways, resembles and is a foretaste of Jesus because our Lord is also the premiere parable teacher in The Gospel. Today as we think about the parable in Ezekiel 17, in so many ways we are pointed to Jesus Himself.

We are coming now to **Ezekiel 17-22**, in which we are going to get a series of parables and riddles in which the Lord is showing Truth to the exiles in Babylon through these parable. Throughout the Bible, of course, parables are a frequent genre of teaching. Obviously Jesus, but we also think about Sampson who was a big riddle teller, and we get some other examples from some of the other prophets. This genre of teaching that we find is found throughout Scriptures. We can track kind of a general flow to Ezekiel 17. We move from The Parable of the Riddle to the historical interpretation of it; to a theological interpretation; and then to a theological promise of the future.

Theology literally means, “The Study of God,” and we all are called to be theologians. One of the reasons I wanted to ask, “Is Ezekiel having any impact on your life,” is that every day we need to interpret our day theologically so this is a great teaching chapter. These things happen in real life. These are the historical events happening in your life today January 5th. Tonight before you close your eyes; before you say your final prayers, it would be important for you and I to think back over the day and to interpret the facts of what happened today theologically. To say, “Okay, today at 3:00 this thing happened. Now, where was God in that; what was He showing me.” Part of what I love about Ezekiel 17 is that if we take two or three steps back, it serves as kind of a teaching of how the daily life of a disciple is lived; and how is it lived? Faithfully, of course, but also theologically; that we’re always asking, “Lord, where were You in this

event; in this conversation; in this joy; in this pain; what am I to learn from it. I think, again, that's one of the things that the Book of Ezekiel can teach us as well as or better than other Books of the Bible.

We come now to **Ezekiel 17:1-10**. We've got a short preamble and then we hear The Parable of the Riddle. So let me read **verses 1-10**:

**Ezekiel 17:1-10** **1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** "Son of man, propound a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel; **3** say, Thus says the Lord God: A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colors, came to Lebanon and took the top of the cedar. **4** He broke off the topmost of its young twigs and carried it to a land of trade and set it in a city of merchants. Then he took of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed it beside abundant waters. He set it like a willow twig, **6** and it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, and its branches turned toward him, and its roots remained where it stood. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out boughs. **7** "And there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage, and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and shot forth its branches toward him from the bed where it was planted, that he might water it. **8** It had been planted on good soil by abundant waters, that it might produce branches and bear fruit and become a noble vine. **9** "Say, Thus says the Lord God: Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its fruit, so that it withers, so that all its fresh sprouting leaves wither? It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it from its roots. **10** Behold, it is planted; will it thrive? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind strikes it—wither away on the bed where it sprouted?"

*So, that's quite a riddle there; quite a parable. If we just had just those ten verses we would all be scratching our heads and going, "What Lord does this mean?" And that's the intention. The intention of this is to get the exiles' attention; is to draw them into a parable, a fable, a story in which the answers are not obvious. We are drawn to dig deeper. God always wants us to go "deeper still."*

You know that famous quote in The Letter in **Hebrews 5:11-14**, "**11** About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **13** for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. **14** But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."

*You're still on toast and bread. Come on guys, you need meat and potatoes. Let's get deeper here. So this is what's happening. Ezekiel is telling a story and it is forcing his audience, you and I and the exiles in Babylon, to draw in to say, "What are you saying? What am I supposed to learn?"*



So in **Ezekiel 17:3-4** is the first episode within this parable. And it's obvious that the key figure is a great eagle. And, the bird is not only magnificent, but also energetic. It comes to Lebanon, renowned for its cedars. It snips off a shoot from the crown of one of the cedars and carries it to a foreign land of merchants. Now, I didn't really have anything in the notes, but as we think about an eagle, I mean, none of these facts are insignificant. So, in the Bible the eagle is a magnificent creature of God, often symbolic of God Himself. We are going to see later when Ezekiel interprets this that the great eagle at first blush is going to be Nebuchadnezzar, but ultimately we realize, "Oh, that's Yahweh Himself." And so the Eagle in Scripture becomes symbolic of God Himself. So, not surprisingly, then satan will try to appropriate and steal the image, right?

So, what becomes the image for the Roman Empire? The eagle. What becomes the image for the evil nazi empire, the eagle. You see how satan will take what is good and of God and he'll try to twist it and capture it for himself.

So, again, it's not coincidental such as Rome, the pagan empire and factious Germany, terribly terribly pagan. If you've read anything about hitler and his key leaders. All the key nazi leaders were demonic. I mean, the attack of the nazi's against the Jews ultimately was an attack against God Himself. It is breathtaking to read of the paganism and the satanic paganism among the nazi's. And, what is their emblem? Their emblem is the eagle.

So, we always need to be careful. And this is not to be disparaging; I do not want to get off too far with this, but I've been reading the Chronological Bible Study last year and now with the new 2021 Bible Reading that many of us are doing reading through the Bible. We just read through the story of Noah. And, there you have the beautiful, Biblical and powerful image of the rainbow. God's Promise. God's goodness; God's Love.

And, what's happened to the Rainbow? It's become the symbol of the very attack against The Word of God, to say, "We are being defiant. We're going to live sexually and morally as we want to in clear defiance of The Word of God." So the rainbow, this beautiful, Biblical powerful image from God has been appropriated for, what I would call, pagan purposes.

Again, as we think about these things, these are not coincidental. Eventually, the anti-christ will come. He may be in the world now. John says that there will be several anti-christs, but ultimately one anti-christ. Listen to that term, "anti - christ." He (satan) will be; he will try to appropriate Christ Himself (Jesus) for his (satan's) evil intensions. So, we just have to be aware, brothers and sisters, we are living in times where we cannot afford not to be Biblical and Theological and always say, "Lord, where are You in this, and how is satan trying to use You, Your Word for his (satan's) evil purposes. So that's too far down the road yet...let's get back to the text.

Any questions or comments at this point?

Episode two is **Ezekiel 17:5-6** **5** Then he took of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed it beside abundant waters. He set it like a willow twig, **6** and it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, and its branches turned toward him, and its roots remained where it stood. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out boughs.

*So the Eagle carries the sprig to some merchants; and now the merchants kind of have the image of a gardner; and the eagle plants the seedling and the plant responds and begins to grow well.*

And then in **Episode 3 in Ezekiel 17:7-8** *the parable is complicated by a second eagle appears. He's a great eagle, but in the Hebrew it is obvious that the second eagle is lesser than the first eagle. They're both great eagles, but the second is not as great as the first.*

**7** “And there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage, and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and shot forth its branches toward him from the bed where it was planted, that he might water it. **8** It had been planted on good soil by abundant waters, that it might produce branches and bear fruit and become a noble vine.

*What strikes us, I think about this, is that the first greater Eagle is very active; He's snipping; He's planting; He's carrying. The second lesser eagle is very passive. He didn't do anything. So that's the significant difference between these two eagles.*

*So, then our attention is drawn to **the vine**. Instead of it continuing to send its roots down to the soil where it can become strong and sturdy, it now seeks to grow toward the second eagle. It's now turning away from its purposes and turning toward the second eagle hoping that the second eagle will water it. So the vine almost has a anthropological presence; i.e., it's almost like a human; it's turning away from the one that really cares for it and it's turning to a lesser person who it's seeking love and watering from but it's not going to get it. By doing so, the vine, not only repudiates the first eagle, but also rejects its intended purposes to bear branches, fruit and become a magnificent vine.*

*So, we're left at this point in the parable asking, “Why in the world would this vine turn away from the great first Eagle who cared for it; who promised security and turn to a second lesser eagle who offers it nothing; in fact will lead to its death?”*

**Ezekiel 17:9-10** *we have a series of questions, almost as we would call “socratic style;” of not giving the answer to the student but asking questions of the students who will then seek the answers on their own. 9* “Say, Thus says the Lord God: Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its fruit, so that it withers, so that all its fresh sprouting leaves wither? It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it from its

roots. **10** Behold, it is planted; will it thrive? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind strikes it—wither away on the bed where it sprouted?”

*The critical issue is that, Will the vine survive after it has turned away from the first Eagle and oriented itself toward the second eagle?*

*By the time Ezekiel finishes this parable, I think we are understanding that the first Eagle has our sympathies; and we're wondering why this vine is making choices that are detrimental to its survival.*

And suddenly then, at the end of **Ezekiel 17:10** we get this, **10** "Will it not utterly wither when the east wind strikes it—wither away on the bed where it sprouted?”

*This is not the first time we've heard a reference to the east wind. Back in **Exodus 10**, God sends an east wind as one of the plagues, and the east wind brings the locusts. And there, the east wind serves God's purposes. Here the east wind is, obviously, a destructive purpose and we know that climatologists tell us that the east wind is a defined historically noted wind in the Middle East where the east wind always brings scorching wind. And, it blows in to Israel from the desert; and it just devastates all the vegetation in its wake. So we know that there is even today the east wind that occasionally will come sweeping over Israel and that always brings a time of hardship. And, so the vine's move to the second eagle, therefore, has left it vulnerable.*

*And so, that's the parable; that's the riddle. Let me stop and ask, "Anything you want to say about that?"*

**Alan Denekas:** One thing is, it seems like that could also be a parable that describes America today as we've drifted away from our Judeo-Christian roots, which have made us very strong and great and prosperous, away from it toward secularism, socialism, materialism, etc. so it fits us too.

**Mark:** Yes!! Dr. Alan Denekas! That is being a theologian; that's a great insight and puts this first part of Ezekiel 17 in a real existential context of why then have we, who have been planted by God Himself, this great Judeo-Christian foundation of our founding, why have we turned away from that to follow these forces that work against it.

Now, that's a great insight, and I think we all would agree that our great nation is turning away from the great Eagle who is God to lesser eagles who are pretend and faux and false and pagan gods.

So, that's a really important insight that Alan just shared with us. And, that's exactly what I'm hoping that every chapter in Ezekiel will do for us. We need to know what it's saying in its context; that's the first part of Bible study. "What is the Word of God saying in the day of Ezekiel in Babylon?" And, then secondly, "therefore, Lord, what should we know in our day?" The Word of God always works on those two plains. If we

try to say, “Lord, what is this saying to me,” and we don’t investigate what it’s saying in its context, we can get really far afield.

If we say, “Lord, what is it saying in its context in Ezekiel in the 6th Century BC and we never ask, “Lord, what’s it saying to me,” then it becomes a study of the past without any application to the present. So we always want to keep it two (plains).

*Now to the interpretation so that we understand exactly what this parable is teaching as I read for us* **Ezekiel 17:11-21: 11** Then the word of the Lord came to me: 12 “Say now to the rebellious house, Do you not know what these things mean? Tell them, behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took her king and her princes and brought them to him to Babylon. 13 And he took one of the royal offspring and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath (the chief men of the land he had taken away), 14 that the kingdom might be humble and not lift itself up, and keep his covenant that it might stand. 15 But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and a large army. Will he thrive? Can one escape who does such things? Can he break the covenant and yet escape? 16 “As I live, declares the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant with him he broke, in Babylon he shall die. 17 Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in war, when mounds are cast up and siege walls built to cut off many lives. 18 He despised the oath in breaking the covenant, and behold, he gave his hand and did all these things; he shall not escape. 19 Therefore thus says the Lord God: As I live, surely it is my oath that he despised, and my covenant that he broke. I will return it upon his head. 20 I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there for the treachery he has committed against me. **21** And all the pick of his troops shall fall by the sword, and the survivors shall be scattered to every wind, and you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken.”

*So the riddle explanation is in two parts. Verses 12-18 talks about what’s happening back in Jerusalem and then secondly about King Zedekiah..The primary goal of this riddle was probably not to change Zedekiah’s foreign policy. We’re going to see that the issue is Zedekiah had been put on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC as a kind of a puppet king. He served 11 years before Nebuchadnezzar came back and sacked Jerusalem in 596 BC. But we are going to see that Zedekiah then, on the sly, reaches out to the Egyptians to try to get an alliance with Egypt to overthrow the Babylonians which, of course, breaks his oath to the Babylonians. And so the issue is going to be Zedekiah’s foreign policy with the Egyptians will mean the final ultimate downfall of Judah and Jerusalem.*

*Ezekiel’s parable probably never reached Zedekiah. Rather, the parable of the riddle is probably told for the exiles there in Babylon because the report of what Zedekiah was up to probably did reach them and perhaps the exiles were also being drawn into this hope that if only Judah enters into an alliance with Egypt, will they be able to go back*

*home because the Babylonians will be defeated. The riddle aims to expose Zedekiah's treacherous policies and to expose them really as rebellion against God Himself.*

*It's very interesting. Jeremiah and Ezekiel are contemporaries, right? So Jeremiah is kind of the home prophet. He's back in the ruins of Jerusalem under this great strain of the Babylonians. And Ezekiel is, of course, among the exiles. But, they are really saying the same things at the same time to both groups of people. And if we took time to cross reference this to Jeremiah, we'll see a lot of application and how closely what Ezekiel says and what Jeremiah says really line up perfectly. But the real issue, both with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is that they are both pro-Babylonian. It's hard for us, "What? Babylonians? pagans?" but both prophets understood that the Babylonians were working under the sovereign hand of Yahweh. And, if Israel would only humble herself; submit to the Babylonians, eventually things would work out. But if Israel rebelled against the Babylonians and sought other alliances, then that would spell the downfall of Judah and Israel. So, it's interesting that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are probably "on the same page?" And that's why The Word of God is so hard for us. They were speaking God's Truth to the Jews in Judah and to the Jews in Babylon. That Truth was hard to hear, and the people rebelled against it, saying, "We've got a better idea. We think it will be better to seek out the Egyptians than to trust that somehow God's going to work through the Babylonians."*

*So, again, how does Ezekiel impact us today? Sometimes the Word of God can be very hard for us to hear. "What! I've got to forgive that person who hurt me so much?" Yes! "What! I have to go to worship even though I'm tired and it's rainy and I don't want to?" Yes! "What! I've got to be generous in what I give of my blessings for the sake of others when it would be much more to my security to keep all my blessings for myself?" Yes! Yes! Yes! So, the Word of God often is initially a Word we have to pray we will receive and believe.*

*So the questions abound as we await the riddles and invitation. "Who is the first Eagle and what about the cedars of Lebanon, etc."*

*After the fall 586 BC in Jerusalem, the answer has become obvious. The first great eagle is obviously Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon. Secondly, the snapped-off sprig of cedar is Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin was only on the throne for three months and then he was taken to Babylon to the City of Merchants. But he does well. If you cross reference this to Jeremiah, to Chronicles and 2 King, Jehoiachin ends up having a pretty good life in Babylon.*

*But then after Jehoiachin, comes Zedekiah. And so, Nebuchadnezzar is betrayed as a benevolent king who insures the well being of Jehoiachin by planting him by a well watered sea bed.*

*And so then in verses 13 and 14, we understand that Nebuchadnezzar then put his own king on the throne. His initial name is a Jewish name Mattanyahu, and Nebuchadnezzar renamed him Zedekiah. And that's how we know him the best.*

*Nebuchadnezzar takes several steps to guarantee Zedekiah. We are going to see that when Nebuchadnezzar places Zedekiah under the oath of loyalty, he does so in the name of Yahweh which is pretty interesting. And we know that from 2 Chronicles. Even though Nebuchadnezzar did not submit to Yahweh himself, he knew in his heart of hearts who the true God was. And so, Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah make an oath to him (Nebuchadnezzar) in the name of the one Lord God Almighty.*

*Secondly, Nebuchadnezzar removed all the nobility in the land so that Zedekiah would not have other nobility to fall back to; he would not be tempted to try to do a coup against Nebuchadnezzar.*

*Again, we see in the exiles we have a first group of these nobility and then in the second group, the regular rank and file, craftsmen, skilled, merchants. So, Ezekiel would have been in the second group of exiles.*

*In verses 14 and 15a, Nebuchadnezzar's objectives to this oath with Zedekiah are obvious. He wants to maintain Judah as a vassal state to Zedekiah (himself); Nebuchadnezzar wants to keep king Zedekiah humble and he wants to guard the treaty oath. But Zedekiah rebels and secretly sends envoys to Egypt. Again, we know this from Jeremiah and Chronicles and Kings. It is a beautiful thing to really cross reference Scripture and how it all fits together beautifully. You'll hear people say, "The Bible contradicts itself. I can't trust a book that contradicts itself." Well, that's a lie of satan. It doesn't; and any example that somebody would propose, we can look at Biblically through the eyes of the Holy Spirit and realize that it does fit together beautifully.*

*So, that's what's happening politically, theologically behind the scenes. And then there's a series of questions; and we know then that ultimately what will happen is that Zedekiah will be dragged off to Babylon. First, he will see the execution of all his sons so that Nebuchadnezzar really lashes out at Zedekiah. Zedekiah's life ends in the most horrible kind of way you can imagine. He sees the execution of all of his sons and then he is blinded totally. He's put into chains and he's dragged off to Babylon. And we hear nothing about him in the Bible after that very tragic and awful end to his life. Why is that? Because the Egyptians do not come to his aid. Egyptians are like that second eagle. The vine turned to the second eagle and the second eagle did nothing to help the vine. So that's the parable. Zedekiah turns away from Nebuchadnezzar the first eagle and he turns to the Egyptians the second eagle and that's his downfall. We get all this in **2 Chronicles**.*

The **Theological Interpretation** is that Zedekiah broke his word. The word, the oath was spoken in the name of Yahweh so when Zedekiah turned away from Nebuchadnezzar to the Egyptians, ultimately he is being disloyal to God Himself because Zedekiah made a promise in God's Holy Name and then Zedekiah broke the promise, not just to Nebuchadnezzar, but to God, and that ultimately spells his disaster.

Any questions or comments?

**Linda Handy:** Pastor Mark, I have a question, comment, concern. One of the things that most troubles, exasperates, frustrates me with regard to what is going on in our own nation right now is how humanity will constantly gravitate toward the second eagle that offers nothing, cares not and loves not. How we, as a nation, and we, as people of God, turn our backs on God just as the king did and worship a false god—the Egyptian god or the whatever secular humanist god, tribal god we are following. As we mentioned in Sunday School on Sunday, we are all in different tribes now, and increasingly so, and how people can turn, in light of all this historical reference and proven factual “God is in charge” data, we can still turn to a second eagle....

**Mark:** I feel your pain, Sister, and that’s what Alan, I think, was also saying at the beginning of class as well. Well, how could the Jews do this? How could the people of Judah do this? How could the people of Jerusalem do this? They are God’s covenant people. Why did they do it?

**Linda:** Right, is it just original sin? Our own self-destructive prideful sinful natures? I mean, I just get so frustrated.

**Mark:** It is; it’s very frustrating. Martin Luther said he thought that the best word for “faith” is “trust;” that he would often translate fa-days as “trust.” And, I think Luther is onto something there, we simply have to redouble our trust in God and His Word. Otherwise, we are going to be clamoring after all these false gods. Because we just have to have idols that we can see; and we have to be in charge and so it’s the same sin of Israel that we’re committing.

**Mark:** Otherwise, there is nothing but destruction:

**Alan:** I think there might be an answer for us in **Romans 8:7-8** “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

**Linda:** Amen! So we need to focus on The Word and focus on The Lord.

**Alan:** That describes our nature as fallen human beings. We have within us this thing that cannot and will not submit to God, no matter how much common sense, reason, whatever. And that’s why I always go back to when Gabriel was announcing to Mary, “You will call His name Jesus, which in Hebrew means, “He saves.” He’s doing for us that which we cannot and will not do for ourselves. And so, I think that’s the answer to it; that we have this inexorable tendency to go astray and to not bow down to God; not to seek after God, and that’s why we need a Savior because we’ve got that in us. We’re just built to go off course.

**Mark:** Amen! Thank you! That’s a great segue then. The final part of Ezekiel 17 is a beautiful setup. So let’s see what the Lord’s going to do for us because we cannot do it for ourselves.

**Ezekiel 17: 22-24 22** Thus says the Lord God: “I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.”

*So, what Alan just said leads us right into this really powerful epilogue which is one of the great Messianic promises of the Old Testament. So now we understand that God is truly the great Eagle. We knew that. We are in His Hands; and God is going to do this because we are always going to mess this up.*

*We understand the shift now in the identity of the Eagle. The great eagle is actually the LORD, and we understand His hand guarantees the flourishing of the dynasty of what this represents. This is not a shock, for God’s sovereignty in this situation has been hinted at throughout the chapter. The LORD’s hand guarantees the flourishing of the dynasty that the sprig represents.*

*The particular origin of the sprig is also highlighted here. It’s the special shoot from the topmost crown to designate the Messiah who will revive the promised Davidic line. The word here for “sprit” or “shoot” is a parallel to the Hebrew word for “branch” in **Isaiah 11:1**. It’s the Promise of God’s covenant with David that Jesus Messiah will come from the line of David. That Promise will not be broken, fulfilled in Messiah Jesus. God will do this; not us but God will fulfill this. A branch—shoot—of David’s line will be the promised King/Messiah of eternity.*

*The special mission assigned to the sprig by the LORD is for it to become a “noble cedar” on “the mountain height of Israel.” The tree’s magnificent expansiveness will be seen by the whole world, and this is The One who will provide protection and life and care for all who come under its branches.*

*The high mountain of Israel is a clear allusion to Mt. Zion, Jerusalem. This weds the motifs of the Davidic line and Zion together. The two are divinely inseparable. The universal impact of the tree is highlighted: When all the trees—all the dynasties of the nations on the earth—observe the magnificence of the tree, they will fall down before it in worship and obedience because they can’t help but do that; like Philipians 2 “every knee shall bow.”*

*Indeed, Zedekiah is brought low, but the one brought low, Jehoiachin, will be lifted up. His kingly line will survive! It is through Jehoiachin that the Davidic line will be restored to the throne of Israel and elevated to the status of the King of kings. Yahweh has spoken. He will act. The Davidic line will survive captivity in Babylon.*



*Later then, it will be Jehoiachin's grandson, Zerubbabel (1 Chron 3:19) who will serve as the governor of the new commonwealth of Israel when the exiles come back under Persia's administration under the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.*

*But the fulfillment of this vision of the future must wait for the arrival of a greater son of the House of David, Jesus, who will claim the world as His kingdom (John 12:32).*

### **Theological implications**

People's responses to crises must deal with the causes, not merely with the symptoms, of the crises. The crisis in Judah had been precipitated by the people's disobedience toward Yahweh. Their attempt to procure aid from Egypt while ignoring their moral and spiritual sins represents true folly that only hastened Yahweh's judgment.

They were dealing with symptoms; they were not dealing with causes. Often what happens in our sin is that we want to deal with the symptom and not the cause.

Those who claim to be the people of God must take him seriously in all aspects of life. Covenants and oaths are binding at any time. When one invokes the name of the LORD in a promise, God will not wink when it is violated. When you make a promise in the name of God and you break it, that's a big time issue. Let your yes be yes and your no be no and don't drag God into it because, otherwise, that will come back to be a problem for you.

Yahweh remains sovereign over history. Through the Book of Ezekiel that is the fact that is beaten into us over and over and over. HE ALONE is guiding history. God will always remain true. No nation can ever be so powerful that he can't and won't bring it low. No one can ever be so low that he can't or won't lift it up high. His objectives in history are always achieved.

Humans may violate the commitments they make, but God will remain true to his word forever. Though it looked like Nebuchadnezzar had broken the promise of the Davidic line, God would never renege on his promise. He would raise up his own Son, Jesus the Messiah, to bring the offer of shalom to Israel and to all the world by grace through faith in Messiah Jesus. God has spoken. He will act.

God is faithful to us even when we are not faithful to Him. He is not going to renege on His promise and through Mt. Zion and the king of David will come "The King of Kings." And in the end, the Book of Revelation, a new Heaven, a New Earth in Jerusalem will come and who is the Temple? The Lord Himself.

These are some of the things we can learn from **Ezekiel 17**. What other things have you learned from this chapter?

**Lisa Bond:** I think this parallels with what Lilly and Will have been working with the Youth lately in social media. When I was looking at that imaging of bending toward, the

kids are really bending toward the world. I'm not just saying "them," I think adults as well, for their identity; for nourishment; for cliques and likes and not realizing that our identity is in Christ because the world always wants more and more. And when you just said, Pastor Mark, who guarantees our flourishing, they are trying to flourish through this world of finding identity, through sexualized images, etc. But, the world just brings death; it doesn't bring flourishing; it brings death of relationships. And so, they've been going over this in the Youth Group and it just reminded me of this lesson.

**Mark:** Thank you. Yes, that's another great application and I know, Lisa, you wouldn't say this because you're so humble but Lisa's daughter, Annie, spoke and gave her testimony Sunday night in Youth Group. Will and Lilly were saying it blew everybody away. And, Annie Bond addressed just what her mom is saying about how devastating it is when young people turn to the world for protection and security and identity and away from God. And, she told her own story. That was captured and recorded and we are going to try to send that out to everybody in next week's or maybe even tomorrow's update. God bless the Annie Bonds in the world. She's a minority voice but so is the Church. We are the remnant, right? This idea of turning away from the great Eagle God to a lesser eagle that will simply end up in our death is a great teaching for us.

**Chris Miller:** Do you feel that we should be pro Babylon in not turning away from rather media, just as the youth group is learning about? Do you think that we should emulate the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel in that respect. I'm a little confused on that. Should we turn away from it or accept it? One or the other?

**Mark:** Are you saying, "Should we embrace the social media?"

**Chris:** "Yes, should we turn away from it or accept it? One or the other?"

**Linda Handy:** Maybe, Chris, we should just use it; be wise as serpents but discerning. Put the message of the Lord out just like Nebuchadnezzar was not a Christian; was not a Jew. He was used by the Lord for a positive watering hole for them. Maybe we could use the media in a productive kind of way.

**Mark:** You raise an interesting question, Chris. I mean I think social media is Egypt. It's the second eagle that is just going to kill us. And, I do not think the Lord would want us just to submit our lives to that. You raise the question. We need to be careful that as we read through Chapter 17 we don't make the wrong connection. So again, we are always asking The Holy Spirit to illuminate and enlighten and give us discernment.

**Closing Prayer** "We pray to You, Father, through Your Son and Holy Spirit. Thank You that You raise up before us The Word of God today that we may learn Your will and ways in the Book of Ezekiel and in Your will and ways in our lives today. Thank You, Lord, that Your Word never changes but from generation to generation it is the Word of Truth to every generation. To You be the honor and the glory and the beauty now and forever. Amen!

**Class 15 January 12, 2021**

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to You Lord in Your Holy Name The Father Son and Holy Spirit in Thanksgiving for this beautiful Tuesday that we can gather as your people in prayer and the study of your Holy saving Word. As we do so, we remember two young women, Lord, in special need today. For Amy, this beloved daughter, and this one for whom we pray today, that Amy and her family will have safe keeping in their move to North Carolina; that You will give them strength, Lord, in their moving. To move is always a time of weariness, but especially under these circumstances, so we do pray for Amy and her family. And, of course, we join Vickie for her beloved daughter, dear sister in the Lord here at St. John; that Tori will be greatly blessed by the surgery by Dr. Gross on Friday; that the surgery will be part of Your healing plan for Tori and that she will be able to give You thanks for her healing as we all will. So for Amy, for Tori, for the nation, the Church, for all of our lives we pray this in JESUS' Name. Amen.

**Mark:** Alright, so, hate to tell you, but we've got a lot of material, and none of it is very positive, sorry. I know you were hoping for something in these days, but it is interesting that in our chapter today on these two riddles in **Ezekiel 19 and 20** with the image of the Lion, the Vine and the Sword, all of this that we are going to study today has to do with God's judgment against the nation of Judah/Israel.

So, you know, here we are in the midst of the turmoil in our nation and the great concerns that we all have in our hearts for our nation. And so, we can't help but say, "Lord, what are we to learn? What's the connection between the prophesy of Ezekiel against Judah in the 6th Century BC; and what does this mean for our nation in the 21st Century. We are not quick to make parallels. We know that there are differences, while at the same time we must always say, Lord what is it that we are to know?" because certainly, The Word of God is applicable to our situation. I don't have direct answers for you, of course, but I so encourage us to pray. That, if nothing else, these chapters (in Ezekiel) encourage us to pray for our nation; and especially for leaders as we are going to see today. The sins of the people of Israel in Judah were significant and certainly they were part of the problem. At the same time, today especially, we are going to see that God's judgment falls upon leaders and the special responsibility for them to be holy leaders and then the special condemnation that falls on them when they are not.

We've got a lot of material so we'll see if we can get through it today. The goal is that we will finish this section of "The Spinner of Riddles and Parables," but we'll see. Like Nancy, that was a great word, we don't want to rush through our devotions today, just like you (Nancy) encouraged us not to rush through our devotions.

We are going to begin with **Ezekiel 19:1**; and Ezekiel is going to take up a lament. Now, it's interesting that in the Old Testament the word "lamentation" occurs 18 times. Now, more than half of those are in Ezekiel. A "lament" is a technical term for a "dirge," at a

funeral or the destruction of a nation. But, we are going to see that possibly the lament here is put almost in a parody form to capture the attention of the exiles.

You know, as we've said many times, there Ezekiel was acting out these sermons; these prophetic messages, being so faithful in the exilic community. But as we will see today, he laments to God, "They're not listening to me." At one point he stops and says, "God, why am I doing this? They're just mocking me. Their ears are deaf." And so, again, this is a great teaching for us never to have our ears grow deaf to The Word; never become just one more word in a whole stream of words that we don't pay attention to.

**Ezekiel 19** has the image of lions and then the riddle shifts to the vine. If we had time we would look at **Genesis 49** where there is a great Word about lions and vines. What I love about this is that the prophesy that God gives Ezekiel builds upon what God has already said in Genesis, the first Book of The Torah.

*The whole aim of **Ezekiel 19**, I believe, is that God is saying that the Davidic, My (God's) Covenant with the line of David is now suspended. Especially, if you were a Jew living in Judah or a Jewish exile in Babylon, to hear that God was putting aside His Promise to David and that the King would come out of David's line. We just cannot appreciate how devastating this news would be. The Covenant is being suspended because the kings have not been faithful to God.*

*We have a King whose name is Jesus, but we don't have a political king. Donald Trump is not a king; Joe Biden is not a king, none of our presidents are kings. But, let us make sure that we pray for our top leader of our country. Every day we need to be lifting our voices for President Trump and for President-elect Biden; and on January 20th we want to make sure we are praying for the new President and for his administration. It makes no difference whether we voted for Donald Trump or Joe Biden, the issue is, as Christian citizens, we need to pray for our leader because if he's not leading according to God's purposes then it's going to go sideways; it just always does.*

**Ezekiel 19:1-9 "A Dirge for the line of Judah,"** **1** And you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel,

*Notice how Ezekiel says, "the princes of Israel." He's talking about the kings of Israel, but he refuses to call them kings. I love that about Ezekiel. He is saying, "We have THE King; His name is Yahweh." And so, we have sub-leaders under Yahweh who are called "princes." He refuses to use the word "king." I think that's so telling. Like I am not the shepherd of this congregation; I am a sub-shepherd, and THE Shepherd is Jesus Christ. You know, Joe Biden is the President-elect of the United States; he is not the ultimate leader of our lives. HE is Jesus Christ. We always want to make certain we understand that Christ is above all.*

*"The people of Judah, even the exiles, looked upon the king as their 'good luck charm,' assuring them of God's favor. Without the submission to the will of God of both leader*

*and those led, both shepherd and sheep, any claim to security with God is a delusion.”*

2 and say: What was your mother? A lioness! Among lions she crouched; in the midst of young lions she reared her cubs. 3 And she brought up one of her cubs; he became a young lion, and he learned to catch prey; he devoured men. 4 The nations heard about him; he was caught in their pit, and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt. 5 When she saw that she waited in vain, that her hope was lost, she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion. 6 He prowled among the lions; he became a young lion, and he learned to catch prey; he devoured men, 7 and seized their widows. He laid waste their cities, and the land was appalled and all who were in it at the sound of his roaring. 8 Then the nations set against him from provinces on every side; they spread their net over him; he was taken in their pit. 9 With hooks they put him in a cage and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into custody, that his voice should no more be heard on the mountains of Israel.

*The first riddle; the first parable about these two lions. I just mentioned that Yahweh is the one and only King, God Himself. It's interesting that Ezekiel starts with not saying, "Who is your mother," but "What is your mother?" and, obviously, that's because the lion is going to become the image. We don't talk about it much, but lions were really prevalent in Biblical times. You don't find lions in Israel today; they've all been exterminated from the land. But, back in Biblical Days, lions were quite prevalent in the wilderness and throughout the ancient Middle East. So the image of the lion would be one very well known and very feared by all those who would listen.*

*There is a particular cub that this lion has; he develops a taste for human beings; he devours men and women and kills people. And so, obviously this lion, as we just learned, is dragged off to Egypt. And Ezekiel describes in some of these details some of the ancient techniques of just of how they would catch and put lions in pits.*

*When we read, for example, **The Book of Daniel** and his friends get thrown into the Lion's Den, well, that was a common, common way to deal with prisoners and your enemies. One of the most moving and just deeply spiritually important places I go when we go on a pilgrimage to Israel is to walk in a place called Caesarea by the Sea where the Apostle Paul was held for two years before he was shipped off to Rome. And there, we know from excavations, that the cages for the lions and other wild animals, bears and lions were kept in, what's called "The Hippodrome" where the races were and where the Christians were brought out as pleasure to the Romans to fight the Lions and other wild animals. When you walk on this part of this coastline of Israel, you are walking on the blood of martyrs because here Christians were devoured and consumed and tortured and killed by lions. And so, this image of the lion is quite telling, both in Biblical and Church history.*

*The lion is taken away. And then we understand in **Ezekiel 19:5-7** a second cub is now promoted to be the chief of the pride; group of lions are called "the pride," of course. The second cub becomes the dominant male as king of the lions. He copulates with widows. He would do that to make sure they were allegiant to him and not to the former*

*lion so that he's the one producing the new cubs. He lays waste to their cities. He frightens the whole countryside with his roaring. It's an international response that the nations, in **Ezekiel 19:8**, all the nations were set against him.*

*This second lion provokes then an international response to capturing him, and they drag him off to Babylon in a cage. The most remarkable detail is the nation's motive for capturing this lion. To silence the sound of his roar; that is to stop his terrifying behavior on the mountains of Israel. So, the surrounding nations pose as liberators of Israel from this lion. So again, we know the background here. God is going to use Babylon and Egypt and Persia as His ways to bring help but also chastisement to Israel. So at this point no explanation in the riddle is given. If Ezekiel 19 ended with Ezekiel 19:9 we would not be sure what we are supposed to know.*

*But, we do know this that the lion for the people of Judah has special significance. We all know this, right? Jesus is the Lion of Judah. That's one of His designations. He comes from the line of Judah. He is The Lion of Judah. So for us Christians this rings a lot of bells for us. **Genesis 49:8-9** we read these words, "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. 9 Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?"*

*Jacob is assigning then a place among all the tribes of Judah as the lion of the tribes, The Lion of Judah. If you are a Jewish exile in Babylon and you are hearing this parable, this riddle, you're understanding that this is a judgment against the very kings of Judah. And, who are these two kings? We can't say for sure, but this is coming from Daniel Block whose commentary I find very very helpful. Ezekiel's two lions must represent two kings of Judah since Jehoahaz was the only one of Judah's last kings to be taken to Egypt. He's the only one and probably the first lion, but, who's the second lion king? Jehoiachin who was taken to Babylon after reigning just three months? Zedekiah? Block says this, "The most satisfactory interpretation identifies the mother's, the nation Israel Judah or as the Davidic dynasty who embodies the tribe and equates the second king with Jehoiachin.*

*I think Block says this because ('Shallum') Jehoiachin's story is told in **Jeremiah 22-23:8**. It gets very confusing obviously. Jehoiachin is also called Shallum. So, again, you've got different names for the same person. But, whatever this is, it's a judgment against the last kings of Israel; that God is going to subject them to the dominance of other nations.*

**Now, that is the riddle in the first part of Ezekiel 19.** Questions, comments at this point?

**Terrie:** I'm really disturbed about this comment that this covenant with David is suspended. And, I don't know if this comes from Professor Block or elsewhere, but it's pretty strong. I mean I'm comforted because I know the rest of the story because Jesus does come through the line of David, but just to say that it's suspended is really

troubling. And, I'm looking at the ESV Study notes on this where it doesn't go so far as to say "suspend," but it more so says that "God did not abandon His covenant promise to David, but His blessings from Judah He withdrew." And, I understand, "suspend" doesn't mean cancel, but could we talk about that a little more, please?

**Mark:** Yes, you raise a good point and it's good that you had that reaction. It's really good because I think Teri you are probably drawing, spiritually and emotionally, upon what the exiles would have thought. "What do you mean that God's going to bring judgment against the king that's in the line of David? How can that be? God has promised never to do that."

So, your reaction is extremely appropriate to the Biblical Word. So, I do think it's important to understand that God is not breaking or nullifying the Covenant with Judah. God cannot do that, but the word, I guess, "suspend," maybe is too strong a word? But, it certainly needs to be understood that God is very angry, and He's not going to break His Covenant, but when the ESV says, "God's going to withdraw His favor upon Judah," it's a similar idea then, that for a time, God is going to bring judgment against David's line of kings even as He promises to never fully sever it.

And so I think this is to understand later we will see that God cannot and will not break His covenant. But, if we act in a way that is against God or not according to God's purposes, we do suffer consequences from that. And there is punishment involved. So these are terribly serious matters. But, I'm glad you had that reaction because I think that's the whole purpose of this riddle is to prompt that very reaction. That's a good comment. Any other comments about this?

**Ann Wolfer:** Pastor Mark, would this be thought about in the sense of, I think it was Hosea and Gomer, in the sense that God separated or divorced Israel for the purpose then of letting Israel do whatever Israel wanted to do and suffer the consequences, but then He brought her back. And, in Hosea's life, he was to marry a woman of very loose morals and eventually she went her own way and became a prostitute, but the prophet Hosea was instructed to buy her back from the slave market and marry her and to forgive her and treat her as though nothing had happened. It was a morality play, if you will, of what God was doing with Israel. There was a time when He put her aside, but then He threw her back in and forgave her of everything she had done.

**Mark:** Right. Yes, thank's Ann, that's another good analogy. That's another good application, right. Boy, Hosea would be an amazing book to read about all that. So, you are right. God does not divorce Himself from Israel, but there is a period of separation during the judgment. That's good. Other comments or insights?

I think we will finally get to the point where we are going to see that Judah/Israel was taking for granted the Davidic covenant. It had almost become like "a rabbit's foot" to them. It was just their good luck charm; that they knew that God had made an internal covenant with David, and so as long as there was a king in the Davidic line in Judah, they were okay, and they could do whatever they wanted to. And, God is saying, "You

have misunderstood the covenant altogether. It's not an excuse; not a license to sin. It is an invitation into holiness."

You know, Paul will later take up these same themes in Galatians where he will say, "You have misunderstood circumcision. You think because you're circumcised that you can live and believe whatever you want to because you've been circumcised." He said, "You completely misunderstood the Covenant of Circumcision. It's to circumcise your heart; that God's grace is to lead you to want to follow Him more closely; want to obey Him. But, you use it as an excuse; as a license to do whatever you want to because you say, "I can live however I want to because I'm circumcised??" I mean we hear this all the time, right?

In the Church Christians must understand Baptism, Faith. They think, "Good! I'm good to go; I've checked the box so I can do whatever I want to." That's completely misunderstanding the covenant. And, I think that's kind of the..

Getting back to our text today, the image shifts to a vine. Let's look at **Ezekiel 19:10-14**  
 10 Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard planted by the water, fruitful and full of branches by reason of abundant water. 11 Its strong stems became rulers' scepters; it towered aloft among the thick boughs; it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches. 12 But the vine was plucked up in fury, cast down to the ground; the east wind dried up its fruit; they were stripped off and withered. As for its strong stem, fire consumed it. 13 Now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. 14 And fire has gone out from the stem of its shoots, has consumed its fruit, so that there remains in it no strong stem, no scepter for ruling. This is a lamentation and has become a lamentation.

So it shifts, the mother is no longer a lioness, but she's a vine. Again, getting back to Teri's comment, this is a clear judgment against the kings of Judah and what in the world is that going to mean for God's promise in the Davidic Kingdom?

In **Ezekiel 19:10-11** *the vine is healthy; abundant waters; strong staves; she could be seen for miles around. Then, some angry person uproots the plant; takes the plant to a desert where there's no hope of surviving; a fire strikes the vine; consumes the replacement branch. I mean this is a devastating riddle parable.*

*So, who is the vine and what's the significance of the scepter of branches? Perhaps, the vine, the mother, is best interpreted as the Tribe of the nation of Judah from which more than one ruler sprouts. She has abandoned her role as a producer of grapes. When Ezekiel says that it's become a huge tree for all to see, that's really a euphemism for arrogance. And, God has punished Judah by uprooting and humiliating her. He is the one that has uprooted His own people and put them in the wilderness in a foreign land. So, it's an indictment of, not only kings, but of the whole nation. So the exiles realize that as they wallow in the misery of Babylonian captivity, they represent the pathetic remainder of this once great land.*



*But, what about the strong branches, the septers? It's best interpreted as a figure for the Davidic dynasty the succession of royal rulers who have sprouted from the Tribe of Judah. The two kings, the first is Jehoiachin; and, of course, he is torn off and burned and transplanted to Babylon. And the new figure, the second branch, Zedekiah, emerges from what's left of the plant of Judah but is consumed within.*

*At the end of Ezekiel 19 it is a Lamentation of Lamentations. It underscores the futility of any hopes based on the Lord's Covenant with the Davidic House. Like the nation, its dynasty was doomed and after 586 BC it did indeed prophesy with all the nation and the death of the Davidic dynasty in particular.*

*BUT, God is the God of resurrection. And we're going to see, finally in Ezekiel, that it looks like all is lost. But, hold on, it's not. There's going to be a shoot; there's going to be a branch; and God's going to restore His Temple. And so, remember (that) some of the most devastating news in Scripture and the hardest news for us to hear, even today, is in The Book of Ezekiel. At the same time, some of the most glorious news of God's grace and restoration after judgment is found in The Book of Ezekiel. We haven't heard a lot of the good stuff yet, but it's coming. But, right now we should not move too quickly to it. Right now, we are in a mode of repentance. Again, how does Bible Study affect us? How does The Book of Ezekiel affect us?*

*I was talking earlier today by a Zoom call with a dear beloved Brother in the Lord in our congregation; and he was talking about how he was just so upset about what's happening in the nation and what's happening in the world; where we are going as a country and all these things that he is saying are not right. And, then after he kind of let off his steam, he said, "Well, but the truth is the first place I need to pray is my own heart. I first need to look at my own sins. Before I get too angry at anything going on with anybody else, God is calling me to repent and turn to Him first." And, I thought, "Well, that is a real wonderful Word of the Lord," so what does the Book of Ezekiel do? It causes us to look globally, nationally at the problems; but it then, first and foremost, causes us to get on our knees and say, "Lord, please forgive me for any ways I have taken Your Covenant with me for granted and I have not lived as You would have me live."*

We will look at the **Theological Implications** and then stop and ask some questions. The promises of God to the ancestors are no guarantee of divine blessing for their descendants. There is accountability to God. And so, if we had looked at Chapter 18 right before this, we would have seen there that God had declared that children die for their own sins, which sounds rough, right? But, the good news is they don't die for the sins of their parents. Everybody's accountable for his or her own sins.

The call to leadership is a call to God-honoring servanthood, but Israel's kings had failed this calling.

The presence of God's chosen representative is no substitute for the people's personal commitment to the LORD. They were hanging their security on the king; whereas, God

calls each man and woman to come and take up our cross and follow Him personally so we can never pass the buck.

Remember in **Genesis 3** after the first couple sinned. God said, What in the world's happened; the man blames the woman and the woman blames the serpent; nobody takes responsibility." And, this is coming to roost now in Ezekiel and Judah and nobody's taking responsibility; they're all passing the buck. So, let me stop here; questions and comments at this point?

**Will O'Brien:** Mark I have a question. One of these verses was a way of pointing at the vine and its arrogance. What verse was that?

**Mark: Ezekiel 19:11** Those are ways, I think, that Ezekiel was saying it was full of pride and it began to...it was supposed to be a branch that would stay along the ground and bring fruit through the countryside. But what it did instead, it grew up and towered so that people would look at it and not be blessed by the fruit it would provide.

**Will:** My ESV says that another way, "towered aloft among the thick clouds.."

**Mark:** What other Biblical story does that remind you of "**Tower of Babel.**" That's a great ESV note. So, again, it's the idea of "look at me, don't look at God. I want to tower up so people will look at me."

And, what we're to do? We're to be low lying branches bearing fruit that people can come easily and be blessed. So they don't have to reach for it; it's right there. But, instead the vine grew straight up and it's going to get plucked out.

**Will:** You can absolutely see that reflected in Jesus' character when He cleans the disciples feet and, as usual, Peter says, "No, you can't do that," and Jesus corrects him, as He usually does, and says, "No, you failed to understand My character and my purpose and what the glory of God looks like."

**Mark:** Yes, good point, and then this past Sunday we heard one of the servant songs of **Isaiah 42**. So, in the **Book of Isaiah**, there are four portions that we call "The Songs of the Servant," all about The Messiah Jesus and so again and again the Lord is called "**The Servant,**" and even today, after all these years, with all this Biblical Truth, we still stumble over pride versus servanthood.

So, I think this uncovers Scripturally these large teachings and themes that just reverberate through all the chapters. Will, your comment for the first time brought to mind, that when the vine grows up so that everybody will look at it, we go back to Genesis and will we see the pride of the people in Babel, "Let's make a name for ourselves," and boy if that's not a sin that most all of us have to repent from? I think it is.

**Vickie Smith:** I have a question. From listening to all of this, and thinking about it, I think, on a personal level... I mean, I think it talks to us personally as well as a nation. But, it kind of cements for me that it is possible to lose your salvation. I mean do you see that there that he is saying, "You can lose everything I've given to you."

**Mark:** *If Ezekiel 19 was the only chapter we had in the prophet Ezekiel, I would have to say, "Wow, that's scary, but it's probably true," but it's not so we have to read in context. So Judah IS going to be restored. Israel IS going to be restored. Their sins were breathtaking, but we see prophetically that there was restoration, and it begins here in The Book of Ezekiel where we will find out. I mean you raise a great question.*

*Biblically, pastorally, spiritually, I really take heart in that, what we call, the doctrine of eternal security; that, you know, once your heart is captured for Christ and you say, "He is my Lord and Savior," yeah, there are going to be a lot of days that you deviate from that, but you're going to come back and God is not going to let you stray so far that you're lost.*

*Biblically, I would not want us to always be afraid of our salvation. See I think that's the spiritual issue I find with people who say, "Yeah, I believe, but I don't know if I will be saved. I believe but I don't know where I'm going to be when I die." To me that is just a spiritual burden that satan can take and just crush a person's hope. But to say, "Yeah, I'm in Christ. I'm not a perfect person and every day I need to confess in thought, word and deed and say, "I have not loved God with my whole heart and my neighbors as myself." That's why we need to continually pray that prayer. But at the same time to say, **Romans 8**, "There is nothing, nothing that can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus." "Nothing!!" Paul leaves no nuance. He doesn't say, "except for these two things, we have the assurance." So, can that be misused? Yes!*

*I won't get into it, but years ago we had a situation with a new member whose most important doctrine was eternal security. He said, "I was saved when I was 19." And then he was a man in our Church and there were things going on in his life that were just terribly sinful. And when I had to go and confront him on that; when his sins became obvious and public to my knowledge; and he was a leader in our Church at that point, he said, "Well, I'm saved." I said, "But, you can't live like this. You are making choices that are sinful obviously against Scripture." He said, "Well, I'm saved, I can live however I want to." Those were his exact words. He said, "I'm saved, therefore, I can do whatever I want to and I'll be okay." And so, was he truly saved? I don't know. Someone who is really saved is probably not going to say that. And so, it can be terribly misunderstood and misused. But we are going to see in Ezekiel that Judah and Israel will be restored. And, we have seen it with our own eyes, that Israel's been restored; I mean 1948. So, that's probably more than you want to hear. Give me some feedback, Vickie, what do you think?*

**Vickie:** I'm just wondering about the people who died in-between there sinning against God like they were when they made Him so angry. What about those individuals who..? I don't know.

**Linda Handy:** I am thinking two things: (1) “I am saved,” always is followed by “Go and sin no more,” knowing full well that we are going to sin again. And so we come back, daily, sometimes minute by minute, confess those sins and return to the Lord our God. So that is “the kicker.” To the gentleman you were talking about, Mark, (the individual; man or woman); to that person, “I am saved, therefore, I can do.” No, “I am saved and to the best of my ability, go and sin no more and when I am recognized or confronted with my sin I will confess it and then fall on my knees and say, “Lord, I have sinned; I fall at Your Mercy seat.”

**Mark:** Paul then will take just what you said, Linda, and others in almost every letter. Look at the Book of Romans, chapters 1-11, “This is what God has done for us,” (repeated over and over again), chapters 12-16 “Therefore,” this is how we live. Ephesians, the first three chapters “God has done this for us in Christ.” The last three chapters of Ephesians, “Therefore, this is how we’re to live.” Colossians. I mean every letter of Paul has two parts. Part A is “Grace” and Part B is “Faith,” because that’s the Covenant. “We are saved by Grace,” nothing that we’ve done; not one iota that we’ve done; God in Christ totally, “therefore, we are saved then to believe and live faithfully.”

So, that’s the covenant. It’s here in Ezekiel. It’s in Genesis 12 with Abraham. It’s in every Gospel and new Testament letter. It’s in all prophets. Like Anne was saying about Hosea, I mean, that’s a perfect example. “Don’t you understand, Israel, God says. I am your husband; we’re in a covenant marriage. Why are you (Israel) committing adultery against Me?”

So there’s judgment; there’s judgment; there’s judgment, but then God says, “Hosea, you can’t divorce Gomer. You have got to put up with it.” And, so God does not divorce Himself from His people even as they must sometimes suffer the consequences of their sin. So, it’s complex; it’s mysterious, but I just pray that each of us today would say today, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. Help me Lord to live.”

**Chris Miller:** I just think that one of the things that I’m reminded of is that in The Hebrew Bible of the Old Testament, it was a corporate identity that people had. We are more individualistic and became so through Greek influence and so, even today, we’re becoming more and more individualistic as we move along in society. So, I guess part of my answer to that question for me that Vickie was having is that if one is going down, everybody is going down; they’re corporate; they’re corporate people not singular identity.

**Mark:** That’s an outstanding point. Yes, Chris. You are right. So, that gets to the core of salvation history. “How can The Messiah Jesus Christ die for all people?” because they’re all identified in that one. It’s one for all and all for one? That’s how Christ can do that. That is a very deeply Biblical Jewish understanding and you are right. In the Greek philosophy, that get’s all confused and forgotten. But, in the Hebraic Biblical view, one stands for all. So, that’s how the king can represent the whole nation; that’s how The Messiah Jesus can die for the whole world. You are right, good point.

Alright, in beginning with verse 45 there's a lot of material here so we'll see how far we can get; it's 12:48.

*We are going now into the section of a parable about a sword. You may or may not remember, but we have done part of this already. I do regret a little bit breaking this up as we have because sometimes it can break the flow, but anyway we are going today to hear the riddle of the sword and the song of the sword. And, the sword is Ezekiel's most important image of the agent of judgment of death; 89 times the sword appears in Ezekiel.*

So let's look at **Ezekiel 20:45-49** the end of **Ezekiel 20: 45** And the word of the Lord came to me: 46 "Son of man, set your face toward the southland; preach against the south, and prophesy against the forest land in the Negeb. 47 Say to the forest of the Negeb, Hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you and every dry tree. The blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from south to north shall be scorched by it. 48 All flesh shall see that I the Lord have kindled it; it shall not be quenched." **49** Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! They are saying of me, 'Is he not a maker of parables?'"

*Ezekiel is saying, "Lord, do I have to tell another one. They are not even believing the ones I am telling."*

*The "Riddle of the Sword," in these verses of Ezekiel 20, we find three ambiguous terms; the southland, the south, the forest land, the Negeb are all nicknames for Jerusalem and so all of this is about Jerusalem. And, he's probably facing east as he tells his riddle. So, if you're an exile standing there at Ezekiel's house and he's telling you this riddle, this parable, you are looking at him and you know that he is facing Jerusalem east as he says it. So, this is clearly about Jerusalem. And God's going to bring a fire that everyone will see that judgment has come. But Ezekiel complains that nobody's taking him seriously.*

So, here's the interpretation then. **Ezekiel 21:1-7 1** The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries. Prophesy against the land of Israel 3 and say to the land of Israel, Thus says the Lord: Behold, I am against you and will draw my sword from its sheath and will cut off from you both righteous and wicked.

*I'm telling you this is hard stuff here in Ezekiel, right?*

4 Because I will cut off from you both righteous and wicked, therefore my sword shall be drawn from its sheath against all flesh from south to north. 5 And all flesh shall know that I am the Lord. I have drawn my sword from its sheath; it shall not be sheathed again. 6 "As for you, son of man, groan; with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan before their eyes. **7** And when they say to you, 'Why do you groan?' you shall say,

‘Because of the news that it is coming. Every heart will melt, and all hands will be feeble; every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it is coming, and it will be fulfilled,.’” declares the Lord God.

*The fire is obviously Yahweh’s sword, and it’s going to come against both the righteous and the wicked of Jerusalem. The death of the righteous and the wicked by God’s fiery sword rules out any hope for Judah. She’ll be totally destroyed; and, his audience, the exiles, would have been shocked to hear this, probably, just as we are. All flesh of Judah shall be cut off.*

*And so, God then prompts Ezekiel to perform another non-verbal, groaning sign act with the performance Ezekiel exhorts them to abandon their false hopes of security and be grieved by the abominations in Jerusalem.*

*As we’ve said, the darkest judgment in the Bible comes here in Ezekiel. But, please understand we’re going to get to the most glorious light in Gospel in Ezekiel at some point. But you know, this is hard stuff and we have to work our way through it.*

So then in **Ezekiel 21:8-17** **8** And the word of the Lord came to me: **9** “Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord, say: “A sword, a sword is sharpened and also polished, **10** sharpened for slaughter, polished to flash like lightning! (Or shall we rejoice? You have despised the rod, my son, with everything of wood.) **11** So the sword is given to be polished, that it may be grasped in the hand. It is sharpened and polished to be given into the hand of the slayer. **12** Cry out and wail, son of man, for it is against my people. It is against all the princes of Israel. They are delivered over to the sword with my people. Strike therefore upon your thigh. **13** For it will not be a testing— what could it do if you despise the rod?” declares the Lord God. **14** “As for you, son of man, prophesy. Clap your hands and let the sword come down twice, yes, three times, the sword for those to be slain. It is the sword for the great slaughter, which surrounds them, **15** that their hearts may melt, and many stumble. At all their gates I have given the glittering sword. Ah, it is made like lightning; it is taken up for slaughter. **16** Cut sharply to the right; set yourself to the left, wherever your face is directed. **17** I also will clap my hands, and I will satisfy my fury; I the Lord have spoken.

*That’s God saying this! WOW! So what do we learn from this?*

*So here in “The Song of the Sword” in verses 8-17 we have no doubt the sword is Yahweh’s sharpened and polished. Ezekiel exhorts his listeners not to rejoice for the sword. They have despised God’s own Son, they should rejoice over their great sin. God hands His sword over to the authorized slayer, the executioner. And, the sword is aimed at two key targets, the population of Israel and at Judah’s nobility, the princes, the kings.*

*And so, the gesture of slapping his thighs laments the suspension of both the national and dynastic covenants. God’s weapon is ready.*

*So the prophesy then enters a new phase. First, Ezekiel is commanded to perform another sign act clapping his hands. Second, God calls to the sword to perform His deadly work, great slaughter; and third concludes the shocking disclosure. Yahweh is the One clapping His Hand. Ezekiel's gestures reflect the very fury of God Himself, God of Israel.*

### **Theological Implications**

(1) We remember what our Lord says about not judging the speck in our neighbor's eye before we have dealt with the log in our own eye. The exiles have no reason to rejoice over the suffering that will come to those still in Jerusalem. They must deal first with their sin: God's sword of judgment has reason to fall on them, too.

(2) We must not despise the Word of God and those who bring the Truth of the Word to us. The exiles would not pay attention to Ezekiel. We must not do likewise (despise the Word of God).

(3) God's divine judgment is part of his divine love.

Now, this is a really hard one for us to understand, but it's terribly important. God's judgment and God's salvation are both part of His love. The two cannot be separated for God practices a "severe mercy."

Have you ever read the book, "A Severe Mercy." If you ever get a copy of that, you will not be able to put it down. It's an incredible story of a man and his wife. A true story. The author Sheldon Vanauken served as professor of history and English at Lynchburg College. He was a good friend of C. S. Lewis. It's an extraordinary story called "A Severe Mercy." I made the mistake years ago of taking it with me on our beach vacation. It is not a beach book, but I spent most of the whole beach week reading it. <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/vanauken-sheldon-1914-1996/>

Let me stop, we only have a few minutes. I had to end with a sword slashing and all are going to die, but we've got to hear the judgment of God if we're going to hear the restoration and Grace of God. Questions in this last couple of minutes?

**Will:** I have one comment. It's a little "out there," so I don't want to take up our time. There's a comment that somebody made. I forget who it was. It might have been Victoria or Anne. Doesn't the content in Chapter 19 kind of make it sound like we could lose our salvation. It's interesting. It brought a verse to mind. I don't know if it's related at all, but it brings **1 Peter 3:18-20** to mind. And, it talks about Jesus going and preaching to the spirits in prison because they formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah. And so, I don't think it's spot on in terms of the timeline, but it's interesting that it sort of talks about Jesus having some things on His radar that maybe we didn't think of. I don't know what to make of that. That's my comment.

**Mark:** Thanks, Will. That's wonderful you're thinking like this. You're thinking globally throughout Scripture of how all the dots connect so that would be interesting for us to

spend time on “What does that mean that Jesus went, talking about Holy Saturday, between Jesus’ death and the resurrection and what it means that He went to the place where those were kept who had died before. And there are some really important interpretations of that, but I think it gets at the great mystery of God’s salvation. And so, we just have to trust God that somehow even His vengeance and His judgment are all a part of His divine Love.

So let me just leave that thought with all of us; that everything God does, He does out of His love, even the hard stuff that we just read today. Somehow we have to ask The Holy Spirit. “Holy Spirit, give me insight. Give me the assurance that even the hard stuff in my life and in Scripture ultimately is from Your love because you love us so much. And somehow I just think we have to keep that together or otherwise, we’ll be overwhelmed by the sword and the vine and the lion.

So thank you, brothers and sisters, if God so favors us we will be back together next Tuesday. (Next week Jan. 19th) We’ll finish up this final small section of Ezekiel 22:17-22 and we’ll move on to a new part of the Book of Ezekiel.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, we give You thanks for Your Word even as we ask that You help us understand the hard Word that You give; that it might ultimately be a Word that brings us deeper into Your Word and Your love. We pray, Lord, for all our congregation, our friends, our family, for Amy, for Tori, for this nation and especially our leaders. We ask all this in the name of The Messiah Jesus our Lord. Amen.”

God bless you all. Great class. I love your questions. I love your concerns; keep those coming.

**(Transcribed from near the beginning of Class 16 January 19 Zoom Recording what remained to be covered in Class 15 Discussion, Handout and recording)**

Pastor Mark begins with, We are going to finish up the last of the section, Ezekiel as **“The Spinner of Riddles and Parables” Ezekiel 22:17-22: 17** And the word of the Lord came to me: 18 “Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are dross of silver. 19 Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. 20 As one gathers silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into a furnace, to blow the fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you. 21 I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it. **22** As silver is melted in a furnace, so you shall be melted in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the Lord; I have poured out my wrath upon you.”

*As we hear that one of the things I think about are all the ways that Jesus Himself taught in The Gospels. He would often use everyday examples in His teachings and*



*parables and other teaching examples. Once again, as we have said many times, although Ezekiel is not directly quoted in the New Testament, Ezekiel is really undergirding all the New Testament. And, we see so much of how Ezekiel, as a type of Jesus, we see Ezekiel as a type of the teacher that Jesus will become.*

*Obviously, I think we all get the point of this parable, if you will, that Yahweh is saying that The House of Israel back in Jerusalem has turned into dross. I am not real familiar with the smelting process, but obviously dross is the slag, the waste, in the process when you smelt down iron ore to get the silver. And so, Israel has become nothing but wasteful dross from the silver process. Those comments cover verses 17 and 18.*

*Then in verses 19 and 20 the interpretation is told.*

*(1) The Smith is Yahweh Himself*

*(2) The furnace is Jerusalem.*

*(3) The exiles must also experience the fire of divine wrath to refine them into the precious metal Yahweh can use.*

*(4) God's goal in the smelting process is declared in the final verse: When He is through with them, they will recognize Him and understand His fury.*

*We know that familiar phrase in Scripture, "the refiner's fire," and we understand that many times in Scripture there's this example of a Spiritual point that God has to refine us, often by fire, in order to get us to be the people He wants us to be. So, it's a way for us to understand that through both the joy and the suffering of life, our loving Father is continuing working on us to become the people He has saved us to be.*

So a couple of **Theological Implications** about this short section, and I would love to hear some feedback.

In order for God's people to be the people He has saved them to be, they must be subjected again to the refiner's fire, which, in this case, is the fire of His divine wrath. It's really hard for us but really important to understand that God's wrath comes out of God's love; that the core of God is love, as we read in 1 John, "God is love." That is the basic description of who God is. Who is God? God is love. And from that emanates all things, including His wrath. And that's counter intuitive to us, but it's Biblically clear.

And secondly, in terms of theological imagery, like Jesus' image of the divine vinedresser who cuts off a fruitless branch and throws it into the fire (**John 15:1-11**), this riddle/oracle serves as warning for all who claim security in divine election but refuse in their lives to reflect the glory of the divine Elector. So, we have to understand that God saves us to be His people; to be His holy people (**1 Peter 2:9**). We never want to take for granted our salvation. We have been saved for a purpose; and that is to become His holy people. So that finishes the section of that part of Ezekiel. Questions, comments, feedback as we move toward completion of this section?

**Linda Handy:** Mark, I have a question. My question is this. He mentions it three times. "You will be melted in the midst of them." And, the Lord never says anything more than once unless it's important that you hear. Is He, the Lord, hoping, praying that they will hear and a remnant will turn? Is that the "three times you will be melted, listen to what I'm telling you; listen and hear?"

**Mark:** That's a good observation. I think so, Linda, in fact, it's interesting that you would should say that *because that's a perfect segue to what we find in Ezekiel 11; that ultimately all this melting down extraction process, if you will, is finally to get down to the remnant.*

*Remember what Paul says in Romans 11 in that famous passage "what then about the Jews?" Romans 9-11. Paul says not every person of Israel is a true Israelite. And so what he's saying there, I think, very much corresponds to this; that God is refining Israel down to the true Israel and His true people who will be grafted into Israel, Gentile and Jew together.*

*One of the themes of Scripture is the remnant. And I have not talked about the remnant as much as I should have in my own preaching and teaching. It's not something we talk a lot about, but once you start doing Bible Study, you realize the remnant is everywhere. And, it's throughout the Book of Ezekiel. And, all this about dross and the refiner's fire gets at that. So, you are right, the three times is to emphasize that through this process, God will finally extract the true Israel, the true remnant for His people.*

**Linda:** And for those of us who are the remnant who have been grafted on, will He not continue to refine us lest we have unchristian Christians amongst ourselves. Is that not another warning or a heads up?

**Mark:** *I think it is, and I think what we are talking about now is about sanctification, the continuing daily process of growing in The Holy Spirit in holiness. For example, I think immediately about what Paul says in 2 Corinthians, "his thorn in the flesh," and he prayed and cried out over a long period of time for healing. He was not healed, but rather he learned that God's grace was sufficient in all things. That thorn in the flesh for the Apostle Paul, you could say, was that refiner's fire, where Paul, like all Christians; all people of God, have to learn that and often through their suffering. If Paul, the great missionary and apostle, could not escape it, then I hardly think any of us can escape it. It's really important for us, as believers, to always ask the question, whatever happens in our lives, "Lord, what should I learn from this." Especially in times of suffering and setback, pain and worry. To know that The Father loves us is to know that He's always with us so the issue is not, "Lord, where are you? Why did this happen to me? But, "Lord, where are You in this? Why have You allowed it? What can I learn?" If we can approach our times of refinement in that regard; we will, no doubt, grow greatly in faith and appreciation for God, but it's hard; it's really hard.*

**Alan Denekas:** Just one other illustration. I've done some black smithing, and you can't do anything with the metal when it's cold. You have to heat it up to get it soft enough to shape. And, I think that's why God puts us through trials. It's that we need to be softened up so that we can be shaped. And, I am 'the complainer in chief,' you know. I fuss; I fight with God all the time, but ultimately I think that is a refining thing. I think culturally we are probably going to start experiencing more and more of that with the way our culture is shifting.

**Mark:** Alan, those are great great insights. What you said sounds so obvious, but I really didn't know it. You can't work with metal that's cold. You can only work with it when it's hot and softened up and then you can work with it. Man, that's a beautiful insight.

**Alan:** One other thing is that when you start out you just have a block of metal or a metal bar, but then you turn it into something that is beautiful and useful through the heating and hammering. And that's a lot of times what our trials feel like, burning and hammering and we're getting beat up. Wiser people have said we need to ask the Lord what we are supposed to learn from it so that we can be more easily shaped.

**Mark:** Right, well that's a great insight. You're right, we're learning more and more in our lifetime that we cannot anticipate what tomorrow's going to be like. I mean, we knew that, but we really know it after 2020 and going into 2021. We have to be prepared for more refining and continually cry out to God to show us what it means for us in the times that are coming. And those times are here, I think, no question about it.

**Alan:** One last thing about that; it reminds me of **Job 42:5** where Job says, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;" So, in the process of all of his suffering, Job drew closer to God, and I think we can look for the same thing.

**Mark:** Yes, so Job is the prime example of the refiner's fire, no question about it, and he went through many long dark nights of the soul; of questioning those friends who were so unhelpful; he wrestled with God and finally Job did come to that place where he was really refined as a remarkable man of faith.

**End of Class 15 January 12 Handout, Discussion and Zoom Recording**

**Class 16 January 19, 2021:**

**Pastor Mark:** I am coming to you from the beautiful environment of **Maggie Valley, NC**. I am here at a cabin on a pre-Lenten retreat trying to write The Lenten devotional for this year, and Lent comes early so I've got to get cracking on it. Historically, I'm with a friend. We were in seminary together. He's now actually retired as a Lutheran Pastor. He has former Church members who have always been so gracious to say, "Come and stay at our cabin at Maggie Valley anytime you want to," so Frank and I have taken these retreats for many years.

But, it's good to take a break so that we can be back together and hope that your week has been good since the last time we were all together. Any prayer concerns or any other things you want to say before we get to Ezekiel this afternoon?

**Linda Handy:** Pray for the nation; for God's shalom; and action in our everyday lives and in the life of our nation.

**Mark:** spoke of the prayers for the nation. In the sanctuary at St. John, this will be the third or fourth Wednesday in a row that members of the healing prayer team have come to pray for the nation. It began as a spontaneous gathering and its grown. I think last Wednesday there must have been 25 or 30 people in the sanctuary. We've definitely designated 2021 as a year of prayer at St. John; and already God has blessed that with probably more prayer at the beginning of the year than I think we have ever had in my recollection. Hopefully it's a blessing that will continue and gather as the year goes on.

**Opening Prayer:** Let us pray in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit, Lord, we give thanks that You are our God who listens, who hears, who always responds in the ways that are best for us, Lord. Sometimes your answers to prayer are not what we request, but they are always what is best. As we come to you, Lord, we pray that Your Holy Spirit would give us insight into Your Word of God in The Book of Ezekiel that, Lord, we may understand it then and apply it to our lives each day. Even as we do so, we pray for Amy and her family as they move from California, that they may get settled in NC. We pray that Nancy can be reunited with her daughter and family soon and very soon in this year. We thank You for Vickie and our beloved Sister Tori, for the healing, Lord, of her sinuses following this surgery and we pray, Lord that the healing will continue day by day until it's full and complete. Father of Mercy, of course, we pray for our nation. We remember, Lord, the brokenness of this land. We remember to pray on this day for both President Trump as well as President-elect Biden, and we pray tomorrow with the transition to new government, we just pray for Your mercy and Your hand. Lord, we give You thanks that You are The King of Kings and that we ultimately, of course, always hold our allegiance first and foremost to You. Lord, never let us waiver from our allegiance and obedience to You. We pray that our leaders in this nation would seek You and make that their same aim and purpose. Into Your hands, O

Lord, we commend our lives today and commend this Bible Study to Your glory. In Your Holy Name. Amen.

(Scroll back to the end of Class 15 for the transcribed completion of Class 15.)

(Class 16 begins at **Location 23:17** on the January 19, 2021 Zoom Recording):  
Pastor Mark continues, As we start a new section, let's continue now with **Ezekiel 11** ESV "**Ezekiel the Debater**," not that other sections have not also been debating-like, but these are especially prominent in showing us how God uses Ezekiel to engage in debate with the people. Let's look at **Ezekiel 11:1-13**, the famous example of the "**pot of stew**."

*We are going in and out of The Book of Ezekiel, so am sorry that the flow sometimes is broken. But, in Ezekiel 10, right before Ezekiel 11 opens, Ezekiel has seen The Glory of God leave the Temple in Jerusalem. That happened at the end of Ezekiel 10. So The Glory of God leaves and immediately in Ezekiel 11 The Holy Spirit transports Ezekiel to the East Gate of Jerusalem.*

*So, this is a visionary experience now. Remember, Ezekiel is in Babylon. And now immediately, once God leaves The Temple, The Holy Spirit brings in a vision Ezekiel to The Temple. So that's what's happening now in Ezekiel 11. And, Ezekiel is going to be at The East Gate, which is, again, of huge Biblical importance. It's where The Messiah comes in. It's where Jesus goes in on Palm Sunday and where He's going to return again as The Messiah in the final Second Coming.*

*Ezekiel stands at the East Gate, which is at the inner court where the priests are, and he sees 25 leaders there. Remember, God has departed, God brings Ezekiel there, and now we understand why God has departed from The Temple.*

**The preamble is in Ezekiel 11:1** which is a long verse, **1** "The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the Lord, which faces east. And behold, at the entrance of the gateway there were twenty-five men. And I saw among them Jaazaniah the son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people.

*Now, being from beautiful downtown Pulaski, Virginia, I probably butchered every one of those Hebrew names. So the preamble says, as we saw plainly, Ezekiel sees these 25 men, and he knows two of them from Ezekiel's time back in Jerusalem. And, they are named for us, "Jaazaniah the son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people." The latter one's name means, "Yahweh has rescued," so when Ezekiel is speaking, probably, this vision out loud, and so the exiles are probably hearing this, right? So, perhaps they think, "Well, great, Ezekiel's having a vision of how God is going to rescue His people." Now, in the text of the ESV (English Standard translation), we are told that these are the "princes of the people." Does anyone have a different translation in your Bible than "princes of the people?" No? Well, it's interesting, because I'm not sure why it gets translated like that; because in the Hebrew the translation is, "public*

officials.” And so, these probably are the 25 men who became the core public official leaders after the initial deportation (of the exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon) in 597 BC. Remember, the king and others get taken out of Jerusalem; Zedekiah is on the throne; but the nobility has been swept away. And so, these 25 men step in; and they are using this hard time for their own self gain. And, that’s going to be the issue. These 25 new leaders of Jerusalem are using the people’s suffering in order to line their own pockets and make themselves rich.

Here’s **the thesis**, **Ezekiel 11:2-3**, God speaking to Ezekiel, **2** And he said to me, “Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city; **3** who say, ‘The time is not near to build houses. This city is the cauldron, and we are the meat.’”

WOW! Mercy! So, God zeros in on the three main sins of these 25 leaders. They plot evil; they offer wicked advice; they think perversely. So when we think of new leaders coming into Washington tomorrow, let’s pray, “Lord, let them not plot evil. Let them not offer wicked advice. Lord, please don’t let them think perversely.” Those will be good prayers for leaders of every nation.

In the ESV it says, ‘The time is not near to build houses.’ What does that mean? Probably the best translation of that is, “There is no need at the present time to worry about building houses.” Because why? Because they’re (these 25 leaders) in control; they’re probably seizing property; they’re taking over the property that was abandoned after the deportation, although they had no rights to it. So, there’s no reason for anybody else to build houses because they are taking all the houses and property for themselves!

And, so we are to understand that Jerusalem is this image of a pot, of a crock with a fastened lid; and it is supposed to offer security for all those inside the pot. And the men think they are the prime cuts of Israel who are being protected in the pot who is Israel. So, hopefully, we kind of get the imagery here of what’s happening back in this vision of Jerusalem.

Beginning in **Ezekiel 11:4-6** God says to Ezekiel to prophesy **4** Therefore prophesy against them; prophesy, O son of man.”<sup>5</sup> And the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and he said to me, “Say, Thus says the Lord: So you think, O house of Israel. For I know the things that come into your mind. **6** You have multiplied your slain in this city and have filled its streets with the slain.

So notice what this says in Scripture. God knows our thoughts. Now, that’s not a new thought to us. We know that! But, it is just emphasized that there is no hiding from God. We can’t get away with anything. That’s why when we make our confession on Sunday mornings we say, “Lord, I have sinned in thought, word and deed,” because we know that God knows our sins in “thought, word and deed.”

*And, God accuses them of the heinous crime of filling the City streets with corpse. So these 25 men are actually not just ceasing property, they're also taking lives. God continues in **Ezekiel 11:7-12: 7** Therefore thus says the Lord God: Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of it, they are the meat, and this city is the cauldron, but you shall be brought out of the midst of it. 8 You have feared the sword, and I will bring the sword upon you, declares the Lord God. 9 And I will bring you out of the midst of it, and give you into the hands of foreigners, and execute judgments upon you. 10 You shall fall by the sword. I will judge you at the border of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord. 11 This city shall not be your cauldron, nor shall you be the meat in the midst of it. I will judge you at the border of Israel, **12** and you shall know that I am the Lord. For you have not walked in my statutes, nor obeyed my rules, but have acted according to the rules of the nations that are around you."*

*And so, the Lord is going to redefine what they think the meat in the pot are. The leaders are, in fact, the butchers who have made stew out of the people. And so, Jerusalem is no longer a pot to store food securely. She is a pot over the fire in which the meat is going to be cooked. And, God's going to bring His Sword against them. God will become The Butcher against them.*

*First, Yahweh will take them out of the City, like raking the scum off the top of the pot. Second, He will hand them over to strangers, which is obviously a reference to the Babylonians. And then, God will execute His judgment in the land of Israel. They are not immune from God's divine judgment.*

*So, the actions of these 25 leaders, you see, have really denigrated to the level of pagans. They are acting like pagans, stealing houses, killing people. They have no holiness of God's Word in them. Because they've acted like pagans, God's judgment against them will be pagan-like. So "you live by the sword, you die by The Sword."*

And then, **Ezekiel 11:13 is the epilogue** to this first section: **13** And it came to pass, while I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then I fell down on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, "Ah, Lord God! Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?"

*As Ezekiel is prophesying, this man whose name means, "God rescues," dies. So, with that, there is this lament that the hope of the nation vanishes. So here, we have a very rare outburst in Ezekiel. The very faithful prophet pushes back against God. And, at some point we understand fully that Ezekiel can hardly take this anymore. I mean, how often do you have to speak a hard word toward your own family, your own children, your own people until finally you just get worn down, right? I mean, if we're continually correcting and judging and disciplining our children over and over and over, finally we just say, I can hardly stand this any longer. This is so hard. So Ezekiel has reached that point where he expresses his horror of the ruthlessness of God's judgment. But, with that, Ezekiel's prophetic vision comes to pass.*

*So, in this vision we now realize without question that back in Babylon what Ezekiel is seeing in Jerusalem is actually happening in real time! And so, what Ezekiel says 'by The Word of the Lord,' actually comes to pass. So that's the famous Biblical definition of a true prophet. A prophet is the one (he or she) who prophesies in the name of God the things that (he or she) prophesies actually comes to pass.*

*All of a sudden, we realize that this vision is happening even as Ezekiel is receiving the vision from the Lord God. And, even as Ezekiel is having this vision he sees the man die right in front of him. I mean, it's an incredible thing. And we would say, 'it's in real time.'*

### **Theological implications**

Obviously, the old, cliché, 'power corrupts, absolute power corrupts, absolutely.' So these 25 leaders have used their new power for their self-gain and not for the glory of God and the blessing of the people.

Secondly, the Lord knows our thoughts. Don't let that be a worry to you. Let that be an encouragement that the Lord knows you completely, spoken and unspoken.

Thirdly, security is not found in a pot; not found in our power; not found in our wealth; not found in the things that we accumulate for ourselves; but true security is found in God alone by faith alone.

So, this is the first half of **Ezekiel 11**, this vision of the pot that is Jerusalem and what happens. Questions, comments about that? (*none at this point*)

As we move on to **Ezekiel 11 beginning with verse 14**, we come into a new section. And, finally, after two or three classes, we get a real burst of good news; not just good news, but amazing great news. You could even title this section of Ezekiel as, 'The Gospel according to Ezekiel.'

Here the focus switches from what's happening in Jerusalem to now what's happening among the exilic community in Babylon; it's a message of hope. So, right on the heels of this divine judgment that's just happened in Jerusalem, God immediately directs Ezekiel to turn his attention to the exiles who have gathered around him; to give an amazing message of hope that God has not permanently abandoned them. They are the remnant through which God will restore Israel.

**Here's the preamble, Ezekiel 11:14 and 15: 14** And the word of the Lord came to me: 15 "Son of man, your brothers, even your brothers, your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Go far from the Lord; to us this land is given for a possession.'

*So, God says to Ezekiel that his fellow exiles are his redeemer. 'The men of redemption' is literally what it says in the Hebrew. You may remember the most famous Old Testament example of this is Boaz. When Ruth comes to Israel from Moab, there Boaz*



*who is a relative of Naomi (Ruth's mother-in-law), becomes Ruth's 'Kinsman Redeemer.' Through his then redemption she, obviously is joined to Boaz into Israel. So, this amazing example, early in the Bible, of a Gentile being grafted into Israel through a redeemer. And, if that's not a typology of Christ, I don't know what is.*

*So here is that same image; that these fellow exiles are Ezekiel's brothers; in fact, they are his redeemers, that close a relationship together. So, God's concern broadens to the whole house of Israel but, particularly, to the exiles.*

*You know, this must have been a really hard thing for the exiles to hear; that people back in Jerusalem say, 'Get away from the Lord; this is our land now.' People back in Jerusalem were looking down their noses at the exiles. They were accusing the exiles of being the ones who have been judged by God. So, the people left behind in Jerusalem were saying, "Well, the fact that you've been taken to exile proves that we are God's people and you aren't." But, of course, Ezekiel's prophesy completely flips that over. God's concern now, is not for the ones back in Jerusalem. He has judged them. His concern now is for those who have been put into exile.*

*And then we get to **Ezekiel 11:16** which is a really really important statement in the Old Testament. 16 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for awhile in the countries where they have gone.'*

*And so, this amazing Gospel message; that they are in exile, but they have not been abandoned by God; and God, Himself, has become their Sanctuary. Now that is a clear reference to The Temple back in Jerusalem. Really, for the first time in the Old Testament, we get the image of a Sanctuary that is being amazingly broadened. So, the Sanctuary, The Temple, now is no longer just the actual building with the footprint in downtown Jerusalem. The Sanctuary is wherever God is. And this is going to become, then, a huge theme of Scripture. It is going to be expanded greatly in the New Testament. And so, then we're going to hear in **John 4** in the conversation between a woman at the well at Samaria and Jesus that she says, "Now, the Jews say 'worship in Jerusalem; Samaritans say 'worship up here in Samaria,' but Jesus says, "Listen, wherever you worship in Spirit and in Truth, in true worship, there you are with God." And, then in the **Book of 1 Corinthians**, the Apostle Paul will expand this even more to say, "Don't you understand that once you have been redeemed by Christ and filled by The Holy Spirit, your body is The Temple of The Holy Spirit."*

*And so, what we find here in this one verse in Ezekiel is one of the most important early proclamations of God being with us in true worship wherever we (individually and collectively) are in exile. And then finally the Apostle Peter will say that we are the exilic community; that believers have been scattered to every nation. But, we remain the Holy people of God because God is with us; He is our Sanctuary; and that, even when the Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed physically, nothing can destroy true worship; because where God is, there true worship is.*

*You know, it's one sentence in the Bible, but in the context of everything else, it becomes an extraordinarily important sentence in the Bible. It then develops a theme that gets a lot of attention throughout the rest of Scripture. So worthy of repeating:*  
**16 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for awhile in the countries where they have gone.'**)

**Ezekiel 11:17-20** The **counter thesis 17** Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.'

*So, there is a promise they're (exiles) going to come back home (to Jerusalem)*

18 And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. 19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

*A whole new order is going to be restored. And, look at this, **Ezekiel 11:17, 18, 19, 20.** First, there's going to be a new exodus. They're going to come back into the land. Secondly, the land will be restored; they're going to get rid of all its abominations. And thirdly, the Covenant is going to be reaffirmed.*

*When God says in verse 20, 'they shall be my people and I will be their God,' that is quintessential covenantal language; that's the essence of The Covenant. 'They will be my people and I will be their God.' And that's what's called 'the Biblical Covenant formula.' Those words are actually part of the marriage ceremony. So God is saying in fact, 'I am marrying you, Israel. I'm your Husband; you're My bride,' another great Biblical theme. And so the marriage between God and true Israel will be restored.*

*And again, in just a few sentences we get huge, huge spiritual implications. A new exodus; a new land; a new covenant. And I think we can hear a lot of the prophetic work of Jeremiah in this too.*

**Ezekiel 11:21** is the **epilogue** to this section, **21** But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord God."

*It is a huge good news to the exiles but also with a big dose of warning. 'Don't take God's Promises for granted!'*

### **Theological Implications**

This affirms that the exiles must be aware not to fall into the sins of those leaders and people back in Jerusalem.

The true Israel is known, not by external things, but by a willing obedience to the covenant of the LORD.

Spiritual renewal is achieved, not by human effort, but by the transforming power and act of God alone. How can we get a new heart? Only by the work of God. God alone can change hearts.

This oracle is a powerful testimony to Yahweh's faithfulness to the remnant.

This idea about worship; really dovetails well into **John 4**. We can worship the LORD in any place, at any time, and anywhere in "Spirit and Truth."

*It's good that we are having a little bit of a breather. Like Ezekiel we can say, "Lord, how long? How can we stand all this judgment?" and God says, "Okay, I'll give you a burst of Good News and here it is."*

*And so, this one little section in this **second half of Ezekiel 11** reveals an amazing compact passage of one incredible statement and promise after another.*

We are at the end of our section for today, questions, comments, insights?

**Josh Shreeman:** It's interesting what you said about the fact that, that is a part of the marriage ceremony. Ruth says that to Naomi as well. And actually that verse my sister read at our wedding. We didn't have a clue what it was necessarily, but it's interesting looking back at it and how that has kinda worked out.

**Mark:** That's a great insight, Josh. And, it's wonderful that you and Marnie can look back on that and now understand that God's hand was upon you from the beginning. And, even when you did not understand, He was planting seeds for now. So those are great dots to connect. That's beautiful.

You know that passage from the **Book of Ruth**, I certainly have read that a number of times at marriage ceremonies, and I find that extremely meaningful and important. Again, we understand that marriage is kind of undergirding the whole foundation of the Bible. You know, the rabbis taught that the Ten Commandments were the marriage vows between Israel and God. And so, the ancient rabbis read the Ten Commandments as the wedding service of God and Israel on the top of the mountain where these vows are exchanged. And so, we can again, see throughout Scripture the same themes emerging in a lot of different places. Good, thanks Josh.

Other comments, questions, concerns?

**Linda Handy:** When Josh said what he did it struck me that many many time the Lord works in our lives and we don't have a clue until we look in our rear view and then we go, "Oh, that's what that was about! I get it now!" You know it is just so often. He is always here; He is always working for our good and for our benefit, and many times we don't recognize it. Thanks be to God that Josh now knows what the meaning of that Scripture was at their wedding. But, thanks be to God that we all do and can look at our lives and say, "There You were walking with me, Lord. Thank You."

**Mark:** Right, good point. And so then, generally speaking every Lord's Day when we come together to worship we are renewing The Covenant. There's covenantal language every Sunday, right, "This is the blood of the New Covenant." We reaffirm our faith in God through the Creed; we confess our sins to the Lord; we hear His Word so that we can be found obedient to it. And so, The Liturgy is set up in The Lord's Day service from start to finish to be a renewal of The Covenant. And, it never gets old or stale because every day we want to refresh our commitment to God because every day He refreshes His love and faithfulness to us. It is a beautiful dynamic way of understanding the life of faith.

**Mark:** Good then, thanks Linda.

**Mark:** Anything else?

**Annette Meyer:** Hi Mark, this is Annette. I know some people, some who are pretty close to me actually, who kind of use the excuse to not attend corporate worship because, "We don't have to go to church to find God; and God is living within us and we know that we are The Temple now." It's hard to know; I mean there's a lot of reasons you can give people why we go to corporate worship, but some use it as an excuse where, "I can find God anywhere. I can be alone. I can be out in nature." And, that's true, but I feel like that gets used as an excuse.

**Mark:** Right, it does. Anyone want to respond to Annette. She raises a really good point that I'm sure that we've all struggled with personally or loved ones we have heard from have. How would you respond to a friend or family member who said to you just what Annette said; about "There's no need to go to corporate worship. I can be with God wherever I am." How do you respond to that?

**Linda Handy:** We are also called to fellowship. I would say, "Yes, I can worship on my own. I can read the Bible on my own, but I am called to fellowship with fellow believers, and without that fellowship I can become a one-cymbal band, which is not very enriching to me or to anybody else around me.

**Mark:** It makes sense. Well, it's an important question for us to be able to respond to because the hyper-individualism of, "I don't need anybody else; just me and God, that's all." You know, I think about the language of Scripture, I think about the Apostle

Peter where he says that we have been saved “to be a holy people.” He doesn’t say that we’ve been saved to be “a holy person.”

Now we understand that we are to be holy persons, but in Scripture there’s always the vision of the community; of the people of God. In fact, you could say that the basic definition of The Church is “the people of God.” That’s what the great Augustine said in his book, “The Confessions.” He defined the Church as the people of God gathered with The Lord. This idea that our lives can continue without gathering ultimately comes back and is exposed as a lie.

I’ve said before, an example is Martin Luther. He used to gather with the seminarians and students around the hearth, the fire, in the cold winter German evenings; and they would have teaching and dialogue. And, one time a seminarian said that very question, Annette just asked, “Dr. Luther, why do we have to go to Church? Why can’t we just pray and worship on our own? Why do we have to make the the trouble of going to Church with other people.” And, Luther didn’t say a word. He just got up; took the tongs by the side of the fireplace; grasped hold of a red hot coal; took out the hot coal and put it on the cold hearth of the fireplace and sat down. In about ten minutes, the coal had turned cold black. And then Luther got up with the tongs and put the coal back in the fire and immediately it sprang red to life with heat. Luther said, “That’s why we go to Church.” Otherwise, we become that coal on the hearth that just becomes cold and lifeless.

*So, you know, that’s a very picturesque way, I think, of answering that question. And then Paul’s great teaching that we are the body of Christ in **1 Corinthians 12**, individually members of it, but each member is a part of the body. And so, if your right leg decides it’s not worth having to get up and be with the rest of the body, you’re going to be limping around the rest of your life, right?*

*So the idea is you need all the members; all the parts of your body together to make a healthy body. And so, whenever any of us are apart from The Body (the Church), the rest of us are diminished. Every time we gather, the gathering makes the body healthier. So, I can’t find anywhere in Scripture where God says that it’s okay just to be on your own and don’t worry about being with others. There is no place in the Scripture where that’s commended; not one.*

**Lisa Bond:** And we’re told in Hebrews that we’re supposed to not neglect meeting together and it’s to encourage one another. And someone might say, “Well, I don’t need encouragement,” and that may be true; like you may need less encouragement than the next person but that doesn’t release you from your responsibility to encourage other people.

**Mark:** That’s a great point, Lisa, right.

**Mark:** Yeah, I mean think how many times you've been in worship and you go home and you realize, "You know I was really there, not so much for myself, although hopefully you did feel that way, but you were there because, now you realize, you were there to be a help to somebody else; that there was some comment; there was some prayer; there was some need; that if you had not been there, would not have been fulfilled. That community..so, why do families gather? Why is it important for us to gather as a family, especially like Thanksgiving or birthdays, the same analogy; we just need to be gatherers.

**Marnie:** To me it's a celebration. It's an offering. It's a sacrifice. But it's a celebration of God. You know, when we go to a wedding. We love big weddings, big parties, or any gathering, it is a celebration so I see it also like a celebration of God.

**Mark:** That's a great point and that needs to be said clearly, that we gather so that we can give more glory and celebration to God so that His Glory is not diminished. So, as we gather; the more of us who gather, it just goes by objective fact that there's going to be more glory and prayer and praise to God.

Yes, "Where two or three or gathered, there the Lord is." But, when two or three hundred are gathered there even more The Glory of God is; great amazing thing that is.

Well, God bless you tomorrow wherever you are. If you can't be at the Sanctuary at St. John for prayer from 1:00 to 2:30, please let's all make sure that we pray for our nation. We, of course, want to pray against any violence tomorrow. We want to pray as one administration ends, another begins. For the Hand of God, we want to pray that we will be a people of faith. No matter what happens in the coming months, we are going to stand firm in The Word of God. And, if it means a refiner's fire for us, "Thank You Jesus," and just pray, "Lord, keep us faithful to You as You are always faithful to us."

(Personal insight) God's Word is Living within us and among us. Worship every Sunday, The Lord's Day, is renewal of our covenant relationship with Him. We pray, "Give us this day" knowing He gives of Himself each day including the day He has set aside for us to worship together." He fills us to overflowing each Lord's Day as we give back to Him our praise and honor and glory." It is "self-less worship together" with Him and in accordance with God's Word and the desires of His heart.

**Closing Prayer:** "So, Lord, into Your hands we commend this nation, our Church our families, our friends. We commend, O Lord, those who we love who are not walking with You today; that they will return Home to faith. We pray, Lord, for our neighbors who do not know You as Lord and Savior; for their salvation. We pray, O Lord, for all of our leaders in our nation's Capitol. We pray, O Lord, for Your mercy, and we pray that You will find us faithful day by day, no matter the circumstances. And, we pray this in the name of the One who gave His life for us, Jesus Messiah Lord our Savior. Amen."

God bless you. Thanks for all your comments/insights; you're a good group; see you next week by God's mercy. **End of Class 16 Discussion, Handout, Recording**

**Class 17 - January 26, 2021**

**Pastor Mark** begins It's good to have all of you. We are going in and out of different chapters of Ezekiel because we have kind of collated the book around the different descriptions that we have of Ezekiel. Today, in **Ezekiel 18** we are continuing in the section, "**Ezekiel the Debater**" where we will spend our hour together. I think we are all going to agree why many say is, perhaps, the most important and many say **the** most important chapter, theologically, in the Book of Ezekiel because it teaches us an essential Biblical Truth about personal sin and personal repentance. And, a lot of people really lag onto Ezekiel 18 as the Truth of God's Word that we need to share with all people. I believe it's a chapter that speaks to each of us, of course. But, it's also a chapter that's great for evangelism and witnessing. And certainly, God spoke to Ezekiel inside the Chebar Canal in Babylon in the 6th Century BC as a witness to the exiles and as a testimony for our evangelism today.

**Opening Prayer**, "We pray to You Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in Your Holy Spirit in great thanksgiving for Your continuing work with the prophet Ezekiel. Lord, You are the same yesterday, today and forever and Your Word is the same yesterday, today and forever. And, we certainly, Lord, hear that throughout the pages of Ezekiel and especially today as we come to Ezekiel 18. We pray for Your Holy Spirit to illuminate our hearts and minds that we may not only read but also believe and live out Your Word to us. So, Lord, as we come to You in Bible Study, we also remember our sisters and brothers in particular need. Especially, we lift up our Sister Tori as she anticipates a second surgery with Dr. Brian Gross. We pray, Lord, for her healing and that You would give her peace about the procedure and, obviously, that the second surgery will go much easier than the first. We also pray with Nancy for her daughter, Amy's move with her family to NC. We thank you, Lord, for our Brother Greg Jamison with us today; for Greg and Judy and their family. We pray, Lord, for all the things that we bring before You today, Lord, both silently and spoken. Unto Your hands O Lord, we commend ourselves now to You in the study of Your Holy Word. Amen."

**Ezekiel 18** is premised on three comments; three sayings, proverbs, if you will, that the exiles were saying in Babylon. And so Ezekiel is responding to real life situations. And, I would say and you probably agree with me that the comments and the observations expressed by the exiles are often things we hear today.

*The reason Ezekiel 18 is identified as one of the chief theological chapters, not just in Ezekiel, but one of the chief theological chapters in the whole Bible is this emphasis on each person's individual responsibility for his or her own sins and, therefore, for his or her own repentance. The main premise here is, on the one hand, we are not subject to the sins of others and can never find forgiveness. At the same time, we can't get into Heaven by saying, "Well this family member; she believed/he believed, therefore, I will just go in on their coattails." We can't do that either. It's every person stands before God and says, "Lord, I'm sorry; I repent; please forgive me."*

*You remember what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10**. Paul makes a famous statement that when we die every single person one by one has to stand on the Bema. “Bema” is the Greek word for “seat.” In Corinth, the Bema seat was the place of judgment where a person would come before the judges in a court situation. And, there one would have to give evidence to be declared innocent or guilty. And so, Paul says that in Heaven, there will be something like a Bema where you and I will come before the Lord. And, we will stand before The Lord Almighty, The Judge of Heaven and Earth, and give an account. And so, where does Paul get that? Where does that theology really take root? It’s here in The Book of Ezekiel.*

*As I’ve said many times, while The Book of Ezekiel is never quoted explicitly in the New Testament, you can argue that Ezekiel is foundational to everything we’re going to find in the New Testament.*

**Ezekiel 18:1-2: 1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’?”

*This is a proverb that’s been circulating among the exiles in Babylon, and we hear the proverb also spoken by **Jeremiah 31**. Remember, Ezekiel and Jeremiah are contemporaries; they’re friends; they have great respect for each other. God has kept Jeremiah in the fallen City of Jerusalem as the prophet to those still behind. And, Ezekiel was carried away to Babylon and among the exilic community to be the prophet to the exiles. It is interesting to compare the two prophets, and we do find a number of places of overlap where they’re each saying the same thing to their own communities.*

*It is generally understood that this proverb is a sarcastic cynical mockery of the system of God’s judgment and righteousness that would punish children for the guilt of their parents, what scholars sometimes call the doctrine of “trans-generational accountability” which means what our parents did we are now going to be guilty for and blamed because of past generations. We can find that in the Ten Commandments given*

*to Moses in **Exodus 20:5-6**. We will see in the commandment about no idols, no carved images 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

*Some in Israel, in Judah at this time had misunderstood that because I think the commandment that God says in Exodus is really about, what we might call, “trans-generational consequences.” I think we all understand how this terrible cycle can happen to people who are caught in, say, poverty. Their grandparents were impoverished; their parents; the children impoverished. So we see across generations sometimes these kind of tragic, hard situations, but we don’t blame the children as they have to suffer the consequences of not being raised very well or having good examples.*



*But, Ezekiel 18 is going to dismiss any idea that we have about this. We can look, for example, in Deuteronomy 24:16 “Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.” Moses clearly says a son will not be responsible for the sins of his father. Moses, himself, later in The Torah will clear this up as well. But, even so, the people in Babylon are still struggling with the idea that they were exiles because the people back in Jerusalem had sinned. Their understanding is that the only reason they’re exiled, not because of something they’ve done, but because of something those people did back in Jerusalem. It’s this idea (the exiles believed) of “it’s just the way it is; this is the way God does things; and there’s no escaping from it.”*

**Frank:** Mark, there’s qualifying statement at the end of that. It only applies to the generations of “those who hate me.”

**Mark:** Right, that’s a good point, Frank. Passing on the faith to the next generation is so important versus passing on the hate of God to the next generation, right? Frank, you raise a good point. My generation, the so called “boomers,” right? I know there’s been a lot of talk that the boomer generation is largely responsible for the generation that comes after us being less interested in Christ and the Church because a lot of boomers kind of forgot about God whose parents, the great generation of WW II had those foundations to a large degree. But, then our generation had it so well; things going well in America after WW II; economy was prospering; things were even kilned and the Vietnam War came and a lot of people got side tracked with all those protests and down with the establishment. So a lot of the children raised by the parents of the boomers just were not exposed to the beauty of Christ and His holiness and His salvation by The Cross. We see now the effects of that.

We understand, then, the consequences that can be passed on, for better for worse, from generation to generation. But the Word of God says that we are not accountable for the sins of previous generations. Every person, himself or herself, has to stand before the Lord. That’s going to be the main point here, but hank you, Frank.

Other questions or comments at this point? If there are none, let’s continue with **Ezekiel 18:3-4** **3** As I live, declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. **4** Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

*The word “soul” that is translated in my ESV is probably not the best translation. In the Hebrew it means “a living person.” Probably, a better way to say this is “Behold all living persons are mine,” in body, mind and soul totally; our whole being belongs to God; the living total person of the father; as well as the living total person of the son is mine; the living person who sins; that person shall die. Every living person, in other words, belongs to Yahweh.*

*This declaration is one of the most important, not just here in Ezekiel, but in the whole Bible. Yahweh, the one Living God has Lordship over all human life. With this opening statement Ezekiel repudiates the fatalism of the exiles. We are not tied to past sins. Every living person God deals with one by one. This is a very important Biblical doctrine that undergirds so much of Scripture.*

*One cannot achieve a true understanding of human experience without recognizing the relationship between guilt and punishment; sin and retribution. It is the person who sins who shall die in an attempt to get the exiles to understand. But also the hope they have. We must hear this as good news; that we today, by faith and repentance, each of us can come to the Lord and what a great Word of Evangelism this is to people who are far from God.*

*Ezekiel is going to give three case studies that will all then illustrate this central point. Questions or comments before we get into the case studies?*

**Josh Shreeman:** I'm eating lunch so you can't see me. I know you recognize my voice.

**Mark:** Thank you, Josh, that's a blessing to all of us.

**Josh:** I wanted to revisit the Bema real quick. I don't know if you guys are aware or not of the place in Synagogues currently where the rabbi stands and where the microphone is and where The Torah is. is called "A Bema."

**Mark:** I didn't know that.

**Josh:** Well, there you go; that's your tidbit for the day.

**Mark:** So where the rabbi is; where the scrolls of the Torah are kept; that's The Bema?

**Josh:** That's correct. I don't want to get too much in the weeds, but a lot of Synagogues, like traditional, like orthodox synagogues The Bema is in the middle and the Ark is what they call where The Torah is actually held is not necessarily there, but that's where it's read. Here in town, for example, it's all in one spot; it's all in the same place.

**Linda Handy:** Would that correspond to our altar area; where we've got the Bible on the altar where our pastor reads. What's the correlation.

**Mark:** I am sure there is a correlation because everything that we have has been handled down to us through Israel through Judaism so it's fascinating. I will have to think about that, Linda, but I am sure with the elevated pulpit in a lot of churches; the altar area, that would all, I'm sure, be drawing from the Bema in the Jewish Synagogue. Josh, thanks for that great background. It really does bring out what the Apostle Paul, who was, of course, a deeply Messianic Jew believer, how he, then, extrapolates from the Synagogue to Heaven and makes that correlation.

**Alan Denekas:** I am just learning this, but the word that seems to be used for "life" in verse 4 is "soul" "nephesh" like the same thing that is in Genesis when God breathed His image into us.

**Mark:** That's great! You're getting down to the language; that's wonderful. (Hebrew) "nephesh" is the whole being of one's person. It's this powerful, mysterious Hebrew word that, as Alan has said, God had breathed into Adam.... And so, Ezekiel is remembering this and using the same language today.

Let's look at the **first of the three cases about divine justice**, "The Case Study of the Righteous Person," that is the one who's living rightfully before God. **Ezekiel 18:5-9:**  
**5** "If a man is righteous and does what is just and right— **6** if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman in her time of menstrual impurity, **7** does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, **8** does not lend at interest or take any profit, withholds his hand from injustice, executes true justice between man and man, **9** walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully —he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord God.

*We find a clear link between conduct and the fate of what happens to a righteous living person. "Righteousness," in Ezekiel's context, refers to behavior that conforms to God's covenant with Israel. These are all covenantal things that we find in The Torah so God is speaking through Ezekiel. There's not a new Word of God, but a new understanding of the eternal Word of God that's already been spoken in The Torah. There are 11 descriptions of a righteous life.*

*"to eat on the mountains" = to eat at a sacrificial feast to false gods  
 A righteous person would never do that.*

*"to lift eyes to" = means to seek aid from  
 A righteous person would never seek help from an idol.*

*"defile a woman" [that is, adultery] and "approach a woman in her menstrual period" = see Leviticus 18:19-30 for the laws of purity and impurity*

*"don't oppress" = take advantage of a neighbor in trouble*

*"returns his debt pledge" = that is, gives back a financial guarantee  
 It means if you are in a business transaction with a fellow Jew, and he is giving a down payment to hold as a guarantee, then that down payment either becomes part of his overall payment to you or you give it back. You don't add that down payment to the cost.*

*"no robbery" = see Lev 5:21*

*"gives food and covers the naked" = clothing, based on God's love of the poor*

*"does not lend or take interest" = no exploitation for gain, see Lev 25:35-37*

*Again, in the Torah, usury was a taboo; was prohibited from one believer to another believer. We are not supposed to profit off a fellow believer.*

*“withholds his hand from injustice” = no legal injustice*

*“executes justice” = promotes only true justice*

*Verse 9 then summarizes a righteous walk with God; a summary of what a righteous life looks like; walks in God’s statutes and keeps His rules by acting faithfully. It’s a person who both says, “I believe; therefore, I shall live.” It’s to connect faith and action.*

*Such a person shall live whether they are in the exilic community or not.*

The **second case** study, “the case of the wicked son” **Ezekiel 18:10-13: 10** “If he (*the righteous man*) fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, who does any of these things 11 (though he himself did none of these things), who even eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, 12 oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, **13** lends at interest, and takes profit; shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.

**Second case** study is about a second-generation Israelite;

*1 He now turns to a second-generation Israelite, one whom the first righteous man “begot.” The aim here is to show that the character and fate of the previous generation play no part in determining the fate of the present one. A child; the son of a righteous man, but sadly, tragically he is the moral and spiritual opposite of his father. His father, a righteous man, but the son could not claim righteousness via the father. The son was responsible to God for his own conduct and his own life. And the wicked son, because of his own sins, will die.*

*2 We see a clear distinction here between the righteous one and the wicked one. Indeed, the son of the righteous father is a murderer. The son hurts the poor and the needy and commits abominable (sexual) sins. He’s the moral and spiritual opposite of his father.*

*3 He shall surely die. If a wicked person is executed, he dies on account of his own sin.*

**Third case** example of the grandson of the first man, the son of the second man. So, this is a righteous grandson in **Ezekiel 18:14-18 14** “Now suppose this man fathers a son who sees all the sins that his father has done; he sees, and does not do likewise: 15 he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife, 16 does not oppress anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, 17 withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no interest or profit, obeys my rules, and walks in my statutes; he shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live. **18** As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed

his brother, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.

*This son, this grandson, sees his father; sees his grandfather and, obviously, by the grace of God, he turns from his father's example and he follows in his grandfather's example. And, even though his father was quite wicked, the son standing before God on his own giving accountability, he then shall live because of his own life before God.*

*Three very real life understandable practical down to earth examples that God leads Ezekiel to tell to drive home the point that each of us is called to believe and repent and live for God today; that God calls each person, person by person.*

*(1) The third-generation son is introduced. He's a reflective person who has observed the sins of his father and deliberately steers his life in the opposite direction. He follows the example of his grandfather instead.*

*(2) The righteous son is absolved of any responsibility for the sins of his father. His own righteous conduct alone determines his destiny.*

*(3) But the wicked father will die because he sinned against others financially, against his own people of Israel, and for his overall sinful behavior.*

This section ends in **Ezekiel 18:19-20** after which we will stop and have some discussion. **19** "Yet you say, 'Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?' When the son has done what is just and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. **20** The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

*Ezekiel slams the door on any misunderstanding of God's divine justice. Ezekiel responds to the exiles loss of hope by reiterating the rejection of any deterministic notion of intergenerational accountability.*

Questions, comments, insights, observations?

**Terrie:** Because I'm in Lisa's class; it's really fantastic doing Samuel and Ezekiel at the same time. Would you talk and remind us about Eli and how his sons were ungodly and what happened to Eli as a result in 1 Samuel?

**Mark:** That's a great example. I love the cross-pollination of Scripture. That's a great way to study the Bible, Terrie; to take this and refer back, back and forth. So Lisa Bond, you're here; it's your class. Why don't you tell us about this. Lisa, you're such a great Bible teacher and it's wonderful that Terrie gives you a little bit of shout out as she appreciates the class so tell us, Lisa, how would you respond to what Terrie just said

about Eli and his sinful sons and the correlation you hear between 1 Samuel and Ezekiel 18.

**Lisa Bond:** So Eli was the priest and he had two sons that he did not restrain from doing evil things at The Temple. So God gave a prophesy that Eli's priesthood would end and his sons did die in battle; and he also died on the same day when he heard the news that the Ark had been captured. Although Eli was allowed to continue in his priesthood to a very old age but was cut off, his sons were not allowed to serve any more. So God did execute judgment on their father for their wickedness.

There is another example too in Samuel that I can't think of right now. Oh, we were also talking about Saul and how God took the kingdom from Saul and gave it to David. But Saul had one righteous son named Jonathan; and Jonathan did actually die in battle, not for his own sins, but he was not able to take the kingship because God had taken it from Saul's family and gave it to David. So, Jonathan, in a sense, bore the consequences, I guess, of his father's disobedience.

**Mark:** Thank you Lisa, great insights and thank you, Terrie for that question. As we go through, for example, the long list of the kings of Israel and Judah, we will find a bad king, unfaithful king, but then his son, the next king, WOW! he strives to follow God and then his son is back to idolatry. Like every generation, it just goes back and forth. Even Solomon following David; Solomon starts off well and it ended terribly in deep idolatry. I can't think right now of any example where you find generational faithfulness over many many generations. It's almost always back and forth. It's a great mystery.

And, this was causing me to pray last night, just thinking about some of the wonderful people I know who are faithful; but their children sadly are not; or the children of parents who did not believe in God, but now they (the children) are so strong in the faith and praying for them. This causes me to pray for our own children and I've got five grandchildren. The core of my prayer every night is, "Please, Jesus, may my children and grandchildren follow You faithfully and know that You are their Lord and Savior."

*So, we see Ezekiel 18, the grandfather, son and grandson; we see this played out in our lives and we understand how we need to impress upon each person, "Today is the day of your salvation. Today, is the day of your repentance. The Lord has opened the door to you, no matter what has happened; no matter who your family was or is; no matter what the past is. Today, God gives you the love to come to Him." Other comments or questions about Ezekiel 18:1-20?*

**Ann Wolfer:** Pastor Mark, there is maybe one bright spot. I think it was King Manasseh, the most wicked. You know, he's the counterpart to David. If David is the gold standard of good kings Manasseh is the worst king in Israel's history. I think at one point when Jerusalem was surrounded by the enemy, he even sacrificed one of his children to idols in the hope the idols would save the city but, of course, that didn't happen. And, he was taken into captivity; and there in captivity, he had time to ponder on his reckless

life and he came to the Lord if I'm remembering history right. And then he was returned to the land. So, the person that you would think would never in a million years come back to the God of his fathers did. And, I think sometimes if you read an account of him in Scripture, you don't get that, but he came back a changed humble man. And, he tried to tell the remaining people in Jerusalem about his conversation and they mocked him and they just wouldn't listen to him. I think he's an interesting case study about the grace of God. And, people, maybe even our own children who we think won't come back to the Lord, never stop praying because Manasseh is a great example of how the Lord can work.

**Mark:** Thank you, Ann, I'm just looking at that in 2 Kings 21 about Manasseh. He was 12 years old; he reigned for 55 years and, of course, his father was Hezekiah, the great and righteous king that God gave 15 extra years of life when he prayed to Him. Manasseh's life is a lot of ups and downs. We also need to look at how his life is recorded in Chronicles. It's always good to compare Kings and Chronicles to get the fullness.

So, we do see the hope in that individual life and probably in our own lives. We can all testify that there are some days when we're doing pretty well faithfully. And, there are some days when we are far from God. By the grace of God, His mercy is always extended to us.

So, we don't ever want to think that any life is so wicked that it can't be redeemed, right? We think of the most wicked person in the world today or the most wicked person we know. The Book of Ezekiel would teach us, "Don't ever give up. Don't think that person is just evil to the core and that's all she wrote; there's no hope." And, at the same time, think about the most righteous loving most Christian person we know. Well, don't stop praying for that person. She or he needs our prayers as much as the wicked person does because Satan's going to be on their case. You want to lift up those who are following Christ because they're going to have a lot of pressure on them, especially going forward, (with pressure) not to follow Christ faithfully.

Any other comments before we go on? Anything else?

**Dr. Greg:** Well, I was going to reflect on (King) David. We all lift him high up with regards to his pursuit of God; his love for God, but we also need to remember that he was an adulterer of the highest caliber. He suffered for that sin. So, if David, a man of God, could fall, then so could we all. And, that's among other reasons why we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

**Mark:** Great insight; great insight, Dr. Greg, thank you. So once again we see an example of one man's life, David. That's a great example to teach this, difference between consequence and responsibility, right? So, David, the only one in Scripture called "A man after God's own heart," sins terribly. He forces himself upon Beersheba and then orchestrates her husband's death; heinous capital sins. But, Nathan calls him out and David repents. He is forgiven! He is forgiven! It's done; the Lord declares his

forgiveness, but, obviously, the child of Beersheba and David who was conceived in the adultery, sadly that child dies. The consequences are painful, painful (2 people die as a result of the act of adultery, Beersheba's husband and this innocent child), but the sin is forgiven.

Again, we want to see this difference between consequence and responsibility; that there is forgiveness; even as sometimes (often and perhaps always) we have to bear the consequences after the forgiveness has been given. It's complex; wondrous and God deals with us man by man; woman by woman.

Let's look at **Ezekiel 18:21-32** as God is opening the door to divine mercy. So, we'll finish out the chapter as I read it now and then we will go back and look at it.

**21** "But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed (*we were just talking about this*) and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **22** None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. **23** Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? **24** But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die. **25** "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? **26** When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. **27** Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. **28** Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **29** Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? **30** "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. **31** Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? **32** For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live."

*This past Sunday here at St. John, Father Steve was preaching and The Gospel was Mark 1 and included in that was **Mark 1:15**, the first couple of sermons of our Lord. He says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." That IS Ezekiel 18! Really, once you think about it, and you listen to all the direct statements of Jesus in The Gospels, you're going to hear Ezekiel over and over. So, it is Jesus Christ who gave The Word to Ezekiel. It is Jesus Christ who now continues that Word in His own ministry. So, the Lord's first sermon; really a summary and encapsulation of Ezekiel 18. That's the foundation for Jesus Christ's first public sermon.*



**“opening the door to divine mercy:”** Ezekiel opens the door to new possibilities; offers life to those in despair. Really again, it builds upon The Word of God near the end of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy are the last five messages of Moses before Israel goes into the Promised Land. And there he says to choose the way of life or of death. You, Israel, each one of you. There are two paths. Later, around the year 100, there is that very famous document called “The Didache,” “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” that was a summation of the apostolic teaching. It was a very important teaching document in the early Church. We don’t do much with it now to our loss, but The Didache opens, “There are two ways, the way of life and the way of death; choose today which way you shall go.” The opening line to **The Didache**. What is that? It’s a summary of The Torah; a summary of Ezekiel; it’s a summary of God’s mercy that’s open to every person.

Ezekiel’s urgency becomes more apparent here. He challenges the exiles (and us) to find life by three means. And, really it’s a summary of Biblical repentance. If you will look with me again in **Ezekiel 18:21-22** which taken together, summarize the biblical doctrine of repentance. **21** “But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **22** None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live.”

It’s the turning. “Repentance” in the Greek means “to change one’s mind.” Biblically, both with the Hebrew and the Greek, it means your whole life to turn around; your thinking; the way you use your body; the way you use your resources; to turn from your sin; to turn to Christ and, therefore, do what is right. So, it’s a turning away from and turning to is the way of repentance.

He spells out the basis for the exile’s hope (our hope) in Ezekiel 18:23: God is on the side of life. He doesn’t want us to die. Later the Apostle Paul will say in **1 Timothy** that God desires the salvation of all people. He’s not come to destroy us. He’s come to open the way of life to us through His Son Jesus Christ. Why so many people choose death and not life. I don’t know. I mean, it is probably one of the greatest burdens I feel.

He desires that all should repent and live. He gives them a new vision of God: God is on the side of blessing and life, not on the side of the curse and death. What a remarkable declaration of God’s patience and mercy! If the people repent, they will live.

At the same time in **Ezekiel 18:24**, if the righteous person, you know, is righteous for a part of his or her life and turns away from God and says, “There is no God; I’ll live however I want to; I’ll worship other gods or I will do wickedness, then God says, “Well, you can’t transfer your past righteousness to your current wickedness.” So He says, “be warned as well if you think that you can just slide by on what you did earlier in life.

*By such, Ezekiel repudiates any notion of “merit of demerit.” One generation cannot build up treasure for the next or a person can’t bank righteousness and then claim it later to balance off any debt. The fate of the righteous and the wicked is determined by the present, the moment of judgment.*

**Ezekiel 18:25-32** *we have the clear call to repentance. The exiles are the ones who got it wrong. God is not capricious. His ways are just and true. He has not changed. Has said to each person, one by one to choose today the way of life and death.*

*But they’re the ones who should be looking in a mirror: their behavior, not God’s, is unscrupulous and capricious. Ezekiel reiterates that each person can choose to live by turning from sin to righteousness (v 27).*

The **epilogue Ezekiel 18:30-32** *again reiterates repentance; it’s turning away from; it involves casting off; and then, of course, it involves a heart/mind transplant. So that last part, “make yourselves a new heart and new spirit,” we can hear that in Jeremiah back in Jerusalem, right? In his famous statement that God will take The Law The Torah and write them on our hearts. David prays, “Create in me a clean heart...” We know ultimately that it’s God who has to do this. So, I don’t think we should interpret this that it’s up to you and I to get a new heart and spirit. We can’t do it, but we certainly can call upon God, our Lord to give us a new heart and a new spirit.*

### **Theological Implications**

First, Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine of sin and retribution that would allow one person to blame another for his or her fate. God calls each person to turn to him by faith and live.

Secondly, Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine that a person is held captive to the past decisions, for better or for worse. “Repent and live” assumes real, personal freedom to determine one’s ultimate destiny today.

Thirdly, Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine that would accuse God of unscrupulous or capricious behavior. His laws are set, and he is faithful to them.

Fourth, Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine that would perceive God as primarily bent on judgment and death. God by grace and mercy pleads with us to repent and believe today.

Fifthly, Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine of ministry that encourages a prophet to proclaim only what people want to hear.

Finally, Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine that claims that God’s covenant with Israel is over. He is telling the exiles there that the covenant principles are still very much in place.

What other comments and concerns do you have as we close today’s lessons?

**Dr. Alan :** Mark, it seems like there are so many people around now who accuse Christians and Christianity of being judgmental. And I think we can point to these verses right here. It's like God is saying, "Guys, choose life." I think it's far from universal salvation because we have to live according to God's ordinances, but it certainly goes against the idea that God is some ogre wanting just to stamp us out for any slight infraction.

**Mark:** Yes, thanks Alan, good observation. So this does become a good text for evangelism.

**Lisa Bond:** I also wanted to comment on the problem with parents and wayward children. And, I've heard this from someone else and think it is very helpful; that a lot of parents feel so responsible for the spiritual life of their children when they go astray. But, when we do take that burden on ourselves, we essentially release them of their responsibility to believe and turn to God. So everyone whose heard The Gospel has a responsibility, and I think that might help us as parents. I mean it's still sad when our children don't walk with Him. Of course, there's always hope, as we were saying that they can turn back to God.

**Mark:** Thank you Lisa, I never really thought about it that way. It's a great insight. When a parent blames herself or himself that their children are not living and behaving better, we absolve them of their own responsibility to stop and repent and turn. That's a great insight.

*And so we want a couple this always with the prodigal son, **Jesus' teaching in Luke 15** about the son who disparaged his father; who hated his father; who demanded his inheritance; who went off and lived a wicked unrighteous life; he comes back home. And when he comes back home, his father doesn't say, "Well I told you so, you wicked sinful stupid son. You've got to earn your way back in. You can start back with the servants; and in a few years if you behave yourself, we can talk about moving back into the main house." Didn't say that. The Father hikes up His robes and He runs down the road; He runs down the road to welcome this son who finally has repented of his wickedness. And even then, he's not fully repentant. He still says, "Well, maybe I can be a servant." He's still a little bit calculating, but The Father gives him a benefit of a doubt. The Father puts a robe on him; puts a ring on his hand; kills the fatted calf. THAT is the picture of Ezekiel 18 to the nth degree. That is the mercy of The Father to each person. That prodigal son could not go on the coattails of his righteous father, but once he turned around, his righteous Father, God Himself, in the story, has nothing but mercy upon mercy upon mercy. That's the Good News that we can pass on to our children and our grandchildren, neighbors, people who we know that are not with the Lord. But, it is a testimony we must speak because every person will be on the Bema. You and I; every person will be on the Bema; every human being; and we'll have to give an account. And, the Lord will say, "Did you choose life and My Son who is the Way of Life and the Truth or did you choose death?" God will know, of course, what we did already,*

*but He's going to make us say it. We just want to say, "Lord, I wasn't perfect, but on Your mercy, I throw myself."*

Well, thank you, any other comments before we close in prayer?

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I have one. I feel like I keep harping on this over and over and over again, but if you look at **Ezekiel 18:26**. It sounds to me like He is saying you can lose your salvation....and Vickie goes on to share a recent real life situation as she seeks more clarity on the salvation issue.

**Mark:** Okay, thanks Vickie, it's good that you're pressing this point. It's a hard example and we need to pray for the situation you shared. So, a couple things in closing. *This is a huge topic so we need to give it longer than just what we have time for now. But, I would caution to equate in verse 26 the word "righteous" to "salvation." Righteousness is the result of salvation. In other words, when a person is saved, truly saved, he or she is not going to lose their salvation and their righteousness is a result of that. If a person then turns away from righteousness, you have to ask the question, "Were they really ever saved in the first place?" Eventually, even though a saved person is not always going to be on the right road. You know; life is always going back and forth, ultimately that person is not going to be lost. I think on the one hand what we read in **Ezekiel 18:26** is a terribly important cautionary tale. What it says to me is, "Mark, don't take your salvation for granted. If God has saved you for a purpose why would you say I'm saved and go and do these terribly wicked and unrighteous things? That does not make any sense." At the same time, our salvation is always in Christ and this beautiful doctrine of eternal security is so important.*

**Closing Prayer,** Lord, Your Word is wondrous; Your Word is sweeter than honey to our lips, but Your Word, Lord, is also something we must wrestle with. And, Lord, both of those things are very important and a part of Your Word. So help us, Lord, to wrestle with these things and help us to appreciate the sweetness of your grace and especially right now. And, we pray today, in great thanksgiving that You have called all of us to follow You in life. Lord, help us to walk in the way of life always. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

God bless you all. By God's grace we will see you next week.

**End of Class 18 January 26, 2020 Discussion, Handout Zoom Recording**

**Class 18 - February 2, 2021**

**Opening Prayer:** So, we do pray to You, Lord in thanksgiving for this day the opportunity that we have to fill, at least part of it, with our study of Ezekiel this afternoon. May You be glorified and may we be blessed through it. At the same time, Lord, we also give great thanks that Tori is doing much better following her surgery. We thank you, Lord, for her healing, and we pray for her continued well being. So, for our time together, for the Church, for this nation, for the world, we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.

**Location 00:05:23 on Feb. 2 Zoom Recording Pastor Mark,** Turn with me to **Ezekiel 24.** We are going to attempt to finish off this section we're calling "The Debater." And, it's called "The Debater" in these sections because Ezekiel is trying to have both the exiles and the people back in Jerusalem understand that their perceptions are wrong. And so, he is debating popular opinion with bringing the Truth of God's Word to them. Now, if that doesn't sound very familiar and contemporary to us, I will be very surprised. In the 6th Century BC, people were following their own opinions of what they thought about things, and Ezekiel had to bring Truth to their opinion. In the 21st Century even more people probably are following their own opinions about what they think is right and wrong, and we, too, need to be Ezekiels to bring God's Truth to them in love.

*There can be a tendency, I think, for us to read through the Book of Ezekiel and see his relatively hard life in all the things that he had to do to be faithful to God. And, there's a tendency, I think, that we could say, "There but by the grace of God, go I. Thank You, Lord, that You called Ezekiel to do these things and not me!" We can stand at a safe distance and read The Book of Ezekiel without having it personally affect us. But, I would want to challenge all of us, including myself, that to study The Book of Ezekiel is The Holy Spirit calling each of us to be more "Ezekiel-like." And, I don't think it's too much of a stretch to say that God would work through our lives in similar ways that He worked through the life of Ezekiel all those years ago; that we simply cannot stand muted on the sidelines of culture and Church and world without bringing God's Truth to the all the lies that are being perpetuated. So, as we continue our study of Ezekiel, I just want us to really pray, "Lord, don't let me just observe Ezekiel at an easy comfortable distance. Lord, help me to be more Ezekiel-like as I speak to my friends and family and to neighbors and to the world." So, as we think about these things I just want always to press that upon us.*

**Ezekiel 24:1-14 "The Boiling Cauldron," (The Boiling Pot)**

*Not surprisingly, it is more the preaching the teaching about God bringing judgment to Jerusalem. "Woe to the bloody city," that the Lord says three times in our passage. And then, His judgment is fierce, and we're going to look at this cooking song, that was probably a little cooking song melody being sung and how God's going to turn that against them.*

**The preamble: Ezekiel 24:1-3a 1** In the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. **3a** And utter a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, Thus says the Lord God:

*This timeframe that we read corresponds exactly to the historical record of **2 Kings 25:1** and following. I love this about Scripture. Scripture confirms Scripture. And, when we hear people say and we say it often, “Well, how can we trust the Bible when it contradicts itself? That is not true and that is a false understanding of Scripture because it never contradicts itself. And, we could talk about examples of that, but here is a beautiful example of how it affirms. And so, we can then compute this exactly; that the siege began against Jerusalem on January 5 in the year 587 BC. So just kind of wrap your heads around that; that one month ago basically today 1,424 years ago almost to the day, the siege of Jerusalem began. So, what we read in Ezekiel is a fascinating combination of these visions and these kind of metaphysical things, if you will. But it’s always built on historical foundation of real events of life in real time and space.*

*Later, when word comes to the exiles that Jerusalem has fallen; and it will probably take about three to six months for word to reach Babylon of Jerusalem’s fall. We live in an age of instant information; a lot of it false, but instantly. Back in the day, it would have taken months for major events to be learned by other people. It’s a great litmus test for Ezekiel that it really is another way to confirm in the exilic community that he is a true prophet as that actually becomes true.*

*And, so God gives Ezekiel the three charges as you see for this urgent appeal. Here is the popular saying or song that God is going to turn upside down against them in **Ezekiel 24:3b-5: 3b** “Set on the pot, set it on; pour in water also; 4 put in it the pieces of meat, all the good pieces, the thigh and the shoulder; fill it with choice bones. **5** Take the choicest one of the flock; pile the logs under it; boil it well; seethe also its bones in it.”*

*Now, Vickie was talking a few moments ago about The Beatles song, “When I’m 64,” that she and I have been singing since our birthday. So, we think about the popular song today, here’s a popular song for you (way) back in the day, and you know, those lyrics are not real catchy. So, songs have changed a little bit. I don’t think that even The Beatles could put that to a nice melody. But, that’s an example of a poem, a song, something that they would have been very familiar with; a children’s rhyme, perhaps, that they would have shared, sung, said as they cooked together. And so, the point is raised that the action of a cook preparing a special meat dish. The imagery here is pretty clear and distinct. We are going to see later that the pot is a copper pot which means that it’s going to be an extraordinarily special meal. Almost always, back in the day you cooked with clay pots. So, to bring in a copper pot and this was a sacred,*

*festive meal. It would be like bringing out your best China that you would only use a couple times a year and only the choice meats go into this pot.*

*Now, you may recall that earlier in Ezekiel we've seen this same image of the meat and the pot; and, just like then, so now, the people in Jerusalem and the exiles would have heard this song as a sense of security. They would have said, "Of course, Jerusalem/ Israel is the choice meat; in the safe cauldron; in this sacred copper pot with God; and we are the ones selected; we are the special ones; and nothing can ever happen to us because we are the choice meats. And so, this song would have been understood initially as a very positive one of affirming Jerusalem in her security with God. But then, God takes this and He turns it against them in verses 6-8:*

**"The Dispute"** Ezekiel 24:6-8 6 **"Therefore thus says the Lord God** or you could say, *"Therefore thus says Yahweh God;" or actually that's Yahweh Elohim; that's what the words are in Hebrew, Yahweh the name of God given to Moses, the most sacred of all names that no Jews would ever speak or write Yahweh; always G-D and God can either be Elohim or it can be Adonai; those are the three main names of God in the Hebrew Scriptures: Yahweh, Elohim, Adonai.*

**Ezekiel 24:6-8 6** *"Therefore thus says the Lord God* Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose corrosion is in it, and whose corrosion has not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece, without making any choice. 7 For the blood she has shed is in her midst; she put it on the bare rock; she did not pour it out on the ground to cover it with dust. 8 To rouse my wrath, to take vengeance, I have set on the bare rock the blood she has shed, that it may not be covered.

*Now Ezekiel enters into debate with the prevailing attitude. The object of woe is "the city of bloodshed," which is, Jerusalem. And so, there's a corrosion. Now, a lot of people will say that means that the pot corroded but that's probably not what it means. It probably means, the meat itself has corrosion; i.e., the meat is giving off a putrid reddish flesh. So, it's the meat itself that's corroded. And then in verse 6 we read, "and whose corrosion has not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece, without making any choice. That's probably a reference to casting lots; that the lot of God's grace and mercy has been removed from Jerusalem. She's no longer the choice of the Lord because of her sin. Her special status has been relinquished. And why is God rejecting Jerusalem? Well, it all has to do with 'blood;' it all has to do with the kosher cooking. If we were to look back at The Torah in the middle of **Leviticus 17:10-16**, we get the clear teaching of The Torah that you are not to eat the blood in the meat. And so, 'her blood is within her,' means that she has not removed the blood from the meat; that she has cooked and then that becomes a euphemism that she is guilty of taking blood and not preserving life. We'll see that in just a moment a second time in verse 7b, she's further described as 'the offender,' because, again, in breaking the law of Leviticus 17 she has left the blood of this slain animal exposed. In Leviticus 17, God says to Moses, who says to Israel, 'When you slaughter an animal you shall not leave its blood exposed. You should bury it under the dust of the earth.' But, Israel has left the blood of the slain animal exposed which is, she has not covered it with earth and, in a sense, when she*

*does that, it's like throwing it back in God's face. 'Not only am I going to break Your Holy Laws, God, I am going to leave it out, just to kind of smear Your face in it.' So, it's a very wanton, intentional breaking of God's Law. It could be and probably does refer to the fact that back in Jerusalem, it's horrible to think about, but a lot of the Israelites had fallen into the pagan way of sacrificing your firstborn child; so child slaughter; child sacrifice along with, you know, just criminal activity where people are killed. These things are going on in Jerusalem. We saw an explicit reference to child sacrifice back in Ezekiel 16:20; we know that's going on.*

*So, brothers and sisters, obviously that is a horrible thing. It's hard to imagine anything worse than slaughtering, sacrificing an innocent newborn child or a little child. I mean, it's horrible and yet the horror of it continues, right? I mean even more so when people say, 'Well, you know there are less abortions today than there were 20 years ago.' Well, good, but there's still almost a million. I think 20 years ago, just in the United States, the average was somewhat like 1.1 million children died by abortion. Last year, it was something like 984,000 children. Okay, it's gone down; it's still almost a million children. And so, there is forgiveness of sin for any of us who have participated in that. One hundred percent, just lay it at the blood of Christ. But, it also calls us to take a stand even more so.*

*Not to get to far afield with this, but already in the new year these matters of life and sanctity of life are being thrown right in our faces big time. So, was it just last week or week before last that I read in The Roanoke Times an editorial by four Virginia Senators in Richmond. And, these four wrote a very strong op-ed piece with their pictures there, really giving their full clout to it. The headline of that article was 'Roe v Waid is not enough.' And so, their argument is that not only do we need to double down on 'Roe v Waid,' which allowed abortion, we need to broaden it and deepen it and strengthen it into even more encompassing ways. So, again, when we read the Book of Ezekiel, not only must we not stand at a comfortable arm's length and say, "Well, I'm glad you asked Ezekiel to do this and not me;" not only must we say, 'Lord, rather how shall I be more like Ezekiel.' Also, when we read about these terrible sins that caused God to destroy His very Holy City, we also must see that that same sin continues today even more so; even more so. And so, it is a hard, hard truth, but it's one that we need to think about and to ask the Lord what we should do about this. We can't afford to stand on the sidelines and do nothing. The question is not that we do something or nothing, but the question is, "What do we do?"*

*In verse 8 God is going to insure that the blood on the rock is left exposed in order to be a perpetual witness to their sin. Which, here is the good news. Guess whose blood is also left on The Cross as a perpetual witness for the mercy of Christ and the mercy of God.*

*So, in Ezekiel God leaves the blood on the rock to say, 'Jerusalem, if you ever forget why you had to be punished, look at the bloodstain on the rock.' Then, the Lord says finally to us, 'If you ever wonder are you forgiven and is there mercy of the Lord for you, look at the blood soaked stained cross as a perpetual witness that I have done this for*



*you.’ Blood in the Bible is extremely important; we could probably read and interpret the whole Scripture around the one theme of ‘blood.’*

So, then here’s **the counter-thesis in verses 9-13**. (Let’s get through this section and then I want to hear from you.) **9** Therefore thus says the Lord God: Woe to the bloody city! I also will make the pile great. **10** Heap on the logs, kindle the fire, boil the meat well, mix in the spices, and let the bones be burned up. **11** Then set it empty upon the coals, that it may become hot, and its copper may burn, that its uncleanness may be melted in it, its corrosion consumed. **12** She has wearied herself with toil; its abundant corrosion does not go out of it. Into the fire with its corrosion! **13** On account of your unclean lewdness, because I would have cleansed you and you were not cleansed from your uncleanness, you shall not be cleansed anymore till I have satisfied my fury upon you.

*As I’m reading that last part of verse 13, the first thing I think about ‘till I have satisfied my fury upon you,’ again that points us to Christ The Messiah. Why? Because He becomes, as Paul says in **Romans 3**, the propitiation of our sins, which means He becomes the covering against His Father’s fury against sin. So as, deep and as terrible as we see sin in Ezekiel, even more so the depth of God and His forgiveness.*

*The refutation divides into two parts: the manner of Yahweh’s wrath to be vented (vv 9b-12) and the justification for his vengeance 9v 13-14).*

*In 9b, Yahweh assumes now the role of cook. He makes a big fire, a hot fire, much like we read in **Isaiah 30:33**. Now, we get the ominous beginnings of His judgment. The bones that are to be boiled in this pot are not animal bones—they are human.*

*In v 11, the process is not finished. The pot has been defiled and must be cleansed. It must be heated red hot to destroy every remnant of the defiled meat. There is no hope for the inhabitants of Jerusalem because the meat has become tainted. God is justified, therefore to destroy Jerusalem as the oracle reaches its climax in vv 13-14 as the prophet concentrates on its theological significance. God is justified to destroy the city. All of His past efforts at purifying the city had failed. Again, as we read in verse 13, God tried and they would not repent.*

*And then, **the conclusion in verse 14** I am the Lord. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. I will not go back; I will not spare; I will not relent; according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord God.*

*The oracle concludes with the emphatic affirmation, one of the most emphatic statements in all the Book of Ezekiel that God is going to bring the judgment; He’s going to; He will not relent. And so, they thought they were good to go; they were the choice meat in the security of the pot which is Jerusalem but God says, ‘Today Nebuchadnezzar has arrived and He will bring my fury against you.’*

*God's highly charged statement consists of seven verbs—three positive and three negative—then a final positive. The judgment pronounced corresponds perfectly with the wanton behavior of the city. The sentence is sealed.*

*The sign-act of the boiling cauldron challenged Jerusalem's illusions of security. The residents thought of themselves as choice portions of meat specially selected for a sumptuous banquet. By implication, the exiles were the discarded portions. But God turns their little cooking song against them. He's now the cook focused on burning up the meat. Nebuchadnezzar has arrived. Yahweh has spoken, and **He always has the last Word.***

### **Theological Implications**

We can't hide in our traditions. Salvation is through grace by faith. If God's grace is not met with faith and love and obedience, we cannot say, 'Yay! I'm good to go.'

Singing little songs to make yourself feel better is no substitute for obedience.

God's judgment is real. But so is His mercy to all who repent and turn to Him; and, we're going to see that in just a moment especially.

It's important to say that this is not the first time that God had said, 'I'm done! you've blown it!' It's been over and over and over that God has been trying to get their (Israel's) attention and they refuse to repent.

Questions, comments about **Ezekiel 24:1-14**?

**Terrie:** I have some questions about the date on the calendar because, obviously, today the 10th month would be October; and we said January; and my ESV study note said January 15, 588 BC. Would you just double check that date.

**Mark:** Well, isn't that interesting you're right. I'm just looking at the ESV too. Well, I was calculating it differently. Let's see, what does it say back...that's about a year and ten days' difference. I'll have to double check that. I thought the calendar worked out exactly to the date on the handout, but I didn't even notice that the ESV has a different date. So, looking at **2 Kings 25**, they don't give the date at that point. Well, I'll double check that

**Terrie:** Perhaps, more importantly, is it today annually there's a Jewish feast to commemorate this date. ESV also says, "annually by fasting it was observed." Is that still going on today?

**Mark:** I don't believe so. Josh have you? No. I don't believe that remembrance has been kept current. Well, thanks for flagging that. I did not even realize the discrepancy. I thought that was a pretty hard and fast date so I'll look some things up and bring word next week. Thanks (Terrie) for pointing that out.

**Linda Handy:** It's interesting about the dates, but I think calendars have changed; the Jewish calendar has not, but I know our calendar has changed. What's important to me is that the historical record exists, whether we are a year off or a day off is interesting, but that's not the meat. The meat is, "warning was given; warning is still given." Our nation is being given a warning and we have heard it loud and clear, those of us who were listening, and the consequences of hearing and not changing, for all of us, are impactful, to put it quite mildly. That's the important thing. They heard; they listened; they did not hear; their ears were closed; their hearts were closed; and they continued to live in a way that was counter to the Lord, with no remorse.

**Mark:** *That's true and so, once again, we say, "Lord, not just their sins, but our sins also." You're right so thank you Linda, good observation and Terrie just to get back to your other questions about the 10th month. That would be October on the Gregorian calendar. On the Jewish calendar the 10th month is; that's completely different so it does not mean October at that point. But, I will look at those dates, but you're right, I mean, and the point on which I am sure we all would agree it is important to understand that this is historically verified; these things happened; Scripture tells the track record of real history. It makes it both trustworthy; and it also means that we need to take it very seriously ourselves. Other questions or comments before we move on to Ezekiel 33?*

**Dr. Greg:** You know, I saw a parallel that is worth mentioning. Perhaps, too often the Church in America and America itself considers itself to be the choice nation in the world. And, you know, economically that's true, but there's..spiritually, no.

**Mark:** Right. Good observation, Greg.

**Vickie:** I was wondering. There seem to be so many examples in the Bible of God giving His people chance after chance after chance and, you know, they never seem to listen and then they're punished. And I'm wondering, are there any examples of somebody immediately backing up (looking up) and saying, 'Whoa, You're right. I (we) really messed up here or is it just human nature that we just don't listen until it's too late?

**Mark:** Well, that's a good question. *I think, well certainly there is Paul (Saul the great apostle). He orchestrated the murder of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He wanted to destroy the Church; he's on the way Damascus, Jesus says, 'why are you persecuting Me?' and Paul has a dramatic conversion, right? So, we see that now in the New Testament. The Book of Acts tells us about a Philippian jailer who sees; and Cornelius, the Centurion, so we certainly see dramatic eternal conversions. In the Old Testament, well certainly there was Moses. He was a murderer and had been in the land for 40 years. He killed the Egyptian when he was 40 years old and didn't flee until he's 80. Finally, God got a hold of him and he changes his life. So, there probably are, but I think we see the more dramatic conversions in the New Testament.*

**Vickie:** I am wondering more of nations than individuals.

**Mark:** *No, I mean I think eventually by the time we get to the end of salvation history in Book of Revelation, we see that God is bringing out from every nation those who would truly follow Him. And so, His followers, then become the new priests, the new people, the new nation of God, if you will; from every nation; from Israel; from every Gentile nation God will bring those who would truly follow Him and they'll be kind of nation under God. So, you're absolutely right, good observation that even Israel, the one covenantal nation with God, in all of history, even Israel floundered in her sin.*

**Vickie:** Well, it makes me think that really there's not much hope for our country because of the direction it is going right now. Well, it would take an absolute miracle and I don't think history gives us any insight. It doesn't look good. It looks like we are going to have to suffer God's wrath too before anything changes.

**Mark:** Right, Vickie, you and I have been in conversation this week by email about these things. May I share with the group a little bit of that. A couple days ago Vickie sent me a video of a radio broadcaster, a Christian commentator who was interviewing two pastors about the coming persecution of Christians in the United States. But, the video began with a clip of a pastor down in Texas, I believe, preaching recently about..; he's telling his conversation that without a doubt that the day is coming soon where Christianity will be a capital offense. Now, this pastor is saying that it's not going to be in 100 years but he is saying, 'in a few years, convinced beyond doubt' that to be a Christian in the United States will come with it the possibility that we will be executed as a capital offender. So, I'm thinking, 'now the rest of the video wasn't quite that dramatic.'" The pastor was saying, 'persecution is coming; here's the evidence,' but it starts off with this very dramatic dark announcement. I looked up this pastor. I was thinking, 'okay, is he kind of an off brand, kind of way out there, kind of looney pastor.'" Turns out the guy has great credentials. I mean he's well educated. He's worked within very respected Church denominations. He's served on boards of very respected ministries. This is no looney pastor. He would be called a very trustworthy, conservative scholarly respected man. And, he is saying Christianity is going to become a capital offense. So, I still have a hard time thinking, 'that is going to happen,' but I have no problem saying that we have got to be God's people within the nations because the nation is never going to be God's nation ever. We are seeing that just in the last couple of weeks, and I could give a lot of examples of that. I just saw today that a well respected 25-year service Army chaplain has just been disciplined by saying he doesn't think it's a good idea to have transgender people on the front lines because he says somebody says I'm a woman whose really a man who is mentally ill. He should be getting mental help; he should not be serving on the front lines of a battle. And so, the chaplain is probably going to lose his position over it. So, that's what happening and it's going to happen more.

**David Leamon:** There are prophetic words regarding a third grade awakening coming forth the past couple of years and pretty strong right now. Do we have that to look forward to?

**Mark:** Well, brother, you know David one of the things that I love and respect about you is how you really keep current with what is going on in the wider Christian world. And so, I've not personally seen a lot about that. I would welcome it. It's something, perhaps, we can pray about, "Lord in Your Mercy before the second coming there could be a third awakening that more can be saved." That would be wonderful.

**David:** Not only for this country but for the world. I read recently that the condition of this nation at the time of both the first and second awakenings is very similar spiritually to what it is now.

**Mark:** Yes. Right.

**Greg:** If I could add that I suspect there may be a Great Awakening coming, but there may be a price attached to that. If you look at China which, before all the western missionaries were thrown out, the Chinese Church was only a million strong. Once the missionaries were thrown out and persecution started in earnest that's when the Chinese church began to explode and they're up to 90 million people now, but for a price.

**Linda:** Amen, and that's the price we may be called. We need to stand, Greg, on The Word and on Truth and it may cost us. When I was speaking earlier about 'if we don't turn,' that was not so much the nation turning, but we, as Christians, have to be able to stand and support each other in it. And I believe in an ecumenical, as David was just saying, an ecumenical across denominational stand.

**Mark:** Yes, good; excellent points. You know, speaking of China, great illustration, I just read, not that long ago, that some estimate about Year 2050, just a few years away, there will be over 350 million believers in China which will far surpass the United States and all of Europe. So, yes, that is a great point that persecution, both Biblically and in our own history, has often led, not to the loss of faith, but to even deeper faith. So, if we are to be persecuted for the sake of Christ, to the glory of God.

**Chris:** Have you ever heard of Zinzendorf? (Nicolaus Zinzendorf was an eclectic theologian. He talks about the Church within the Church. Kathy and I came from a tradition where it was understood that there's the Church, evangelicals or whatever they want to call themselves, there's really just a remnant within the Church that is God's real Church. So, when we say that we need to get together as Christians. I mean there are christians who are just way out there. They are not just way out there from looney ville, but way out there in terms of issues that are pertinent to the values of family and life and scantity of life and marriage. And so when we say that we as Christians need; and I agree with Linda 100 percent; that we need to stand up with one

another, my concern is we identify so many people in the United States as being Christian, but are they really or just nominally?

**Mark:** Good point; so *only God can judge the heart. Only He alone knows who truly is saved by grace through faith. When you say that, Chris, the first thing I think about is what it says in **Romans 9-11**, not every Israelite is a true member of Israel. So, Paul recognized that, even among his own people, the Jews, just for the Jew to say, "Yes, I am an Israelite, I am a Jew, does not mean that they are a true Jew, a true Israelite." There's always a remnant within the larger group. And so, Jesus then says later that many will come to Him and He will say He never knew them. And, the Lord says, "Let the wheat and the tares grow together." You would hope that everybody who goes to worship, that everybody in the congregations around the world are true believers, but we know that's not true. We know that whole denominations have taken up huge disobedience and abomination as to God. We understand that there's probably a remnant, is a remnant among those who say, "I am a Christian." And, we leave that to God to decide that.*

**Linda Handy:** We just said in Bible Study this morning that Judas, one of the disciples, was sitting at the table with The Lord.

**Mark:** Good example; perfect example, right. And, only the Lord knew his true heart. You know, he was elected to be the treasurer. He was well respected; trusted by the other 11 apostles and there he was an imposter; a traitor, so that's a good example.

WOW! This is good stuff; it's heavy stuff and I think what it does; it just reinforces that the study of Ezekiel is a study, not just of history but of real contemporary life. I love that about Scripture. Scripture always works on three different levels: the past/history; the present/what does it mean in our lives right now; and the future hope that we have in Christ. Scripture always brings all that together. It reminds me of what it says in Hebrews, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. That's what's happening here in Ezekiel.

Let's see if we can get through, at least, this next section. We've got a lot of stuff next week too do so it looks like we'll have even more stuff next week. We are going to turn now to **Ezekiel 33:10-20 "The Appeal of the Prophetic Watchman."** We do need to get this part because it does remind us that even now, death can be avoided if they will only repent. So to the very last breath of a person's life, God says, 'Even now; even now it's not too late; like the thief on The Cross next to Jesus.

**Ezekiel 33:10-16 10** "And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: 'Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?' 11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? 12 "And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall

not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. 13 Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. 14 Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, 15 if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **16** None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.

*There is hope for the wicked and the sinful, even as there is more judgment, not for the righteous, but for the self-righteous. So, that's the difference, right. So they say 'rotting away in our sin' we see that curse back in **Leviticus 26:39**. Sin has crushed them. Sin always leads to death. The penalty of sin is death, clearly, **Romans 3** and we see that here. Yet, for those who are sinners, for the wicked, all they have to do is to repent, and turn from their sin and turn to God, and they will live.*

*Now, it's also sobering that, but it's also good news, that what we did in our past, we cannot bank it; we cannot say to God, "Lord I was really faithful until the ages of 21-33, but for the rest of my life I've been a rotten, wicked scoundrel who hasn't loved You at all." And we can say, "But, remember those eight or nine years?" We can't bank righteousness. At the same time, we look back over our lifetime. And, I know I do. I can count so many sins that I lose count, right? And some of them worse than others. And I go, "Lord, how can there be any hope for my life, given all these years of sin?" And, God says, "Today, repent, turn to me, and I remember your wickedness no more." So, it is amazing good news to a world that's gone amuck.*

*It's kind of like what we see and hear in the **Letter of James**; "faith without works is dead." Righteousness can become self-righteousness when it's just not of God. There is God's offer of hope to the penitent sinner. God's commitment is always to life.*

*I remember the famous document called "The Didache," the teaching of the twelve apostles written about 100 AD. It starts off famously, "There are two ways, the way of life and the way of death; choose today which way you shall go." That's kind of like what we are hearing now in this portion of Ezekiel.*

**Ezekiel 33:17-20 "The Second Disputation."** **17** "Yet your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not just,' when it is their own way that is not just. **18** When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. **19** And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by this. **20** Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways."

*The people of Israel are still bitter. They think that God is not fair; He's arbitrary. And God says, "Are you kidding? I've never changed. This has always been my Word. It's you, Jerusalem that have become arbitrary." God's ways have always been the same. He has set before them the way of life and the way of death. His commandments do not change from day to day. Each person will be judged according to his or her own conduct (v 20).*

### **Theological Implications**

This probably is a portion of Scripture right before the fall of Jerusalem, before it was too late. And, Ezekiel is calling as the prophetic watchman to, even at this late hour, turn and obey The Word of God. So it is good news to those of us who know we are sinners. It is hard news to those who think they are righteous on their own.

And, also, I think this passage reaffirms the inability of a hardened heart to comprehend the things of God. You know a hardened heart only wants to blame God. A soft heart that's open to the Good News says, "I am a sinner, and You Lord are so merciful." Paul will take this and speak about in several places in his epistles. You know, I think of 1 Corinthians 2 where Paul says to understand spiritual things, you've got to be a spiritual person. He says that if your heart is hardened; if there's a veil over your heart, you are not going to understand grace. And so, we understand that God wants to make a new heart within us.

Thirdly and clearly, God does not desire the death of sinners, but sinners would turn from their wickedness and live. **2 Peter 3:9**: the Lord is patient, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should repent and find life in His grace.

As much as we see in the wrath and the judgment of God, we see even more at The Cross of Christ His Son and this is God's desire that we all return to Jesus and live.

It is getting close to the 1:00 hour. Any comments or questions about this section from Ezekiel 33.

**Linda Handy:** "I hear it shouting to the 21st Century that says the Word of God is superficial, judgmental, we don't need it, we have the answers, we will rely on our favorite fallback science or our second favorite fallback, politics. God help us all, as Victoria would probably say, 'God help us all.'" Because only He can. He did not change. He does not change. We are the unfaithful ones; not the Lord.

**Mark:** Right! Okay, well thank you so we'll pause there. Next week we've got just a short section. Next week we will pick up with **Ezekiel 33:23-29**, and then we start a new section in Ezekiel and we may or may not get to it next week, but I just want to warn you that Ezekiel 16 is coming up. Now, that's one of the toughest chapters in all the Bible. And, it has to do with Israel and God and Israel's turned into a harlot. And, I just want you to pray about it. It's hard stuff; eventually it's going to be redeeming, but the people will say, it's the hardest chapter to read in the Old Testament; in the whole



Bible coming around the corner. Don't miss next week if we get to it. You don't want to miss that even though you probably do want to miss that.

**Closing Prayer:** So, Lord, we give You thanks for this day. We pray that You will always make sure that we read Scripture both in its historical context but never divorced from its contemporary impact upon our lives today; that we may see, O Lord, that Your Truths are eternal; the same Truth You are preaching through Ezekiel 2500 years ago is the same Truth You are proclaiming to us today. So, we pray that we will believe, we would repent of our sin we will turn to you once again. And we pray, Lord, for this Church, for the world, for the nation. Please, Lord, have mercy upon us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for your time and attention.

**(Location: 00:00:00 February 9, 2021 Zoom recording)**

**Mark:** We've got to pick up from last week (**February 2**). Terrie had mentioned a discrepancy with the dating, which was a very good catch on her part. In **Ezekiel 24:1** where, if you remember, it says "in the 9th year in the 10th month on the 10th day of the month, The Word of the Lord came to me." And this was the prophesy that the siege to Jerusalem had begun. The ESV has notes that the dating translates into January 15, 588 BC. And, on the handout from last week I had put that translates January 5, 587 BC, about a year later.

So the discrepancy, the difference there, is that the ESV uses the date based upon the date when the exiles were first dismissed from Jerusalem. So, that date corresponds to the period of the exiles in Babylon.

The date that I listed, from the commentary that's been so helpful for me and for us, lists, basically, a year later January 5, 587 BC based on the "regnal year." That means the year that Zedekiah became king. It's called "the r-e-g-n-a-l year," the year a king or a queen assumes the throne. The commentator that I used for this date says, for various reasons, he computes that, not from the period of the exiles, but a period of Zedekiah's ascension. So, there's a year difference there. One of the reasons the commentator uses this date versus the ESV date is that January 5, 587 BC corresponds to 2 Kings 25:1 in which the same historical event of the siege of Jerusalem is noted. And so, to use January 5, 587 BC matches historically to 2 Kings 25.

And so, again which is right? ESV commentators for the footnote, I'm sure, obviously, are great scholars, as well as the commentator and others. So, these dates can get a little tricky because they unthoughtfully did not use the same calendar we use so it makes it harder for us, right? The Gregorian calendar didn't come into affect until centuries and centuries later so the dating in the Old Testament; for example, when we get early on in Genesis, the ages of the Patriarchs and all the other early people are tricky.

To say was Methuselah really 900+ years old? How is that calculated? You get Orthodox scholars saying different things for various scholarly reasons; so, there are some things like that that are hard for us to pin down exactly all these years later.

But, the Lord knows and there is a right date; and we just have to kind of search for it. But in terms of Ezekiel, that year discrepancy is based upon: "Is it dating from the period of the exiles or is it dating from the period of Zedekiah's ascension to the throne?" And so, that's a longer answer but, Terrie, I hope that explains your question and concerns. And certainly if you want to except the ESV date, you may do so. You have that prerogative. Anything you want to say about that Terrie?

**Terrie:** Just, that I find it fascinating and thank you very much.

**Mark:** It is fascinating and these dates and these ages are not to be quickly overlooked in Scripture. I mean there's nothing in the Bible, nothing that's not important. There's no date, no person, no historical event that is beyond the scope of importance. So, God wants us to dig in and really then discern.

Having said that, then our last portion from last week is the final part of the handout last week **Ezekiel 33:23-29** to finish off this section of Ezekiel that we're calling "**The Debater.**"

This passage, this oracle follows immediately from Jerusalem's fall. And, it is to refute the popular opinion about God. You know, any time there's a judgment, our natural tendency is to blame others; to say it's not fair; to say that we were not that wrong. And so, the natural tendency of Ezekiel's peer group, especially those in Jerusalem, was to say, "God, You are unfair. We don't deserve this punishment." This oracle is to dispute that and to affirm the true character of God; that He is righteous and all His ways.

So let's look at **Ezekiel 33:23-24**. This is what's being disputed. This was the popular opinion. **23** The word of the Lord came to me: **24** "Son of man, the inhabitants of these waste places in the land of Israel keep saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess.'

*So, that was the basic argument that those in Jerusalem were saying and by extension probably it was repeated in the exilic community as well. It begins with a direct quotation of an opinion circulating among the people and the focus, of course, is those left behind in Jerusalem. But, notice that in these verses, Jerusalem is not named explicitly, rather there's a euphemism that she is called "the wasteland." And so, it's a sobering thing that the land of Israel, God's gift to them, has become a wasteland because God has allowed the Babylonians to capture it.*

*We think maybe 20,000 people are still there at that point. But, remember there's a number of deportations; and not all the exiles went at the first wave. Ezekiel was among the first wave; but then there were waves after that. By the time the captivity ends after 70 years, the population is going to vary; but, it never gets more than 20,000 total. And, previously the population would have been around 100,000. So, you're looking at quite a decimated population.*

*We've talked about the land a lot because the land is at the core of the Covenant. You know, the land is the sacramental part of the Covenant, if you will. God speaks His Word and comes to His people; and God works through the sacraments. The real tangible means in other words. The land, if you will, was that sacramental real tangible means of God's presence with His people. How could Jerusalem; how could Judah become a wasteland if the land is a tangible sign of God's Promise? God is not capricious, He doesn't make promises with His fingers crossed behind His back. He's not a promise breaker.*

*So, in the overall scheme we have to understand that God's promise of the land was not broken. It was not abrogated. He is not capricious, but he has allowed, from time to time, over long periods of time, His people Israel to be expelled from the land for sins and for disobedience. But, they've always, always come back. And we've said this many times here at Saint John, the most remarkable miracle and evidence of this is, in our lifetime 1948, when Israel as a state, was restored. And, we can look at all the historical reasons for that; and we don't have time right now to do that, but we must never, never underestimate the importance of that.*

*And so, people all the time say, "Well, are we living in the end days? Is Jesus coming back soon?" And, we don't know, and we should not speculate. Jesus says, "Don't even do that." But we do look around, and we can say that the clock certainly is ticking louder now that Israel's restored. The Messiah cannot come back without Israel being in the land because He's coming back to Jerusalem. I mean, that's where He's coming back. And so, now that Israel, the state, has been restored. Now that Jerusalem is under Israeli governance; now that the embassy of the United States has finally been moved to Jerusalem, which it should've been done years ago. Just pray that the new administration doesn't close that down and no longer say that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. That is what it's all about. The embassy going there is to affirm that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. So let's pray that continues. But, be that as it may, the clock is ticking more because the land has been restored. Yes, God has allowed it to become a wasteland in the days of Ezekiel, but the Promise was never broken. We need to keep the big picture in mind even as we do this.*

*So let's get through this section, and I certainly want to hear from you. So they were appealing to Abraham. And, they said, "He came as one man; he got the land; we are many and have even more rights to it even though, technically, the land did not become Israel's until after Abraham 400 years later. But do you hear their appeal to Abraham because Abraham is their ancestor, therefore, they deserve? If you hear that, then you may hear then the echo of the preaching of John the Baptist almost 600 years*

later, where in **Matthew 3:9**, the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the religious leaders are coming to the Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. And he says to them, "Don't you think; don't assume just because you are a descendant of Abraham that makes you completely right now in the eyes of God. God can raise up children of Abraham from these rocks. So the preaching of John the Baptist, I would argue, comes directly from Ezekiel, from this. And that's why I keep saying every week, Ezekiel is never quoted directly in the New Testament, but I would say Ezekiel is foundational to almost everything in the New Testament. And, that's another example of where, I think, John is working off of the prophesy of Ezekiel there.

So, they displayed smug self-interest, while, of course, Abraham relied only on God by faith. And, it's almost like, as one commentator has said, "a Darwinian materialism; the survival of the fittest." So their argument is, "Hey listen, we're descendants of Abraham. We're much greater than Abraham because we have more of us; therefore, we have more right to the land." And God is going to completely overturn that argument.

And then in **Ezekiel 33:25-29** **25** Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God: You eat flesh with the blood and lift up your eyes to your idols and shed blood; shall you then possess the land? **26** You rely on the sword, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife; shall you then possess the land? **27** Say this to them, Thus says the Lord God: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in strongholds and in caves shall die by pestilence. **28** And I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and her proud might shall come to an end, and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that none will pass through. **29** Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have made the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations that they have committed.

*These are explicitly the reasons why the survivors have been disqualified from the land because of their wanton disregard for responsibilities of being associated with the true heirs of the Abrahamic Promise.*

*So there are six accusations that they've done that God brings to them: (1) they eat meat from which blood has not been drained. We know that; we know that Covenant Promise, "The blood is the life. And so, when you eat meat, you must make sure that the meat has been drained of the blood. (2) they pay homage to idols; obviously, that's a deal breaker; (3) commit murder; (4) depend on violence (5) They commit abominations (6) They defile one another's wives. So, a lot of this is going to be right from The Ten Commandments kind of things. So they are the exact opposite of Abraham, right? They say, "Hey, we should deserve it; we are descendants, they're a lot of us." But in truthfulness, they are the exact opposite of Abraham.*

*And the key there, I think, is, Abraham walked before God. And he was blameless by being faithful. That's **Genesis 17** when the Covenant is made with the circumcision. And the people in Jerusalem, all those years later after Abraham, are no longer walking with God.*

*Now, that expression, "Abraham walked with God," is extremely important in the Bible and in salvation history. The Hebrew word for walk is "Halakh." It is an expression of living faithfully. So, "walk" becomes this great image, that you are being faithful to God in your whole being, that you are walking with God in His ways. In the New Testament, the believers in Yeshua, in Jesus, before they were called Christians, Christianity was called "The Way." That goes back to this ancient important Biblical concept of walking, which is really on my mind right now because yesterday I had a wonderful conversation with Baruch.*

*Many of you know Baruch. He's been here two or three times. He's been our guide in the land of Israel for about six or seven trips. And it was great getting caught up with Baruch. He started "The New Jerusalem Seminary," which is just now offering classes. You may want to visit their website sometime, "The Jerusalem Seminary." It's a great website; and we are going to pray for them a lot. Baruch is finally going to finish his PhD. He needs to; he's going to be the founder and the president of a seminary, he has to have his PhD. He's been working on this for seven years, but it looks like he is going to be able to finish it before the end of the year. He has to finish it before the end of the year. And, his whole dissertation is on "Walking." It is on the Biblical meaning of what it means to "walk with God." And, how the ancient Hebrew understanding gets picked up by the apostles and how it becomes, then, a way to look at the whole Bible. I say a lot about this because I had a fascinating conversation with Baruch in Israel for over an hour yesterday about that; and I can't wait to see what his work results in.*

*So, God is going to send His wrath because they've not walked with Him, by sword, by wild animals, and by the plague, and that will result in total devastation.*

### **Theological Implications**

God may have abandoned His people, His Temple, but He is still present. He sees everything.

The privilege of being a son or a daughter of Abraham must be accompanied by a commitment to walk with The Lord by Word and deed.

Claims to the birthright must be accompanied by devotion to His will.

Questions, comments, observations about **Ezekiel 33:23-29**?

**Chris Miller:** With the present political circumstances aside, there has been the argument that it's sort of the Anglocentric or a western idea primarily about America being central to history. And, I think about the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Islamic, the Ottoman, the Mongols, the Chinese, different empires lasting for up to

thousand of years. Is there any reason why we should think that America is the land and the country is central to any of the prophecies of Biblical times. That's my question.

**Mark:** Well, it's a great question. Somebody want to weigh in on what Dr. Chris has said. He raises a big question. We know that Israel was in a Covenant relationship with the Lord. What about the United States of America or what about other nations or other empires in the past. Chris asks, "Is America central to history because it has a special relationship with God?" Anybody want to weigh in on that?

**Elaine Thompson:** Pastor, I don't think I remember the United States as part of any translation of countries getting together. It seems like we are on the outside looking in sort of; I've never seen us as part of a group.

**Mark:** That's a good observation, Elaine. Let me respond this way. So, here's a little product placement plug. You know how in movies, if an actor or actress is drinking a diet Coke it's because that company has paid for that to be in the scene. So, here's a little "product placement." "Race and Covenant." Sunday, this is one of the three books I was touting hoping that some of us will read. This is going to be the July evening Book Club discussion. So just one night, one evening of a discussion of these books. That title "Race and Covenant" gets right to Chris's question. The introduction is by our beloved brother Gerry McDermott. And, that whole first introductory chapter is on the national covenants with nations. It gets right to your question, Chris. And the answer that Gerry comes to is, yes. I mean Israel is a special case, unique in salvation history. No country is like Israel, never has been, never will be, unique, special. But, there are reasons, Biblically and Historically, to think of nations entering into kind of a national covenant. That is obviously right there in the title. I would love for you, if nothing else, to get the book and read that introductory chapter. But, I think once you do that, you will want to read some of the essays in the book.

I just finished a great new biography of Abraham Lincoln. It was just published in 2020. Wall Street Journal named it one of the ten best books of the year in 2020. It is a cultural biography of Lincoln. More books have been written about Jesus Christ than any other person in history. The second most written books is Abraham Lincoln; i.e., Lincoln is second only to Jesus in terms of number of books. So, why another biography of Abraham Lincoln? Well, this really stands unique among all the biographies because it's a cultural biography, which means the author has taken the big cultural situation around Lincoln's life, religiously, literature, arts, politics; it's fascinating. But, Abraham Lincoln, especially as the Civil War began and continued, he came to a firm conviction that America was in a Covenant relationship with God and that the Civil War was the punishment upon America for slavery. Abraham Lincoln had an uneven relationship with the Lord as a young man. By the time he died by the assassin's bullet, I think he had a true and saving relationship with God. But, part of that was seeing the National Covenant. Now, that's more than even Chris wanted to hear.

Any other reflections on that? You raise some good things and I want to get to that in just a moment; it segues here to the next part. Anything else?

**Linda Handy:** Two things. The first thing was, the current administration has changed the name of the Embassy in Jerusalem. They are not moving it, but they have added the..; and I was looking to see what the new title is, but it includes the Palestinians and other groups. So it's not The Israeli Embassy anymore. It is the Israeli and others embassy.

The second thing relates to what you were just talking about, which is the importance of the land and reliance on God in the land. I can't remember whether it was this group or another one; somebody just like week said to me that God was never part of the founding of America. And, to me that is sacrilege. They were not in a covenant, but they (founders) certainly came here with God wrapped around them. Even in Jamestown, which was founded as an economic enterprise, the first building created was a church. And, all of the writings as an English teacher that I covered about early American literature had to do with the providence of God and the action of God in the new nation. So, just as aside, we might not be in a covenant relationship, but we are certainly connected.

**Mark:** I agree 100 percent. Both Jamestown and Plymouth Rock, the folks up there to the north clearly. Rena and I took a trip a couple years ago for the first time to Plymouth Rock, and there's a monument there with the Mayflower compact etched into it. I mean, it is nothing but a covenantal language. So they clearly understood themselves as pilgrims for the sake of the Lord to establish a covenant with God in a new land. The Jamestown people, also, like you said. We've just discovered within the last ten years the first building that was built in Jamestown was a church, which blew away most people who assume that was a purely profit driven mission. And, you don't build your first building as a church if you are a purely profit driven mission. So, Jamestown as well as Plymouth were both..But to say that though is not to build us up and to puff us up. To say that, it must put us on our knees because if that's true, if God stirred men and women all those years ago to come to this land, and now we look at what this land has become now we have no basis for pride; we have no basis to say "Lord hah we're more numerous now than the Plymouth Rock and Jamestown people, therefore, we have much more reason to think that You're going to bless us. We have much more reason to be contrite; and to beat our chest and say, "Lord have mercy, forgive us." So, we've got to be careful when we do come to the truth of the historical reality that this country was founded by men and women who saw themselves as pilgrims of God, it is not a reason to boast and be prideful. It is a reason to confess one's sins.

**Linda:** And return to the Lord our God.....where we came from...

**Mark:** Amen. Well, there are some more things we could say about that but we'll try to be a little more focused here.

**End of Class 18 February 2 Discussion, Handout, Zoom Recording**

**Class 19 - February 9, 2021**

**Pastor Mark:** Welcome to Ezekiel. It's great to see all of you guys and be with you and to make sure I've got everybody in who's knocked on the door. So let's pray; we've got a lot to cover. Any prayer needs or concerns that you would like to share with the group before we start?

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to You Father through our Lord Your Son Jesus Christ and The Holy Spirit that You would once again cover us with Your Word that we may listen carefully to what you told Ezekiel to tell the Israelites in Jerusalem and in Babylon all those years ago; that we may listen carefully; that we may learn deeply; and that we may take our listening and our learning and turn it into greater faithfulness to You. O, Lord, even as we remember the sins of Israel for which she was judged, we pray that You would forgive us of our sins because, Lord, we know always that the plank is much bigger in our eye than the mote in our neighbors'. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

(Class 19 teaching following opening prayer Location: 00:35:00 on the Feb. 9 video. **Ezekiel 14 begins a new section called, "The Prosecutor."** *And, as I said last week this section includes Ezekiel 16 which is the longest section by far in Ezekiel. Ezekiel 16 is longer than six of the so called minor prophets. "Minor" being the short prophets in the Old Testament like Obadiah, etc. This one chapter 16 is longer than some whole books in the Old Testament. And we may or may not get to that today. But, Ezekiel 16 is a difficult chapter full of very harsh things, but ultimately, it's full of a lot of hope and redeeming too. So, we'll see if we get there.*

**Ezekiel 14** is (also) important material that we're going to turn to right now. So once again we continue to look at the inevitable judgment on Jerusalem and God's basis of that and His justice; why He was right in doing that; and then there's a concrete example of that in **Ezekiel 15**.

**Ezekiel 14:12-20 "The High Price of Treachery; A Lecture on Divine Justice"**

**12** And the word of the Lord came to me: **13** "Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, **14** even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord God. **15** "If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no one may pass through because of the beasts, **16** even if these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate. **17** "Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, Let a sword pass through the land, and I cut off from it man and beast, **18** though these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered. **19** "Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast, **20** even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they



would deliver neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.

*So fascinating analogy or observation with these three famous figures in salvation history. Verses 12-20 of Ezekiel 14 is a kind of lecture on divine justice. It's the basis for Yahweh's judgment against Jerusalem. It's a quasi legal framework, and so you can kind of see that God is the prosecutor and Ezekiel is the prosecuting attorney who is bringing the charges.*

*Now here, this is where I want to go for just a second in this observation. This is the segue from our discussion about a nation and a covenant. In Ezekiel 14:13, God says **13** "Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly,*

*Obviously, 'the land' here is the land of Israel, but it can be extrapolated that when any land, that is, when any nation sins against 'Me' (God) by acting faithlessly there will be judgment. That really has me thinking a lot. I told you about the biography of Lincoln. Lincoln saw that the Civil War was God's judgment against slavery. I just finished another book about a figure from Nazi era Germany. And a lot of Christians, and Jews of course, saw that the total destruction of Germany in World War II (and most of the cities were leveled), came about directly because of the abomination of the Holocaust and the sacrifice of over six million Jews. If Lincoln sees the Civil War as a judgment against America for the sin of slavery, the national sin of slavery. If believers are able to see the total destruction of Germany as God's judgment against Germany for the horror of the decimation of His own people, the Jews, it isn't that much of a stretch that America would fall under God's judgment for the national sins that we have?*

*(From a personal note, transcriber, paused here thinking of the half million lives already lost to Covid 19 and yet the enormity of 'six million Jews' takes my own breath away to pause and pray a prayer of gratitude that we have this freedom to worship and study together as God continues unraveling the complexity of His tapestry—His Living Word.)*

*You know, one of the things that has made me very prayerfully sobered, just in the last couple weeks, is that right here in The Commonwealth of Virginia. On the one hand, laws to double down and expand abortion are increasing. So, on one hand there are new laws to ensure that the littlest people among us, unborn children will be able to be easily killed. On the other hand, a new law's been passed outlawing capital punishment. Now, as a Christian we can talk about capital punishment, but you see that juxtaposition. We're killing babies and we're allowing murderers to live. What's happened!? We're killing babies and we're allowing murderers and rapists to live. When will the hand of God's judgment fall upon this State, this Nation. And, you see what's happening at the two ends of those spectrums. And that's just one small slice of an example.*

*So, to read Ezekiel, brothers and sisters, is a hard read right now because of stuff going on, not just in our country, but in the whole world. I don't think a believer can read Ezekiel apart from saying, "Lord, what does this mean now, in my life and our life and*

*this nation's life?" You just can't read it in a vacuum. That's why, on the one hand I'm so glad that God finally has brought me and brought us to deeply study Ezekiel. I've ignored it almost my whole life. I've read it quickly just to get through it, "just to check it off. "Yeah, I've read Ezekiel!" But, on the other hand, it's a hard time to do it because there's a lot of stuff going on. We go, "Yep, we've got those issues too, Lord." And, we're going to see that in Ezekiel 16, especially. That's part of the horror of Ezekiel 16, there's a lot to say, not just then, but "Now, O Lord, forgive us."*

When a country sins, God is going to bring judgment. Here, obviously, it is to Jerusalem Judah, "Israel." He's going to bring His Hand (judgment) in four different scenarios: famine, wild beasts, sword, and plague. And, not even the presence of these three righteous men from history can save them. Noah, we know about; Job, we know about, but the most fascinating name on this list is Daniel. Noah lived, obviously, in the very early days; Job is not dated, but we think Job lived in the era of The Patriarchs, before Moses and Israel was established through Moses. Those are two really old figures in Biblical history. But, Daniel was a contemporary. Daniel was living at the exact same time as Ezekiel and Jeremiah back in Jerusalem. And so Daniel was probably taken as a hostage early into Babylon. And he was just a teenager when he was taken. You know the story of Daniel. It's in his extraordinary book. And the exiles would have heard about Daniel because, you know, he became very important in Babylon because God gave Him extraordinary gifts and he survived extraordinary trials by fire. And, he rose (in importance and notoriety). Among the exiles, he rose and became a very important figure. And so, it's fascinating that Daniel would be added to this list. Again, it gives a more historically situated, both past and present, righteous figures.

**Ezekiel 14:21-23 "Application of Divine Judgment" 21** "For thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! 22 But behold, some survivors will be left in it, sons and daughters who will be brought out; behold, when they come out to you, and you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. **23** They will console you, when you see their ways and their deeds, and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, declares the Lord God."

*So you hear that in **Ezekiel 14:23**? Do you hear what He's actually saying? It's shocking that there are survivors because the City's been totally destroyed. But there are some survivors; not because they are righteous like Noah, Job and Daniel, but because God has allowed them to come. And, these survivors have now come to Babylon, and the people in Babylon will be consoled because they will see the evil ways and deeds of these survivors. These survivors have not changed their ways. They're still acting in opposition to God. And so, the previous exiles will go "Oh, okay now I understand why God had to destroy Jerusalem. Look at this example of these people who have escaped. Look how badly they're living their lives in opposition to God. NOW, I get it!" And so, the survivors become a way for the people to understand that God was*

righteous in His *judgment of Jerusalem and not unrighteous. And, so that's basically what I think the notes say.*

So some **Theological Implications:**

Within the LORD's salvation, each person is responsible for his or her own welfare. (However, there is hope and mercy for all who are righteous by God's standards.) Secondly, the Lord is just in all his ways. Whatever God does, God is just.

Questions, comments, observations about that last part of **Ezekiel 14:21-23?**

So let's go on to **Ezekiel 15**. It's a short chapter, just eight verses, and becomes then a way to understand metaphorically God's divine judgment. **Ezekiel 15:1-8 "A Metaphor on Divine Judgment"** 1 And the word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? 3 Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? 4 Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? 5 Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything!

*This illustrates the waiting judgment on Jerusalem. In this example, the vine is inherently worthless, not anything to work with in terms of woodworking; only fit for the fire. The wood of the vine is totally useless as raw material, and the grapevine is useless for anything else except to start a fire. If it doesn't have any value when it's alive, how much less will it have when it is charred and burned up?*

6 Therefore thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 7 And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them. 8 And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord God."

*Yahweh is the one who throws the wood into the fire, the very residence of Jerusalem God's hostility against the city has reached its limits. The escapees will continue in their apostasy as a sign. And God's wrath will continue to hound them. The loss of the spiritual relationship between God and Israel will result in the desolation of the land.*

Just to finish out Ezekiel 15 with these **Theological Implications:**

This oracle disputes Israel's false claims to security based on their being the royal vine, the privileged people of God. You know the covenant is the covenant of grace by faith —trust and obedience in the Lord. When there is no faith, the covenant is not in effect.

The judgment visited upon those who do not match profession of faith with faithfulness is severe.

Once again, here is how Ezekiel is foundational. This short teaching in Ezekiel 15 probably reminds us of **John 15:1-17** when Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches, abide in me as I abide in you." But any branch that does not abide in the vine, what happens? It is cut off and thrown into the fire.

So again, we read Ezekiel 15 and go to John 15 and you go, "Oh, the dots are all being connected." **Jesus Christ and His teaching said nothing that He had not already said in the first two-thirds of His Bible.** In other words, Jesus is building entirely on what He (God) has already spoken through the prophets, through Moses and all the others. So, it's a beautiful way to understand. When people say to us, "Well, there's the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. It seems like (they are saying) two different Gods. I believe in the God of the New Testament." Now, we can say, "Well no. No, that's not right. It is One God eternally from Genesis through Revelation, and, He's building upon His Word and here's a beautiful example of that. So, Jesus is saying the same thing in John 15, Yes, I have chosen you. Yes, you belong to me, but if you cut yourself off then the fire results. And so, it's full of grace as well as full of exhortation to remain faithful.

Questions, comments about **Ezekiel 15?** Anything at all.

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I have a question, but I'm actually going back to **Ezekiel 14** if that's okay. It almost seems to me in the repetition in Ezekiel 14 where the Lord is saying that those three good people, Noah, Daniel and Job would not deliver any lives but their own. It almost sounds like they could have done that before. And, I've wondered about this before; like in the Old Testament when like the head of a household will, not only say, "I'm following the Lord, but my family and my servants and my whole household." It's almost like the head of the household made that decision for his entire family and everyone else who was associated with his home. It almost sounds like in Ezekiel 14 that God was saying that if it weren't as bad as it is right now, that those holy people could possibly save others, their sons and daughters.

**Mark:** Well, good observation, Vickie. Two things I think. *First, that's a little bit what the people in Jerusalem were saying, you see. They were saying, "We are descendants of Abraham. We're on his coattails, therefore, we should be saved and we should be blessed because we're the descendants of Abraham." God said that you're descendants only by your faithfulness like Abraham, not just because you call yourselves descendants of Abraham.*

*And secondly, remember, I'm sure you do, I think it's in **Genesis 18** that Abraham goes to God and implores God with intercessory prayer on the sake of Sodom and Gomorrah? And Abraham said, if fifty righteous men (are found), would You save it? And it goes down "if ten," and God says "Yes, if ten," but, of course, ten were not found. Ultimately, I think the teaching here is finally, that each man and woman needs to come and walk before the Lord himself or herself. We cannot do that on the coattails (of another). Even when the head of the household, and we see this in Acts when the*

*Philippine jailer is converted/baptized; his whole household; his whole family gets converted and baptized. We see this several times in the Book of Acts. It's a wonderful thing and the head of the household needs to do that and set the example and raise his family up in The Lord. But, if that family leaves and members of that family reject the Lord, then that's on them, right? So, like the Prodigal Son. You know, he was raised in a wonderful house by a loving, faithful father and he rejects it, but, by the grace of God comes back. So, does that get at what you are saying, Vickie?*

**Vickie:** I guess I was wondering IF in earlier times maybe..

**Mark:** *Well, it does go back to what Abraham was saying, "if ten righteous," so that's why it takes ten righteous Jews living in a town to make a synagogue. And so, that's the basis of the synagogue system, that you had to have ten faithful Jews and then you could build a synagogue. So, there is something to that, but ultimately, I think, in Ezekiel, the teaching is that finally it's each person must come to faith, and it cannot be because of the righteousness of Noah, Job or Daniel or Abraham or anybody else.*

**Mark:** Other comments, questions?

**That sets us up really well to dive into Ezekiel 16 next week.** That will take up all of next Tuesday if God allows us to be together. *I don't want Ezekiel to be bigger than it needs to be, but it is a really important chapter. The first 43 verses are tough going, but verses 44-63 are full of grace so we look at the whole thing. It is set up on the premise of marriage, but the covenant that God has entered into with Israel is a covenant of marriage. We see this explicitly in the Book of Hosea. The whole Book of Hosea is about Israel's covenant of marriage with Yahweh. And, it is, therefore, on that foundation then, Israel is (that) God is going to judge Israel for not being a faithful wife, not just not being a faithful wife, but just a wanton harlot. And, for example, to commit harlotry, to act like a prostitute; that occurs 21 times just in this one chapter of Ezekiel 16. You talk about repetition; there's a lot of repetition about harlotry in here. And so, it's also probably the rawest, most graphic language in the Bible in this one chapter in terms of sexual things. And, so when you read, for example, the ESV or any English translation, no translation is going to translate Ezekiel 16 literally because if the translators put what Ezekiel actually wrote in the Hebrew in English we would all be shocked, and it would be hard for us to read this out loud. That's just the kind of imagery that Ezekiel uses. It is raw graphic language. I am not going to try to point out all the Hebrew rawness, but just to say that it does get a little cleaned up; a lot cleaned up in English. And, we understand that because we don't want to be graphic; we don't want to be shocked Bible students. But, there's a reason for that and the reason is that Ezekiel did want to shock his audience. You know, you hear a preacher use raw language from the pulpit, you may not like it; you probably won't like it, but you'll listen it and you go, "What did he just say!?! Did he just say what I think he just said?! And, all of a sudden you go from "Oh, boring sermon, boring sermon..OH WHOA!! this no longer boring!!" So, that's the purpose of the raw stuff. And, you know, that just goes with Ezekiel and who he is. You know, we've seen this over and over. Ezekiel is a man of extraordinary living out his faith. I mean, here's the guy who was what? on his right side;*

*then his left side for days. You know, this is a guy who, you know, his wife dies; he spends one night mourning and God says the next day, "Get back to work." And, here's the man who eats strange things, all for the sake of God. So, it's not unusual; it's in keeping with who Ezekiel is; that he would also be a very non-politically correct prophet. That would be a good way to characterize Ezekiel, "the most non-politically correct prophet in the Bible."*

So that's next week, and we'll pick up then with **Ezekiel 16**. Any other final comments or questions or prayer things before we end today?

**Closing prayer:** Lord thank You for the pro-life committee; for prayer; for all people; for all lives, born and unborn. We pray, Lord, for this nation. On our knees, Lord, we repent. We ask that, by Your grace, we may turn from our sin and live for You. We pray, Lord, for our president and congress and the supreme court and governor and all the legislature and all the legislators in Richmond and here in the Roanoke Valley. Lord, we lament whenever laws are passed that would bring harm to people, to our neighbors. And, we just pray against that and we pray, Lord, for the sake of life from conception through natural death. And we pray, Lord, for Your mercy and help today. So, Lord, by Your favor and we're able to gather again next Tuesday may it always be to Your Glory. In the name of Father Son and Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

Amen! God bless you.

**End of Class 19 February 2, 2021 Discussion, Handout, Zoom Recording**

**Class 20 - February 16, 2021**

(Opening prayer begins at Location: 00:04:18 on February 16 Zoom Recording)

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to You Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in Your Holy Spirit in thanksgiving for our gathering on this beautiful Tuesday. And, Lord we have so much to give thanks for including for Your own child Ryan who knows what's it's like to go through a bad season and knows what's like by Your grace to be brought into a new season. So, we give You thanks, O Lord that You will continue to knock on Ryan's heart until He has opened the door to You. We pray that You and Ryan, Lord, would always be in close love and relationship together forever. So, watch over Ryan and his family and to all of us as we come to You now in Your saving Word. In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen

Thank you all for taking time to be here today. We are now in **Ezekiel 16** so we are officially one week behind. I did post recently what would have been our lesson today so we'll just get caught up next week and just take it from there.

*We've mentioned this several times. Last week I did not want to over speak, but certainly it's hard to under value or underestimate the importance of Ezekiel 16. It is a chapter of huge contrast between the darkness of sin and the great light of grace. So, it is a remarkable chapter in God's saving Word.*

**Ezekiel 16 The Adulterous Wife: Tramping Down the Grace of God**

*The context, at least, for the first two-thirds of the chapter is God's grace to bring Israel up as His own, to the point where there's a marriage covenant between God and Israel. And then, Israel turns and commits adultery repeatedly against Yahweh. The context of the whole chapter is the covenant marriage; and that God is a jealous husband; jealous not in the dark ways that jealousy can be borne out; but jealous in that He marries Israel; she's His bride and He is completely committed and faithful to her; and when she then is completely unfaithful to Him, there is great anger and great justice in His anger.*

*And so it, once again underscores; and this is why Ezekiel is foundational to the whole work of God; and why it's so good that we're studying Ezekiel today. Because marriage is foundational to the whole Biblical witness. Salvation history is premised upon marriage as the key way to understand God's relationship with us. It starts with the gift of marriage by grace in **Genesis 2**. You have Adam and Eve; they are man and woman. And then, at the end of Genesis 2, God just declares that they are now husband and wife. And so there is what might be called an ontological miracle, their very being changes; ontology means, "their very being changes." They go from simply a man and a woman to becoming a husband and a wife.*

*And so, that then sets the context for the covenant marriage. Then we see it get played out, especially in the Book of Hosea, the whole Book of Hosea is about marriage. Hosea's marriage to Gomer, as we know, is a metaphor of God's marriage to Israel, and*

*just as Hosea was faithful to Gomer, but she committed adultery as a prostitute, so it is that Israel has committed prostitution against God.*

*And then, we see the marriage foundation in the New Testament. Obviously, the Messiah Jesus affirms it, and then Paul speaks of it in miraculous and mysterious ways in Ephesians; that the marriage between a man and a woman points us to the very marriage between Christ and His Bride, the Church. And, then the Bible ends in Revelation with the final insight into Heaven, which is The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.*

*So, from Genesis through Revelation, beginning to end, alpha and omega, the marriage is foundational so I take just a moment to say all that because that is the background to the sin and why the sin is so infuriating to the Lord here in Ezekiel 16.*

The Hebrew verb to commit harlotry “practice of illicit sex” occurs 21 times just in the first two thirds of Ezekiel 16; so that’s a huge percentage. Let’s look at **Ezekiel 16:1-3a**  
**1** Again the word of the Lord came to me: **2** “Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, **3a** and say, Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem:

*This is the section on Ezekiel, **The Prosecutor**, so this chapter **presents Yahweh’s case against Jerusalem**; that is against Judah, Jerusalem, all of God’s people. You’ll notice there a very harsh and strong Biblical word, “abominations.” It occurs in The Torah in the Book of Leviticus a number of times. In Leviticus abominations are almost always in the context of sexual sins. For example, same sex, homosexual sex is called an abomination; incest, an abomination; bestiality, an abomination. It’s also a word that gets associated with false worship, worshiping idols and spiritual harlotry. It’s a strong word and occurs 43 times in the Book of Ezekiel, more than in any other Book of the Bible, including The Torah so we see that repeatedly.*

Turning now to **Ezekiel 16:3b-5** we hear the particular indictment against Jerusalem, **3b**. And, by the way, as we go through Ezekiel 16, please stop and just unmute yourself and say, “Hey Mark,” if you’ve got a comment or a question or observation to make so don’t be shy about that.

**Dr. Greg:** Well, Mark, since you’ve given me permission, my version of verse 2 transliterates abominations as “loathsome sins,” pretty potent. It’s the New Living translation.

**Mark:** So, that’s an insightful way to look at it because you have “sin” and then you have “loathsome sin,” so any time God puts an adjective on sin, you understand, it’s really sin. Sometimes, I know I was raised or at least I was initially taught that “sin is sin is sin,” and all sin is equal. I’ve come to understand in my latter years; that’s not Biblically accurate. All sin, of course, falls short of the glory of God and all sin is wrong in the eyes of God, but sins do vary. And so, we have a good example with what Dr. Greg just said. This is not just sin; this is a loathsome sin. And so part of it is that sins



vary according to their consequences. And we all can get that; we understand that right? So, there are some sins that are wrong and have minimal consequences; they're still wrong. But, then there are other sins that are wrong and have loathsome consequences, and we can see the difference there. Thanks, Greg. Other comments?

**Linda Handy:** My translation says, instead of in verse 1 "come to people and confront them." My translation says "confront." Yours just says, "tell them about it." I think there's a big difference between "confronting," much more in your face "confront them."

**Mark:** Yes, the ESV says, "1 Again the word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and yours says "confront."

**Linda:** "confront," and there's a big difference between "make known" and "confront."

**Mark:** What translation are you using, Linda?

**Linda:** NIV

**Mark:** That's true; that's a stronger verb

This reminds me that we're all working second hand, right, in the English so we get these different translations. It would be wonderful if we all knew Hebrew. By the way, we will learn Hebrew one day. It is the language of Heaven. Read the Book of Acts, and Paul hears a voice in Hebrew, so we'll learn Hebrew; we just may have to wait. But, you will see tomorrow in the email update, "The Jerusalem Seminary." Baruch our good friend has started a seminary, offering now the first four classes on-line beginning in March. You will see an email tomorrow on how you can sign up for them, pretty reasonably priced and one to four is on Hebrew. And it's for people with absolutely no Hebrew background or training, to get us to beginning to think and to learn some of the language and some of the vocabulary. So you may want to consider that on-line course. It's being offered and taught live, but then it will be recorded so you can look at it at your convenience. So, look at tomorrow's email update about that.

Good, so this is great; you can see how important Ezekiel 16 is. Thanks for those observations. Greg and Linda thank you, and let them be our example for anyone who wants to stop and make a comment or ask a question.

Turning now to **Ezekiel 16:3b-5** we hear the particular indictment against Jerusalem, **3b** Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. 4 And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. **5** No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.

*You can begin to see already some of the graphic language and visual kind of context that Ezekiel, through the Lord, is presenting to us. That image is very graphic of a newborn child, still dripping with his or her mother's blood from birth; the umbilical cord not even cut; exposed in a field, which is how unwanted children were often disposed of; they were simply laid out in a field and, of course, they would soon die.*

*The indictment which takes up the first half of this chapter is in the form of an allegory. It's going to recount now the incredible rise of Israel from an abandoned child, to a wife, to a queen. But then you're going to see how the queen; this woman who was saved and raised by God, is going to turn against God. But you can see it's all by grace and so the point is going to be that Jerusalem, that Israel, that Judah have absolutely no reason to think that they merit any grace of God. They've done nothing. Jerusalem was an abandoned child ready to die except for the grace of God.*

*So in verse 3b, Jerusalem's origin is traced back to the land of the Canaanites. The exiles listening to this would go, "What do you mean the Canaanites, we're from Abraham." No, you know Israel did not really form as a people until the days of Moses. So during the time of Moses and his offspring they were in the land of Canaan with the Amorites and the Hittites. And, these were the ancient enemies of God. Secondly, Jerusalem has the wrong parents. She's got an Ammorite father and a Hittite mother and together the Canaanites, the Amorites and the Hittites represent the complete depravity of human kind at its worst.*

*So contrary to what they're thinking, Jerusalem's spiritual roots derived, not from the pious Abraham and Sarah, but from the pagan peoples who God told Israel to drive out but they never did. So, you see once we disobey God in one little way; in the course of time, that one little way becomes a huge way. And, that's what's happened. So over the course of time, because they did not drive out the Canaanites, Amorites and the Hittites they began to be influenced by their sin. Jerusalem's beginnings involved the most hopeless of circumstances. She's rejected by her parents; she's flung into a field; she's a newborn infant; and death is her only outcome except for the grace of God.*

In **Ezekiel 16:6-7** the image shifts to **God Who is a Passerby Who finds a child:**

**6** "And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' **7** I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.

*So, God is like a traveler Who passes by and sees this newborn. God saves the baby and adopts her as His own daughter, "wallowing in your blood, obviously, refers to the blood discharge at birth. Obviously, the baby would have died within hours, but God declares, "in your blood, in your blood Live!" Now, that technical phrase that gets repeated twice in these verses is a legal term. It is a formal declaration of adoption. So, in the Hebrew those are the words, but they convey not just an attitude of love and caring for this child, they actually have legal import. So, all of Ezekiel's exiles, his audience, would have known that this is a story of God adopting the abandoned child, Jerusalem Israel. And, God acquires full legal right to this child for Himself.*

*And so, again, it's for the sake of life, "Live! child," and later Jesus will say that He has not come not just to give life but to give abundant life. So we can think about that as well in our Lord's teaching.*

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I was just going to say that that makes me think about how Gentiles were kind of adopted by God also; you know, as we were grafted in. I have always kind of felt like the red-headed stepchild or whatever, as a Gentile instead of a Jew. But this makes me feel like God sees us like He originally saw the Israelites.

**Mark:** That's a great insight Vickie! I am so glad you said that and having said that, it reminds me immediately of what Paul says; we are all adopted, right? In Romans Paul said, by the grace of God you've been adopted, and he means Jew and Gentiles. That's a great point. So, once again, I think your insight, Vickie, really helps to underscore the foundational importance of Ezekiel; for the Lord's teaching; for Paul's teaching; and for all of the New Testament teaching. Yes, we've all been adopted, Jew and Gentile. That's a great point.

*The girl's maturation is attributed completely to God's care. She's grown; she's lived; she's matured into full health and adulthood by God's grace. But, they're two parallel lines. And in the Hebrew, the language is more graphic than we will see it in the English. But the two parallel lines are, you grew, you matured and you arrived completely nude.*

**Ezekiel 16:7b** *"Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown (sprouted); yet you were (stark) naked and bare." So that introduces, "This is getting a little bit darker; perhaps, there are storm clouds coming," because that phrase in the Hebrew "stark naked" often indicates a dangerous sexual situation. So, in her sexual maturity, Jerusalem is going to forget Who is responsible for her whole life.*

**Ezekiel 16:8-14 8** When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. 9 Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. 10 I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. 11 And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. 12 And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. 13 Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. **14** And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.

*Yahweh saves the woman's purity and marries her before anyone else can take advantage of her. He spreads a garment over her. Hopefully, this reminds us of The Book of Ruth when Boaz spreads his garment over Ruth. Again, this is a legal way of talking about marriage, the spreading of your wing or your garment is a formalization of a marriage covenant. So marriage, now, has been declared.*

*Metaphors only work so well, right? So, the first metaphor is that God finds an abandoned baby and adopts this baby as His own daughter. So, the first part of the metaphor is the daughter-Father relationship by grace alone adoption. But, then the metaphor shifts to husband and wife and marriage. It doesn't mean that God is any way incestuous; it's just that the metaphors work in two different ways here; they are not meant to be one extended metaphor but two side by side.*

*God cleanses and anoints her; clothes her with finest garments, jewelry, royal food. Jerusalem has now become the beautiful queen of the Lord. God is The King; Jerusalem is His queen. Christ is the Bridegroom; The Church is His Bride. This rags to riches story ends with an important reminder. Jerusalem's beauty was not innate. It was a gift graciously bestowed on her by Yahweh, not reflected of her own splendor. She's a showcase of divine majesty.*

*Now, it's really interesting how many of the rabbis took that metaphor, those verses, and they understood that also to be a way to speak in The Temple. And, if we had time we could uncover all that, but it really talks about the sacrifices, the food, the beauty and the adornment of The Temple and how His Sanctuary reflects the royalty of the Kingship as well. At this point, then, Jerusalem stands as the Queen of God's creation, all by God's grace and by God's grace alone. But, then Jerusalem is going to forget this and so Ezekiel 16:15-22.*

By the way, just again, a little product placement in our lesson. This book I mentioned a couple weeks ago, "The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self," by Carl Trueman. We are not going to see references to Ezekiel explicitly in this book, but once again Ezekiel kind of points us to this book because Carl Trueman's argument is that individually we have become so full of ourselves that we have no room or bearing for God; that we think that our importance; our identity; our love is all self made and self righteous and "the self" has replaced God. And really that's what's happening here in Ezekiel 16. So, hopefully as you hopefully will read Dr. Trueman's book at some point over the next several months, you will keep this in mind with Ezekiel.

**David Leamon:** I'm seeing what appears to be a strong tendency for those who are particularly blessed spiritually, like Israel, like this nation, to progress from that downward to a worst place than those around them for some reason. Perhaps, the devil coming harder at Israel, at this country because of the early stands for The Truth and righteousness. I don't know, but just something to keep in the back of our minds and for you to comment on as we go; if you see anything to highlight on that.

**Mark:** That's a good point, David. Your point there about the United States, so blessed in the beginning and we're kind of turning our back on God left and right.

**David:** There's a Scripture somewhere that talks about Israel having done worse than those around them; and I can't quite put my finger on it again.

**Mark:** I think we're going to find it right here in Ezekiel 16; maybe not the exact verse you're thinking about, but we'll see in just a moment that now Jerusalem (at this point in Biblical history) is considered to be worse than Sodom, worse than Cana, worse than Samaria so that's about as bad as it gets. Good observations (David) so keep those observations rolling.

*Again to repeat, at this point, Jerusalem stands as the queen of God's creation, all by God's grace and by God's grace alone. But then, Jerusalem's going to forget this and so we turn now to **Ezekiel 16:15-22 15** "But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his. 16 You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. 17 You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore. 18 And you took your embroidered garments to cover them, and set my oil and my incense before them. 19 Also my bread that I gave you—I fed you with fine flour and oil and honey—you set before them for a pleasing aroma; and so it was, declares the Lord God. 20 And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter 21 that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them? 22 And in all your abominations and your whorings you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, wallowing in your blood.*

*Pretty harsh indictment in language that God is prosecuting Jerusalem. Now, God speaks as the betrayed Husband. Jerusalem's response is characterized by a single word in the Hebrew 'Zana' as a transliteration. Obviously, it means to act like a prostitute; that's where the word 'whore' comes from 21 times in these 20 verses. And, we'll see that her prostitution is both religious against God and political as well.*

*Verse 15 serves as a thesis statement of this section. Instead of committing herself to God her husband, she placed her confidence in her own beauty and became intoxicated with her beauty. She lived for the temporal, for her pleasures in the moment. She did not count as worthy the eternal relationship with God. That's what happens to so many of us; we live in the moment; we want something; we have a sexual need and appetite; we have a physical hunger; we have an emotional desire. It's like Esau coming in famished from the field and sells his birthright to Jacob. We think, "How could Esau give away his whole future for the sake of a bowl of stew?!" Well, unfortunately, I know I've done that a lot, living in the moment of my own appetites versus always saying that I must always keep first my eternal relationship with The Lord Jesus Christ. And, if I do this thing that I want to do in the moment, will that, somehow, negatively affect my relationship with Jesus Christ? That needs to be the governor that really determines how we live. Now she dispenses her harlotries indiscriminately to all who pass by. She is no longer about real love, but only sexual love or sexual appetite for her body. And so, this ungrateful woman "takes" God's good gifts and abuses them for her own prideful and vain purposes.*

*And then, look what she does; she makes gaudy shrines from her luxurious clothing. That's a clear indication of pagan worship. She melts down her jewelry that God gave her to make images. And, in the Hebrew you can imagine what that literally says about what kind of image (images) that she is making and turning into an idol (idols) to enshrine this graphic lewd male image that she's dressing with her clothes and pouring oil and presenting food to so she's just graveling in the worst kind of way to this self-made pagan idol.*

*And then third (vv 20-22) and horrifically, the children she had borne to God, the people of Israel of Jerusalem she sacrifices to the images. So it really then becomes a matter of child sacrifice and child slaughter.*

*There are three expressions describing Jerusalem's treatment of her children: "to slaughter," the basic Biblical word for sacrifice; "sacrificial slaughter;" and, "to pass one's son or daughter through the fire," with is the fire of Molech, the awful Canaanite god that required child sacrifice to be appeased. The abomination of child sacrifice appears to have been introduced in Israel, the northern kingdom, in the early part of the 7th Century. We see a reference to that in 2 Kings 17:17. And then, it spread south to the southern kingdom of Judah under the reign of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:3; 2 Chron 28:3).*

*So that's what happens when we do not obey God; when they did not drive Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites out of the land. Soon, over the course of decades, hundreds of years, well, what happens is what always happens, we fall under the influence of the people we hang out with, right? So, we know the old adage that "You are as your friends are." Yes, it sounds great to say, "Well all my friends are pagans, and I am going to be a strong witness to them." And, that's a great thing. We need pagan friends to be a witness to them. But, eventually, because of our human weakness if our only friends are pagan who hate The Word of the Lord and do abominations; over the course of enough time, we probably will end up following our friends. And that's what happened to Israel.*

*And so, it's a horrible thing to think that she has sacrificed, actually, literally, physically, her own children to these pagan gods. And so by the end of **Ezekiel 16:22** she has completely then abandoned the grace of God. Once again we study the Bible and we look back, but then we look inside. We look in our own hearts; we look in our own day. And we think how horrible; how could Jerusalem; how could Israel sacrifice children. And then, we come into the Season of Lent tomorrow and it is "The 40 Days of Life." And, why do we have to have The 40 Days of Life during Lent; why do we have to protest at Planned Parenthood; why do we have to pray every Tuesday for the sake of life? Because, we, this nation, this world is sacrificing its children once again. We're sacrificing more children every year, every month than Israel probably ever did in the history of child sacrifice. If reading Ezekiel doesn't put us on our knees and say, "Lord have mercy; forgive us and help us to fight for life and not death," then we are not reading the Bible properly.*

*God saved Israel; saved Jerusalem by grace for the sake of life. And then, Jerusalem, His own people, turn around and sacrifice for the sake of death. And that epitomizes the great spiritual battle we are up against in the year 2021. It's kind of breathtaking, really, to be studying Ezekiel today because tragically we see way, way, way too many parallels. Our sexual sins; our abortions; our unfaithfulness, I mean the list just goes on. We've got to get through this part, though, because there is grace coming, but it's not quite there yet.*

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I wanted to say one other quick thing. In addition to, I think, abortion there's another way that we are sacrificing our children. I think there are so many parents today who aren't bringing their children up in the Church. I know I grew up in a family where my parents never ever once took me to Church. You know, that puts you behind the ball so far, that it's just really difficult when you're raised that way to ever even make it to Church as an adult. And I look at so many children who are growing up today without any influence of the Church, and I think that's another way that parents are sacrificing their children.

**Mark:** Yes, absolutely, another great point. If you want to extrapolate child sacrifice beyond the actual murder of a child, then we begin to see it in its broadest way, including neglecting to bring up, to raise up children for the sake of The Lord. And, that's obviously happening more and more.

**Greg:** If I can add a footnote. A quick review on the internet from World Vision says that child sacrifice is actually taking place in Uganda, not just infant but child sacrifice.

**Mark:** That is horrible stuff; Uganda, Nigeria, Ethiopia. These are spiritual and physical battle zones for all of God's people. WOW, thank's Greg.

**Linda Handy:** I think we're slaughtering innocent children in so many ways that we cannot even categorize them. We have not only kept them from God; we have introduced them to satan and to his ways in school systems. The latest one I personally read about or heard about was a little innocuous book about a little boy who wants to be a mermaid, read to two and three year olds, which normalizes the transgender sexual identification that it does not exist; it's just who you think you are; and it goes on and on and on. The children are sacrificed to their parents' own wishes for careers and so they are left alone. It's a never ending; just never ending.

**Mark:** Right, right, yes, I know, Linda, it's breathtaking. You know, toward that, I think we've all read, I read just recently about children whose parents put them on puberty blocking medications because a six year old little boy comes home and says, "Mommy and Daddy, I think I'm a girl." They say, "Great," so they put him on these blockers; so that's child abuse.

**Linda:** I had children who were used for breeding so they could get more ADC. These were children who were mentally deficient; and their parents were using them so they

could have more Aid to Dependent Children. That is murdering a child in my opinion; and that was in my own life experience.

**Mark:** Right, well, I know, we could go on and on and so it's important that we are aware of these things. And, at the same time, it's almost overwhelming to think of how things have not just stayed the same from the days of Ezekiel but have gotten far worse.

**Ezekiel 16:23-34** where we move from her (Israel's) religious whoring to her political promiscuity. **23** "And after all your wickedness (woe, woe to you! declares the Lord God), **24** you built yourself a vaulted chamber and made yourself a lofty place in every square. **25** At the head of every street you built your lofty place and made your beauty an abomination, offering yourself to any passerby and multiplying your whoring. **26** You also played the whore with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, multiplying your whoring, to provoke me to anger. **27** Behold, therefore, I stretched out my hand against you and diminished your allotted portion and delivered you to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. **28** You played the whore also with the Assyrians, because you were not satisfied; yes, you played the whore with them, and still you were not satisfied. **29** You multiplied your whoring also with the trading land of Chaldea, and even with this you were not satisfied. **30** "How sick is your heart, declares the Lord God, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute, **31a** building your vaulted chamber at the head of every street, and making your lofty place in every square. **31b** Yet you were not like a prostitute, because you scorned payment. **32** Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! **33** Men give gifts to all prostitutes, but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side with your whorings. **34** So you were different from other women in your whorings. No one solicited you to play the whore, and you gave payment, while no payment was given to you; therefore you were different.

*You can see at the end of that section in **Ezekiel 16:23-34** (that) Israel is the worse prostitute possible because she doesn't even accept money for it. She pays men to come and lie with her, so it's an awful kind of prostitution.*

*She turns to other nations; she's not satisfied with just these men who come by her shrine. Now, she turns her whoring ways to entire nations. And she sets up these brothels (houses or tents elevated on a platform) and she entices the men to come into her brothel; that like in other places the language here is quite graphic that she is offering her body to these other nations.*

*(vv 26-29) Driven by her insatiable lust, she intensifies her prostitution by setting her sights on three targets, the sons of Egypt, the sons of Assyria, and the sons of the Chaldeans. Instead of trusting Yahweh, she gives herself to these world powers. But even these enemies look at Jerusalem and they're ashamed. I mean this is an*



*unbelievable turn of events, that as sinful as these other nations were, Israel's sin causes them to blush; they can't believe how bad Jerusalem really is.*

*God is furious; she's gone from bad to worse. First, she has broken the accepted norms as a prostitute's behavior by scorning payment. Second, as a married woman, she commits adultery and third, Jerusalem has reversed the customary roles of payer and payee. Now, she's paying men to lie with her.*

**Ezekiel 16:35-43** “the sentencing of Jerusalem; the suspension of grace.”

**35** “Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the Lord: **36** Thus says the Lord God, Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them, **37** therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated. I will gather them against you from every side and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. **38** And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. **39** And I will give you into their hands, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places. They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare. **40** They shall bring up a crowd against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. **41** And they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many women. I will make you stop playing the whore, and you shall also give payment no more. **42** So will I satisfy my wrath on you, and my jealousy shall depart from you. I will be calm and will no more be angry. **43** Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things, therefore, behold, I have returned your deeds upon your head, declares the Lord God. Have you not committed lewdness in addition to all your abominations?”

*The summary of charges (vv 35-36): (1) her lust was poured out (2) her nakedness was bared in her promiscuity (3) she's having affairs with idols (4) she's shed the blood of her children by sacrifice, striking at the heart of Jerusalem's relationship with Yahweh.*

*(1) First, he will gather all those whom Jerusalem had charmed. Her lovers will become the ones to make war against her. (2) He will put Jerusalem on display before her lovers and her enemies. The public stripping of one's wife symbolizes divorce. (3) Third, God will execute the death sentence on Jerusalem. The one who was found in her bloody condition now returns to it. (4) Fourth, Yahweh will deliver Jerusalem into the power of her suitors and enemies. They are now transformed into agents of divine wrath. They are going to be the ones who will bring the sword against Jerusalem (a) They will destroy all of the things of her harlotrous business, leaving her stark naked. (b) Then her so-called lovers will execute her, hacking her to pieces by the sword. (c) They will torch the houses, while other women watch. So we think of the destruction of Israel in 722 BC and the the destruction of Jerusalem in 589 BC.*

*We learn from Ezekiel 16:41b-42 that God's primary aim is to put a stop to all of Jerusalem's harlotrous ways. Then his fury will be calmed.*

**Ezekiel 16:43** *All that has taken place in this oracle is now summarized. Jerusalem has suffered an acute case of amnesia. She has failed to consider how the LORD took her in by His grace. God invites her into serious contemplation of her sins. God's anger in this section must be seen against the backdrop of the intensity of his love. God had poured out His love on this woman, rescuing her from certain death, entering into a covenant of marriage with her, pledging her His commitment, and lavishing on her all the benefits she could ever enjoy. He could not take her contempt for His grace lightly; and it must be understood in the context of His Law. So, again, we understand that marriage and the covenant marriage is background to all of this.*

**Mark:** We have just a few more minutes. Questions, comments? (None)

**Ezekiel 16:44-52 44** "Behold, everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you: 'Like mother, like daughter.' 45 You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. 46 And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. 47 Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. 48 As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. 49 Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it. 51 Samaria has not committed half your sins. You have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed. **52** Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.

*So think about that. We know the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in **Genesis 19**. We know that God destroyed those cities. We know that there were not even ten righteous men left in them when Abraham tried to intervene. And, yet Jerusalem has become worst than Sodom. "Samaria" there is another word for "Israel, the Northern Nation." And after it was destroyed in 722 BC it went off the rails, and paganism took over. So, Jerusalem Judah, the very crown queen of God has become worse than any of her pagan neighbors.*

*Jerusalem's behavior follows from her family's tree: Like mother, like daughter, her mother a Hittite and father, an Ammorite. Her sisters Samaria and Sodom. Jerusalem's*

*corruption exceeds even that of her sisters. We know that Sodom was a site of really grave homosexual activity.....*

*Then, Ezekiel summarizes his comparison there at the end of this section. She who had been quick to recognize the faults in her sisters now discovers the largest beam is in her own eyes. Far from the noble descent that she claimed, Jerusalem was in fact a product of an Ammorite-Hittite union. For this contempt of divine grace, Jerusalem will pay dearly.*

*Again, we think about our Lord's teaching in The Sermon on the Mount. Before we judge the speck in our neighbor's eye, we better get that beam out of our own eye; and that's what Israel was doing.*

So, the bad news is that we don't get to the good news today, but the good news is we get to the good news next week, by God's grace. So, we'll stop her and then we'll finish off Ezekiel 53-63 next week. It is a double ray of hope that God is going to provide; in spite of all this grace will triumph. So let's hold onto that thought this week.

**Mark:** Any closing words or comments?

**Greg:** We all have heard about the fate of Rome; that it fell primarily because of corruption from within. And, basically how Ezekiel describes Sodom about being proud, lazy and glutenous with the poor and needy outside the door was a picture of what happened to Rome in many ways. And, what worries me is that may be a picture of the United States too.

**Mark:** Yes, that's a good point, Greg, when we think of the Roman Empire and we think of pride, child sacrifice, sexual sins, gluttony; and it finally leads to its downfall. So we wonder how many more years does the United States have.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, we need to confront the hard things in Scripture as well as in our own lives in this Church, in this nation, in this world. We need to know these to confront them so we can confess them that Your grace may once again abound. Please, O Lord, You have saved us by Your grace; find us by faith obedient to You. We pray this in the name of Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

God bless you all. Thanks for your time and attention and, God willing, we will be back together next Tuesday at noon.

(Location 00:10:22 on the Feb. 23rd Zoom recording as we finish Class 20 Ezekiel 16)

**Mark:** Okay, so we're going to finish up **Ezekiel 16:53-63**. *And, if you were with us last week, you will remember, as a quick recap, that the bulk of Ezekiel 16 is this long story of how God finds abandoned Jerusalem; she's an abandoned baby; whose been put out in the wild to die. God saves and adopts her as His own. She grows up; He marries her so we have mixed metaphors here. It does not mean that God marries His own*

*daughter. We're not talking about that. We are just talking about different metaphors to describe different kind of stages in God's relationship with Israel. And so marriage becomes the foundation between God and Israel. That's why marriage is essential; that's why the Christian Church, why believers must stand for marriage between a man and a woman because it alone is the way that points us to the very marriage of God, The Lord and His Church, the Bride. Upon that foundation; but then Israel, Jerusalem Judah, Judah forgets all that God has done for her. She prostitutes herself to every person who comes along, every man, in fact to all the different nations. And so, by the time we get to verse 52, it is a long and terrible story that we read of Israel's deep and adulterous harlotry against God. In fact, she (Israel) is even worse, we're told, than Sodom and Samaria. Up to this point in Ezekiel 16 is how Israel Jerusalem has rejected and stomped on the grace of God. It has shown great contempt for God's grace.*

We pick up on that very low note with a ray of hope. **Ezekiel 16:53-58** Before I do that anything from last week? Any summary point that you want to bring up today? (silence) **Ezekiel 16:53-58** **53** I will restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, and the fortunes of Samaria

*When we read "Samaria" we are to read it "The Northern Kingdom of Israel."*

and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes in their midst, 54 that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, becoming a consolation to them. 55 As for your sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state. 56 Was not your sister Sodom a byword in your mouth in the day of your pride, 57 before your wickedness was uncovered? Now you have become an object of reproach for the daughters of Syria and all those around her, and for the daughters of the Philistines, those all around who despise you. **58** You bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations, declares the Lord.

*The good news first is that God is going to restore their fortunes, and that's a Hebrew idiom that means, "He's going to restore them to complete well being." So that's good news, but we've got to get through the bad news first.*

*God is even going to give grace to Sodom, which is a wonderful Word for us to hear; that the worst of sinners are offered the grace of God; that no one, no one is ever beyond the grace of God, up to their last breath.*

*And, a remnant will be saved. But, even as God promises to rehabilitate Jerusalem, the purpose will be that she may bear her disgrace and feel ashamed, not only for her actions, but also having caused Sodom and Gomorrah to breathe easier Ezekiel 16:54-55. Part of the consequence of Israel's sin is that she's finally going to recognize how deep her sin is. And, her sin is even worse than Sodom's sin, and that makes Sodom feel a little bit better because, the point is that Israel is God's spouse. Israel's God's wife, His beloved Bride. And so, there's a relationship between Yahweh and Israel*

*that's enjoyed by no other people or nation. And so, when Israel commits adultery and sins, that makes her sins worse than even the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jerusalem has herself become a laughingstock and an object of scorn. Even Sodom laughs at Israel for the depth of her sin. (Yahweh's perception of the city's spiritual condition is far different from their perception of themselves.)*

*Then, we come to the triumph of grace. And we just can never, never underestimate or neglect or have contempt for grace. I mean, we are saved by grace and grace alone. There have been several great heresies in the Church and in Israel over the last two or three thousand years that would suggest that we add something to our salvation. There was in the early Church a priest named Peligaus. And Peligaus taught that Jesus Christ did everything for our salvation about 98.9 percent; and all we had to do was the 1.2 percent to complete it. That became a heresy known as Peligaism which means that we have to finish; and we have to work and add to God's salvation.*

*And, we also have the sin of legalism, which is a way of adding to God's Word more than is even there. We have, through our history as believers, many examples of people who just cannot believe "amazing grace." They just cannot think; it cannot be just grace, grace, grace, grace. And yet, the Book of Ezekiel says, "Yes it is. Yes it is."*

**Ezekiel 16: 59-63** 59 For thus says the Lord God: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. 61 Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. 62 I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, **63** that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord God."

*God's grace is going to be so great that it's just going to shut their mouths and they can do nothing but be silent. God is justified to condemn and judge Israel; she's broken the covenant. And yet, one of the most amazing and important transitions, conjunctions in all of Scripture is right there in **Ezekiel 16:60**, "yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant." And if you don't mind to write in your Bible, I would advise you to take a red ink and circle the two words "yet I." This is Ezekiel 16:60. Do some of you have different words in your translation? No? Everybody has "yet I?" That's great, "yet, I."*

*I mean all that we've read in Ezekiel 16. I mean Israel is sacrificing her children to pagan idols and she's committed adultery with all these nations and she's spitting in the face of God and "Yet I." That is grace, brothers and sisters. In spite of all that, God says, "Yet I will do something new. I will bring Jerusalem back and she will remember her covenant when she was young and the relationship was sweet and grace-filled and faithful. God, brothers and sisters, is always faithful to His Promises, He's not a*

*capricious God; He doesn't have His fingers crossed behind His back; He doesn't change His Promises; and 'yet I' will remember.*

*And, then in Ezekiel 16:61-63 we see the effects of the covenant. Finally, Israel will remember God's grace; she will be ashamed and humbled; contrite would be another way of saying it. And thirdly, finally Jerusalem will acknowledge Yahweh and can only just fall in silence and awe at the grace of God.*

So, looking now at the whole picture of Ezekiel 16 from last week and then today, a few **Theological Implications** that come to mind; and I would love to hear anything on your minds.

The destitute description and condition of Jerusalem is a metaphor for you and I. It just reminds us that we are all utterly, utterly unable to save ourselves and that death is our penalty. Paul says in Romans 3 that we've all fallen short of the grace and the glory of God. We've all fallen short, like Israel.

If we remembered back last week, Ezekiel 16:6-14, probably the most vivid words of grace in the whole Bible. So, I love verse 16. On the one hand, one of the hardest chapters to read. On the other hand, one of the most glorious chapters ever to read. (1) The source of this love lies entirely with God Himself (2) The reach of divine grace knows no limits. (3) The seriousness of divine love is expressed in His relationship with us. (4) The power of divine love is displayed in grace's ability to transform a wretched, sinful person into the most beautiful picture of grace.

You know, when I think of Israel, I was just talking yesterday with a person who was so excited that she had just discovered the background to the song "Amazing Grace." Perhaps, a lot of us, most of us know the back story, but for her this was new information that John Newton, you know the infamous slave ship captain. Impious man who cursed God and did the worst despicable kinds of sins in the midst of crossing the Atlantic with a boat full of slaves has this profound conversion experience. If you read the original words of Newton to Amazing Grace, it really captures Ezekiel 16. It really does.

- But then we find here a shocking portrayal of human ingratitude (vv 15-34).
- God is never arbitrary in his judgment of sin. He's always right when he judges sin.
- No one who claims to be of God can be arrogant and smug to the needs of others like Jerusalem was.
- The constancy of God is amazing. God is faithful. He is faithful to His Promise; to His Word; He will not go back on it.
- Unfaithful Jerusalem is shamed when she finally recognizes her sin against God. She knows she's unworthy to be loved by the LORD. But when He does forgive her and loves her once more, she can only exclaim to all the world: what "amazing grace!"

Questions, comments, observations, overall on Ezekiel 16 (**completes Ezekiel 16**)

*Amazing Grace John Newton, pub.1779 v. 7 by Anonymous/Unknown, pub.1829  
copyright status is Public Domain*

1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.
3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me,  
His Word my hope secures;  
He will my Shield and Portion be,  
As long as life endures.
5. Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess, within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.
6. The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, who called me here below,  
Will be forever mine.
7. When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.

**Class 20 February 23, 2021****(Includes the blessing of the Christmas Cactus discussion)**

**Mark:** God bless you.

**Linda:** Mark, I have good news about your mother's Christmas cactus. I just talked to the gentleman at the Arboretum and he is giving us connections to somebody who might be able to report it so progress is being made.

**Mark:** Sounds like that's a bigger deal than I thought it was going to be.

**Linda:** Oh, my goodness, yes it is.

**Mark:** It's not just a matter of taking it out and putting some new dirt in and putting it back in?

**Linda:** Well, just the taking it out, I mean, it's like lifting a tree..it is not uncomplicated, no.

**Mark:** Well, please; it sounds like too much; I do appreciate it but keep me posted on what I can do to help.

**Linda:** It's the Tuesday Morning sisters in honor of your mother. So, the class that you began as a Bible Study, however many years ago in honor of your mother who was a part of us. We're going to take care of it. I just wanted you to know we're making some progress.

**Mark:** That's wonderful. I'm humbly thankful, thank you so much.

**Linda:** Not a problem, God bless.

**Mark:** Linda's talking about the Christmas cactus which is upstairs at The Church, off the Merriman RD entrance. I inherited that from my mother. That plant is a planting from a plant about 150 years old. So it was in my great great grandmother's house; my grandmother's house; and my mother's house and now it's in this "House of the Lord." So, thank you Tuesday Morning women for taking care of this ancient plant.

**Linda:** It is a magnificent specimen.

**Mark:** It's got two blooms on it right now. I was a little bit worried that it wasn't going to bloom, but it bloomed a little late, but it's persisting.

**Linda:** That's why we think it may be root bound because in years past it's just been a mass; so we're doing the Lord's work in a plant.

**Mark:** Well, we all need to think like that, don't we.

**Welcome everybody,** it's good to have you all. Thanks for taking the time this Tuesday. It's a beautiful day and a good day to study Ezekiel. And so, I've got good news and then bad news and then good news as we start Ezekiel. We're going to start with good news as we finish, from last week, the end of Ezekiel 16. Then we go into a long section of bad news in Ezekiel 20, but then it ends on good news. So good news, bad news, good news. That's probably a good way to eat a sandwich so we're going to eat the The Word of God, good/bad and good.



As we get together on a more serious note, several of you, I know Vickie just this morning, reached out and made sure I realized that Amazon, maybe just this week, has taken off abruptly without any warning all of Dr. Ryan T. Anderson's books. Now, Dr. Anderson was here at St. John about three years ago. He was at "The Heritage Foundation." He is now the President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, an amazing kind of Christian think tank. But Dr. Anderson is a profound scholar and he has written a lot about transgenderism and the deadly harm it's doing to children; to young adults; to adults and just this whole ideology that comes along with it. And, he spoke at St. John, and he's a faithful scholarly Christian. And his book, "When Harry became Sally," is my go to book for those who are concerned and wanting to know more about the transgender issue. And, believe me this is not theoretical; this is happening within our own Church; our own families. Just in the past two years, I have become aware of three families dealing with this. But then just abruptly Amazon has removed that book, "When Harry became Sally," and he's also written two other books on marriage. I just looked this morning and all of Dr. Anderson's books have been excised; scrubbed from the Amazon website. So, when we read books, such as Rod Dreher's "Live not by Lies," that I'm recommending that we read, or we read Carl Trueman's book, "The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self," which I'm recommending that we read, we realize that we're living in a day that's becoming more and more totalitarian in terms of ideology. Amazon is the biggest book seller in the world; the second place (book seller) is not even close. So, when Amazon censors a book and call it "hateful," it is a big deal. If you've not read it, Anderson's book is not a hateful book. It is sober; it sticks to science and objective data; it's a book about love; a couple chapters are testimonies from young men and women who have gone down the road of transgender change and have stopped and are warning others to please don't start down this road as I tell you how terrible it (transgenderism) is. There is nothing inflammatory against people. It is a book *for* the sake of people and yet Amazon has labeled it, "a hate book" and has taken it away. So, in some ways I wish this was all just theory; I wish we were being over the top; I wish we were being "Oh, you're seeing the problem everywhere when there's no problem." Brothers and sisters, that's just not the case. We are seeing this before our very eyes just this very day. We need to pray, and it also reminds us that, as we study the Book of Ezekiel, we are in some ways looking in a mirror. We see the sins of Israel; and we see those same sins magnified even now in our own country. It's a sobering thing to study The Word of God. It is a fearsome thing to come into the presence of our Holy God; and Scripture brings us in to the fearsome presence of God.

So, we are again going to look at the history of Israel and her relationship with Yahweh. As we do, and as we say every week, it is a way to examine our own history. So, we must cry out with Israel, "Lord, forgive us." But, we're going to see that He does forgive us and we live only by grace. And we, of all people, have done nothing to deserve it; and that's what makes it (God's grace) so amazing. Before I pray, anybody want to say anything or any other prayers that you want to lift up today. (silence)

**Opening Prayer:** Father, we come to You today through Your Son The Messiah, Our Lord Jesus, Our Savior. As we come to You in and through God The Holy Spirit, we thank You that You are One God in Three Persons to bring us into everlasting community with You. Lord, we can call upon You; we can read Your Word, we worship You; we have our hope in You only because of who You are. There is nothing, O Lord, about us that would make us worthy to study Your Word, to worship You, to even ask a thing of You. But, Lord, You are full of worthiness. You are our God of grace; and it's upon that wonderful gift that we come before You now. Open our hearts, O Lord, to Your Word. Open our minds to It. And, Lord, as we study it, give us also the will to obey it. We pray this in Jesus Name. Amen.

(Here at location 00:10:22 on this Feb. 23rd Zoom recording, move back to the end of the Feb.16th Zoom recording transcript **to complete Ezekiel 16.**)

**Class 20 Ezekiel 20 begins here location 00:24:42 on Feb. 23 Zoom Recording)**

Pastor Mark resumes, We're still in **the section of Ezekiel called "The Prosecutor"** so it's still tough stuff. I keep saying, "Just hold on. There's better stuff coming," and we get little glimpses of it here and there which we will again today. But, the really, really good stuff is going to be at the end. So, if you can hang in there until about the middle of May, it's really good stuff. We've got to slide through this because you can't get to Easter until you go through Good Friday, right?

What amazes me about **Ezekiel 20:1-4: Preamble: "The call for Israel's arraignment"** *is that it really tells the history of Israel in a whole new unique way. Because, we're going to learn in this chapter that when in Egypt, when Israel was still in bondage in Egypt before the Exodus, she was already falling away from God and doing grievous sins in Egypt. But, God still made the way through the Exodus for her to be released from Egypt. Now, we don't get this anywhere else in The Bible. The Book of Exodus which, obviously, tells us from Moses' perspective his eye witness testimony; Moses wrote The Book of Exodus. We don't get this in Exodus. I mean this is a unique insight into Scripture that we get the back story to the Exodus. So, again the amazing miracle of the Word of God, that when we put it all together, we just begin to see things only as God can see them. So, we are getting God's view of what's happening in Egypt before the Exodus. The only place in the Bible that mentions this. And, we're going to see that, perhaps, in Egypt Israel was falling into child sacrifice.*

We are praying every Tuesday for those of us who can attend in the Sanctuary from 10:00 to 11:00 for sanctity of life during Lent. And, I was able to be in the sanctuary for about 15 to 20 minutes this morning. And, it really is breathtaking how child sacrifice has gone from, perhaps, a practice but in a limited way to practice in an unlimited way. And, again, I was struck this morning reading the news that our legislature in Virginia is voting this week to abolish the death penalty, even as they are voting to extend and broaden abortion rights. So, we are murdering the innocent; and we are allowing

murderers to live. And, if you can ever say, “A people, a state, a culture has gone upside down, well, that’s one example.”

*This idea of child sacrifice is an awful one, and it goes way back. And sin hurts children. Sin hurts children the most. We see this in all sorts of ways; i.e. poverty. Who gets hurt the most in poverty? Children. When marriages fail or with same sex marriage, people say it’s harmless when two men or two women marry, “It’s harmless; they can raise children just as well as a man and a woman.” And, now we’re beginning to find that 20 or 30 years after this has become normative, that’s not the case; and children have been affected in ways that will be lifelong for them. So, we see that now in Ezekiel 20. But, as we go into the chapter, the fulfillment of Ezekiel 20 comes in Ezekiel 36, the concern for God’s Name we see in those two chapters. Israel’s sins have profaned the Holy Name of God and they threaten His reputation in the world. In the end His concern for His Name causes the Lord \_\_\_ His punishment. So, again, we go to our knees. And, for all of us who confess Jesus and have been baptized into The Father Son and Holy Spirit, we bear the name of Christ to the world. The word, “Christian,” means “little christ.” So you and I are little christs to the world; and when we live in the glory and obedience to God, His name is magnified. When we live to the dishonor of His Commandments; when we neglect grace and His Law, then His name is diminished; and we see that in big and little examples. This whole chapter is about the name of God, the Holy Name of God and how we who bear that name have a responsibility to bear it faithfully, not perfectly; we can never do it perfectly but at least faithfully.*

Anybody want to say anything before we begin **Ezekiel 20**.

**Ezekiel 20:1-4 1** In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month,

*I love this! We know exactly when this happens August 14, 591 BC; this is exactly when this happened; I love that!*

certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me. 2 And the word of the Lord came to me: 3 “Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you. 4 Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers,

*And so, a group of elders on August 14th 591 BC come to Ezekiel. So, we’re now in the exilic community. We’re by the Chebar Canal in Babylon. Some of the leaders come from the exiles, and they probably want a good word from Ezekiel. They probably want some word of encouragement, affirmation; they want an ‘adda boy,’ and ‘adda girl,’ and they’re not going to get it because God is not going to cast His pearls before swine. Remember that? Jesus says, “Don’t cast your pearls before swine?” Don’t talk about God’s grace to people who want to spit in your face. So, God’s not going to do that. Instead, God is going to remind them of their abominations and why they really have no right to inquire of Him. He is going to put them on the docket. Remember, we’re in this section of Ezekiel called “The Prosecutor.” The context is like a divine court and Israel is the defendant.*

**Ezekiel 20:5-26, “Israel’s rebellion in the distant past”** *And this is where we get the sin in Egypt which I find very fascinating and obviously its very importance in the Bible. And so, there are several phases. Let’s look at Phase I which is God’s telling of history from His perspective.*

**Ezekiel 20:5-9 Phase I: “Rebellion in Egypt”** 5 and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the Lord your God. 6 On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. 7 And I said to them, ‘Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.’ 8 But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. “Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. 9 But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

*Isn’t that fascinating? We think of The Book of Exodus and we know that for around 430 years Israel was in Egypt. And we know the back story, right? First, because of Joseph and he rose to the second command; he gave the Jews a great name and so for the first hundred/two hundred years, things were going well. The Jewish people became the backbone of the Egyptian economy; they were the teachers, the business leaders; they were in the academy; they were in medicine. But then, as pharaohs lived and died, they forgot the goodness of Israel; the goodness of the relationship with the Hebrew people. And so, we know the story; that Egypt turned them into their slaves and they oppressed them. And, by the time we get to the end of these 430 years, they are a really beleaguered pressed down people. But, here we learn the back story that even in Egypt they were worshiping idols and rebelling against God. They were there for four centuries, and they really got off the mark. And so, it makes the Exodus, then you see, even more remarkable. The fact that God did all this to bring them out of slavery; and Egypt, all of the sudden as good as we thought it was, has become even greater. There was nothing about Israel and Egypt that commended her to be saved. It wasn’t like, “Oh, we are so beleaguered; we are slaves and we deserve to be helped.” Well, they were slaves and they were harmed. We look at the pyramids in Egypt, The Great Wonders of the Ancient World, and we marvel at them. We should also weep over them because they were made on the backs of The Jews. Jewish slaves carried those bricks up those magnificent pyramids. And, I’m sure many, many died. There were no Osha laws back in the day. I’m sure a lot of the Jewish slaves, not only suffered greatly but, I’m sure, lost their lives building those pyramids. But, even so, even so, they did nothing of themselves to deserve to be saved. But, God did it because the world knew that The Jews were God’s people. You see the Egyptians knew the Jews belonged to Yahweh. The Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites all knew that of all the people in the world,*

*Israel was God's chosen people. And so, finally God relents and saves them from Egypt, not because of them, but because He wants to protect His Holy Name and it won't be disparaged among the nations.*

*The rebellion in Egypt that sets the stage. We can see that God came to them when they were in Egypt and made promises to them. So, it's all about God, God, God; grace, grace, grace, but the people even in Egypt rebelled against God and He resolves to pour out His wrath. But, before He can do that He stops because of His honor for His name because it was not just a secret thing, but a very public announcement that Israel belonged to God.*

*So finally, we're going to see that the future of Israel will lay with those who respond to His call by repentance. So that sets the stage for what Paul will say in Romans. In the eyes of God, is Israel still God's chosen people? Paul says, "Yes unequivocally; yes without exception; absolutely." But Paul also says that not every Israelite is a true Israelite. There will be repentance/revival and those who turn back to the Lord from Israel will be saved. And, then the Gentiles and we'll all come back into the New Jerusalem together. And so, the Bible really hangs together beautifully.*

*So that's Ezekiel 20:5-9 Phase I: "Rebellion in Egypt," but because of the honor of His Name, He is still going to follow-through on His Promise. Questions, comments, observations?*

**Chris Miller:** I think about the years that the children of Israel spent in bondage. It reminds me of a book expresses how people of color have been in bondage and are somehow still..there's definitely injustice that happens for people of color. And this book is called, "A Bridge that is called My Back," and it's a very interesting read; some radical stuff in there, but it gives you an idea of what the social justice warrior...in a way Ezekiel may have been considered the justice and the righteous warrior, like \_\_\_\_\_ the two go hand in hand. You can't have justice without righteousness. That's kind of what I think about when I see these verses.

**Mark:** Thank you. Good.

### **Ezekiel 20:10-17 Phase II, Rebellion in the desert, the first generation**

**10** So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. **11** I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. **12** Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. **13** But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. **14** But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. **15** Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all

lands, 16 because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. **17** Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness.

*Israel's rebellion continues in the desert. He leads them in this great spiritual pilgrimage. Notice, the special emphasis on the Sabbath is given for two reasons. One to be a perpetual reminder of God's covenant with them. And, secondly to remind them of their special status for God's action alone. We see a lot of special emphasis in Ezekiel and throughout the Bible on the Sabbath; on the day of worship; the day of remembrance to who God is.*

*And so, I think about what we've been going through this past year. The pandemic will have been in effect a year in just a few weeks. I mean our last Sunday before the shutdown was March 15, 2020, so we're soon coming up on that year anniversary of that. And so, we could argue that the pandemic, whatever else it's done is attack the Lord's Day for Christians more than anything else of really shutting down worship centers; shutting down sanctuaries, separating people; causing people to not be able to be in worship; so it is a big concern and it's always been a big concern because The Sabbath is God's perpetual way for us to remember Who we belong to. When believers are away from worship for extended periods of time, that's when it's really easy for us to become forgetful and forget who we are (in Christ). And, it's that perpetual reminder. And, I know that many of us here in our class have not been able to be at in-person worship because of COVID-19; I understand that, and I appreciate your faithfulness to be a part of worship through the YouTube and to participate in this class and other things. But, I do pray and I hope you pray and I know you pray that all of us, as soon as possible, will be back together. Because, the longer it goes, it just becomes harder even from those faithful of us to remember who we are (in Christ). We are such a forgetful people. I think about every Lord's Day at Holy Communion Jesus says, "remember, remember." I mean that word is spoken several times every time we come together in worship, and it's the Lord saying, "Remember, who you are," but more importantly "Remember who I AM," "Remember who we are together."*

*There are four specific violations that God says are spelled out. First, the rejection of Yahweh's laws; we know about from Exodus; the refusal to follow His decrees; the desecration of His Sabbaths; and the pursuit of idols. So we get all of that in the Book of Numbers and the Book of Exodus, but especially in The Book of Numbers; we get all of that. In spite of these sins, God spares His people. **Ezekiel 20** is like this; there's sin, sin, sin, "yet, I" says God. I will spare you because of My name, not because of you but because of who I AM.*

### **Ezekiel 20:18-26, Phase II: rebellion in the desert, the second generation**

**18** "And I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. **19** I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, **20** and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.' **21** But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my

statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths. “Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. 22 But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. 23 Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, 24 because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols. 25 Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life **26** and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the Lord.

*So, this is a tough section so let's get through it and I would love to get some feedback. They have not obeyed God. We see that over, over and over. The second generation, like their parents, rebelled against the Lord. But then, God resolves to pour out His fury, but He exercises restraint; again, for the honor of His Name. But, He swore to scatter His people which we see. The exiles are hearing this, right? Ezekiel is talking to the exiles, and they know, “Oh, that did happen. Here we are in ‘The Great Diaspora,’ the captivity in Babylon. But then, we get this strange thing. He says, “I will give them no good decrees; nothing good can come from them; and laws that did not offer them life.”*

*And then, one of the times in Ezekiel that has really, really bothered and tripped and alarmed people over all the centuries. This idea that God will devastate; and the word in the Hebrew is that God will defile His people. It's the only time in the Old Testament where anything comes close to this radical notion that God would intentionally defile His own people; and it's achieved through the gifts of the people, the offering of their firstborn children. The Hebrew here suggests that what this means is child sacrifice.*

*Could that be? I mean, can we even conceive of that; that Yahweh would defile His people by making them offer up their firstborn children to Him? After all that we've read about how horrible it is that the pagans, let alone Israel, are doing child sacrifice? Now, this has tripped up a lot of people a long time. I mean, you go through the commentaries on the ancient rabbis and on the early church fathers and they all circle this section going, “What are we to think of this???” And so, I would have to say, and I believe it's accurate, that God is not saying He's demanding child sacrifice. I believe at this point we are to understand these things rhetorically, which is to say, that the Lord is overstating a point to make at this point.*

*Remember what Jesus said, “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; or if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.” I don't believe anybody thinks that Jesus says that actually, literally. If so, we would all be handless and blind, right? That's a rhetorical point. When Jesus says, “You must hate your mother and your father if you want to follow me?” Did Jesus mean that literally; that unless you hate your mother and your father you cannot be a Christian? No, it's a rhetorical point. He means, “You must love Me more than you even love your mother and your father.” So, when God says these*

*things here in Ezekiel, I believe that's the same genre of rhetorical speech that God is making; that we hear our Lord make in the New Testament. So, basically, He is saying, because of their sin, they're going to be really totally devastated, but it's not going to be Me that's going to do the devastation; it's going to be the consequence and result of their own sins. God doesn't need to punish us for our sins, brothers and sisters, sin brings punishment on its own. We do not get away with it, one way or another. That's how I would take this. Questions, comments about this section before we move on?*

**Linda Handy:** The thing that occurred to me was (that) there were several times in Scripture where "The Lord gave them over." Rather, than Him causing the defilement, He allowed them to be defiled by their own will. And, perhaps, in hopes of just the great magnitude of that would..might..the old saying about you hit a mule with a two by four; the killing of their own children; nothing else had gotten their attention; that, I'll give them over to their own sin and they let them do what they want; just as I gave them a king because that's what they wanted; they thought that was the be all and end all; that they already had King of Kings and Lord of Lords; they wanted a human king; that did not work out well for them, by in large. And, perhaps, this was another way of \_\_\_open their eyes.

**Mark:** That's good insight, Linda. So, when God gives them over to the horror of their own child sacrifice then later they come to their senses and they go, "What have we done?...You are right, that's a great insight and I think that speaks well to this section of Ezekiel. Thank you.

**Marnie:** I was just going to say. You know, it reminds me of sometimes, pretty much anybody, addicts, people who are struggling. Sometimes you have to allow them to hit rock bottom before they really wake up. I'm thinking, of course, of our society. That's just my thought.

**Mark:** That's excellent, Marnie. That also works very well here. I like that. God is allowing them to hit rock bottom; they are doing it to themselves and until they hit rock bottom, they really can't come back and appreciate grace. Good. Well, thank you Linda and Marnie; good insights.

**Israel's rebellion in the recent past Ezekiel 20:27-31, Phase IV: rebellion in the land of Canaan** 27 Once they go into the Promised Land they are still going to live in rebellion in the Land of Canaan. 27 "Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: In this also your fathers blasphemed me, by dealing treacherously with me. 28 For when I had brought them into the land that I swore to give them, then wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, there they offered their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there they sent up their pleasing aromas, and there they poured out their drink offerings. 29 (I said to them, 'What is the high place to which you go?') So its name is called Bamah to this day.) 30 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable



things? 31 When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day.

*There you go, that's what Linda and Marnie were saying. They are doing this to themselves. God is not requiring it. Their sin is causing them to do this.*

And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you.

*This time the accursed are identified not as some distant ancestors but as "your ancestors—your fathers." And what are the two primary sins that are identified, "to blaspheme" and "to act treacherously" against God.*

*Even though the Lord has given the gracious fulfillment of a homeland, they still are committing idolatry. But instead of rejoicing in the goodness of God at providing them with a land flowing with milk and honey, the Israelites still turn to idols on top of hills. These high places always are to give us a real uneasiness because they always mean pagan places.*

### **Ezekiel 20:30-31, Phase V: rebellion in exile**

*It's their own sin; they've fallen into spiritual harlotry; and they are offering up child sacrifice so why would God listen to them? He has no obligation to do so.*

This is what always happens when we get to the good part and go, "Oh, we've got to wait til next week, right?" It's called a teaser, right; it's all methodically planned out in advance. Instead of rushing through this because we do now, at the end of Ezekiel 20, get the hope and it's all going to be because of who God is and not who we are. The hope that we are going to come to God's holy mountain. So, let's pick up next week on Tuesday, March 2, beginning with **Ezekiel 20:32 in this same section called "The Prosecutor."**

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, as we end, we do pray Your blessing upon our brother, Dr. Chris Miller, for his book chat tonight; for Your anointing; for rich conversation, we thank You too, Lord, that You always act according to who You are and we are really grateful for that because, Lord, there's nothing in us worthy for You to act upon. We are so grateful that You always act according to Your Grace and Your Heart and Who You are. Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend this world. May we and our neighbors all turn to You in the days that You have given to us before it is too late so we do pray for repentance for one and all. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Thank you all; by God's grace, see you next week, God willing.

**(Location 00:05:16 on the March 2, 2021 Recording** picking up where we left off in Ezekiel 20)

As we move along in Ezekiel. Last week we spent the bulk of our time after completing Ezekiel 16 from the week prior and going through the bulk of **Ezekiel 20 and how Israel**

*was found to be sinful from her beginning, even in Egypt. And so we may have this poetic idea that during the 400 years that Israel was in Egypt and became slaves to the Egyptians that she was faithful to Yahweh and stayed true even in the midst of her suffering. But, through Ezekiel now, we understand that is not the case; that in Egypt way before The Exodus, even then Israel had gone after and pursued other gods and other people besides the one true God.*

*So we ended last week on a serious punishment, but then we will see today that Ezekiel 20 ends on a very hopeful note of transformation in the future. And, what we're going to find in these verses of **Ezekiel 20:32-44** is that God is going to give Israel a second chance. He's going to give Israel a second Exodus; a second time in the wilderness; a second time to come to Mt. Sinai; and a second opportunity to enter The Promised Land. And so, what's happening in these verses is a recapitulation of Israel's history. From Egypt to the wilderness to Sinai into the Promised Land, that all being now redone. As difficult and as dark and as serious as The Book of Ezekiel is with punishment, the grace of God always comes through.*

There is a novelist whose name is Anne Tyler. It's been a long time since I read one of Anne Tyler's books. But, I went through a period when I read three or four of them. She writes fiction and I found her fiction very interesting as she often weaves in things of faith and religion into her story. One of her books, "Saint Maybe," is about "The Church of the Second Chance," and the gist of the book is a guy whose life is completely ruined and he's even thinking about suicide. And, he's walking down a rainy dark dreary street, depressed, despairing, his life full of sin, bad choices. And he hears this singing at this storefront Church and it's called "The Church of the Second Chance." And he goes in and he realizes "It's the God of the second chance," and so he is given the opportunity to repent and confess and to know the love and grace of God. So he leaves that storefront Church and the rest of his story is his second chance and how he attempts to make the most of it. I had not thought about that book in awhile until I read this chapter of Ezekiel and really, God is our God of second chance; second, third, fourth, fifth chance. As much as we have to understand that God's judgment is just and His punishment is always right, we always throw ourselves at the grace of God. So, let's look at Ezekiel 20:32-38 as we try to finish out most of this chapter.

### **Ezekiel 20:32-44, the future transformation of Israel**

#### **Ezekiel 20:32-38, Phase VI: Israel in the desert of the peoples**

**32** "What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, 'Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone. **33** "As I live, declares the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be king over you. **34** I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out. **35** And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. **36** As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord God. **37** I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring

you into the bond of the covenant. **38** I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

*As I said, we are now revisiting Israel's history from Exodus, to wilderness, to Sinai, to the Promised Land. In verse 32 there's this faithless determination; that the people are just determined to be like the rest of the world. Isn't that so true today, that even believers, even Christians, want to fit in, to be liked and affirmed. They want to be like everybody else and try so hard to be like everybody else. And, what happens, of course, is they then become like others; and they lose their holiness and their purpose and even end up worshiping idols of stone and wood. But God is going to reign over them as King. He rules with a strong hand and outstretched arms. And, even His wrath is part of His grace and judgment.*

*First, there's going to be a new Exodus; the people are going to have another opportunity to go out into the desert. And, there in the desert, they're going to have a second chance to pass the test of obedience.*

*Now, you remember in the Exodus under Moses, the whole first generation of Jews, of Israelites, who went into the wilderness, not one of them entered into The Promised Land except for Joshua and Caleb. So, two of the first generation. Now, it depends on how you work it, but we are told in Scripture that 600,000 Jews went through The Exodus out of Egypt into the wilderness and that is just 600,000 men. So, if you extrapolate from that women and children, we could easily be talking around two million people. Now, try to get your mind around that; two million people, two million Israelites in The Exodus, a huge number of people. And, of those two million; now think about this; of those two million that came out of Egypt, just two were allowed to enter The Promised Land. Even Moses, as we know, was not allowed to enter The Promised Land. We remember the story in the Book of Numbers, right? The people were thirsty; they were at the waters of Meribah; God said, "Moses, speak to the rock and the rock will bring forth water." Well, when the time came, Moses did not just speak to the rock, he took his staff and he hit the rock twice. And so, the inference there is that even Moses did not trust fully The Word of God; that Moses thought he had to add something to it; that he thought he had to do something himself. Or, Moses wanted to show the people that He was really in control. At that point Moses was not trusting in The Word of God alone, but he was trusting in his own leadership authority with a sign of the staff. And, for that reason, God says to Moses, "You will not enter The Promised Land." It's a sobering thing to think about all those first generation people except for two not being able to enter The Promised Land. Now, their children did and their children's children but not them.*

*But now, God is the God of second chance, second, third, fourth, fifth chance; and He's going to give them an opportunity now to try it again and to pass under the rod means that He's going to separate the sheep from the goats, if you will.*

**Martha Ratcliff:** Pastor Mark, when we were in Israel, I think it was Baruch who told us that there were many places in the rock structures that people who understood the rocks and (that) there were springs behind them could usually find a place; (that's what shepherds often did) and tap that spot and a spring would open up. So, I always thought in the past, "What on earth did he (Moses) think hitting a rock against God's direction would do anything." But, there was a reason for him to think that hitting the rock, "I (Moses) will have found the spot and released the spring of water." So, it was more than just disobedience; he was very arrogant, I think, in that particular moment.

**Mark:** That's a good point, Martha. Thanks for remembering that.

*So later in 1 Corinthians 12, what does Paul say? Paul says and the rock was Christ. It's a very important story, a very important historical event. And, we are to understand that even the Rock itself was Christ who was following them in the desert and, of course, then we remember The Cross and when the Roman soldiers pierced His side, out came blood and water. And so, we get all sorts of important typology and connections in that story.*

So now moving on. Thanks, Martha, for that comment, let's look at (and read)

**Ezekiel 20:39-44.** 39 "As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord God: Go serve every one of you his idols, now and hereafter, if you will not listen to me; but my holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols. 40 "For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord God, they're all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. 41 As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. 42 And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your fathers. 43 And there you shall remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves, and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. **44** And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord God."

*By the grace of God in the end He does not give us what we deserve, which is eternal punishment, but He gives us His grace. God reminds them that in the end, those who return to the land will worship God with single-hearted devotion; and they will give up their idols and obey the Lord. Again, we see this emphasis on "the land, the land, the land." And, there on Mt. Sinai they will worship our one true God and not at the mountain shrines of the pagan gods.*

*God will now accept them (vv 40b-42). He will accept their offerings. He will accept them as His people. He will vindicate His holiness publicly and He will fulfill His promises that they will be given the land.*

*In **Ezekiel 20:42-44**, a new portrait of Israel emerges: Israel will remember her corrupt past; she will recognize her sins; she will have only humility and contrition. She will be just amazed at her sinfulness. And then, God is faithful to His covenant oaths. God's personal integrity and His jealous concern for His reputation triumph over his wrath. So, He knows that if He destroys Israel, He will go back on His Promises; the other nations will say, "Well, why believe in God if He destroys His own people." The glory and the reputation of the Lord is at stake.*

*Isn't that something; that our God of all the cosmos of eternity really hitches His wagon to Israel, and how Israel goes, really, goes the reputation of God in the world. It's amazing that God Himself humbles Himself by identifying with His people to that degree and for all of us who have been grafted into Israel.*

### **Theological Implications as we finish our study of Ezekiel 20:**

God often interprets history properly. We always have a skewed perspective of history, but God sees history correctly, and He always tells the story of history properly.

The primary motivation behind God's divine activity is revelatory: that the world may know who Yahweh is. God, the source and sustainer of all things, is also the goal of all things. It's not about us. It's about God. You may recall the book by the pastor in California, that famous book that sold millions of copies, "Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. Well, that book was okay; it was worth the price for its opening sentence, "It's not about you." And so, that's really what this chapter is all about. It's not about you or I, it's about God.

God's divine reputation depends on the fate and welfare of His people. Concern for the sanctity of His name and the glory of His kingdom remain the mark of God's people. You remember The Ten Commandments; that we are reciting the Ten Commandments each Sunday during this season of Lent; i.e, I Am the Lord your God; no other gods, no other idols, you shall not take the Lord's name in vain. It's about the name and the glory of the Lord.

The experience of divine mercy drives true covenant people to their knees. One of the marks of a person who's truly saved and in Christ is that he or she, when they really consider The Cross, the only response is to go to one's knees in submission and humble thanks and contrition to say that Jesus, by the stripes of my sins, You have saved me. And so, that's finally what's going to happen to Israel. She is going to be overwhelmed by the mercy of God even for her (Israel).

The fundamental problem with most of us is not deficient self-esteem but an inadequate God-esteem. And I think our world has an enormous appetite for self-esteem. Think of all the books that have been published with something to do with

self-esteem. And we understand that self-esteem can be important. We don't want people beleaguered and always with their heads down, but our world is obsessed with self-esteem, which reminds me that once again a little plug for Carl Trueman's book, "The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self." And, again as we've said many times, Trueman's premise is that we are obsessed with self; and that is driving everything that we see, certainly with the transgender sexual things. It's driving people away from God and we, ourselves, have become our own idol. We look in the mirror and we say, "That's who I'm going to worship." And so, our issue is not self-esteem; our issue is inadequate God esteem. I would say that would be, for me, one of the great takeaways from Ezekiel 20. As we submit ourselves to God, we will treasure his grace and worship Him only.

Anything about Ezekiel 20 today or anything you would like to comment upon?

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I have a question. All this stuff that's supposed to happen in Israel; it hasn't happened yet, right? I know that they were brought back and gathered together in their homeland in 1948, but aren't the majority of Jews in Israel pretty much secular like they are in this country?

**Mark:** Right, yes, good question, Vickie. *Sadly unfortunately, that's true. Does anyone know what the percentage is of Jews who are observant in Israel? It's pretty low; maybe 25 percent? So, perhaps, three fourths of the country is what they would call "secular Jews," Jews who do not really have anything to do with faith or the Lord. But, you know, Paul will say in **Romans 9-11**, it's always been the case. He says not every Israelite is a true Israelite so we get now to the idea that we've talked about many times of the remnant; that God is faithful; He has brought His people back after all these years to the land. And we're praying now that as many Jews as possible will really see that Jesus really is the promised Jewish Messiah to Israel and all nations. But there is no reason to think that all the Jews and all the Gentiles are going to believe in God. The Bible is clear that a remnant will be saved. Now, we pray that the remnant is going to be as large as possible, but you are right, Vickie, very sadly, the majority of the Jews in Israel, as in the rest of the world, are secular.*

But, things are happening. I have been in discussion the past couple of weeks with Baruch in Jerusalem, our friend who does all of our pilgrimages. And, of course, you have been seeing in the email updates, "The New Jerusalem Seminary," is now up and running. And, there will be four or five classes being offered over the internet. I really encourage you to sign up for one of those. And Baruch is hopeful. Now, there's a new Messianic school that his children..they have 7 children and have been homeschooling but it has become overwhelming so two or three of them are now in this Messianic school. And so, in Israel religious school for Messianic Jews, that is Jews who believe in Jesus, are now forming. And this is something that has been happening just in the past four or five years. Before that Messianic believing families did not have the option to send their children to Messianic schools. It is a small school, but it is one of many that are starting to happen. So, there are some encouraging things. Baruch's eldest child, his son, will soon be 18 and will be doing his military service. Now, in Israel, it

used to be that every 18 and 19 year old had to do two years in the military; now it's 3 years and mandatory. So they do not even get out until they're 21; then they start college. So Baruch's son is going to start his 3-year mandatory. But, it's interesting, the Israeli Army really loves Messianic soldiers because most of the Messianic Jews in Israel are really pro-Israel. They are there because that's God's land. It's interesting that we're seeing more and more officers in the Israeli Army and Air Force who are Messianic. It's nowhere near the majority, but there's a large percentage of Air Force Pilots in the Israeli Air Force, probably second only to the United States in terms of the Air Force. Many of the Israeli pilots are Messianic Jews.

**Vickie:** So, would you say, what we're reading about in these verses is happening now? Is this the beginning; or it's happening now; or it's already happened; or it's still to happen?

**Mark:** Right, it's happening now. Remember, *Ezekiel is part of the great Babylon exile. When they come back the land is never under Jewish control. Even when they come back, they come back only because other powers have allowed them to. **And so, it's only until 1948 that the land of Israel becomes the Jewish land again.** I mean, that's a great point Vickie, and we really need to emphasize it more. We are living in the fulfillment of Ezekiel, the prophecy. So, it's a great point. Thank you for bringing that up, Vickie, and we should just shake our heads in amazement. So, we're learning about ancient history that's now current present reality. And, it hasn't been fully completed, but boy, it's on its way. And so, we don't have today to waste. Christ The Messiah can come back any time now basically, but it's on its way. Good.*

**Vickie:** Thanks.

**Mark:** Other questions or comments. And, speaking of that you know that Father Steve Kelley and his wife, Lorita, are going to be leading our Church's seventh or eighth pilgrimage to Israel. They hope to leave the 27th of December, this year; obviously, if international flights open up. And so, if you (any of you) have any interest in that; you don't have to say you're definitely going; but if you have any interest, make sure you're in touch with Fr. Steve; talk with him; send him an email [fathersteve@stjohnluthan.org](mailto:fathersteve@stjohnluthan.org) It's been very encouraging. Steve told me yesterday that 19 people in the Church have expressed interest in going. We are both amazed by that because, given the pandemic and everything else. But, it means that I am very, very humbly proud that this congregation really knows the value of Israel. And, if you can get to the land. It's a cheap thing; you've got to save your pennies; it's going to be around the mid four thousands for ten days, but if you can swing it and get to the land, I really would urge you to do that. It's going to be another great trip I think.

(smiling) "You, know we are soon going to be posting our opening for the next senior pastor, my successor. Yay! Hopefully, a new younger voice who you can hear." But, one of the questions we will ask every candidate is, "What is your view of Israel?" If any

candidate says, “Israel?? that’s so yesterday; the Church has replaced Israel,’ then I would say that’s not a viable candidate for St. John. So, that’s how important this is.

Alright, that’s going down a little far afield there, but thank you for your comment, Vickie. Anybody else, before we go to Ezekiel, chapter 22?

**Linda Handy:** Mark, really quickly, if you can cover this really quickly. Back in the days of the kings when the people wanted a king, God gave them over to their own devices. At this point, it’s a totally different attitude. It is, “I will chastise you to the point that I will use My rod. You will acknowledge Me as King,” so two somewhat diametrically opposed “I’ll give you what you want,” on one end and on the other, “You will submit; you will give up your foolish idol worshiping self-praising thing and acknowledge Me as God.”

**Mark:** Yes, that’s right, so be careful for what you pray for and wish for, right? God’s going to show them what the real true King is going to do, right. Thanks, Linda, good.

**(Location on March 2 recording is at 00:36:02 as we move to Class 22 Ezekiel 22)**

**Class 22 March 2 Discussion, Handout on March 2 and March 9 Zoom Recordings**

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to You, Father, through Your Son Our Lord Jesus Christ in Your Holy Spirit, asking once again Your favor upon our discussion of Your Holy Word; that we may learn from the past and may apply it to the present for our hope in the future. In Jesus Name, we pray. Amen.

Moving now to the final two sections under this heading called “**The Prosecutor.**” The context is Ezekiel, the Prosecutor, bringing Yahweh’s case against Israel. And so, the prosecution continues in **Ezekiel 22, “Israel’s shedding of the blood.”** This section is **divided into five parts:** The **arraignment;** the **summons;** the announcement of **charges;** presentation of **evidence** and the announcement of the **sentence.** So, we see that Ezekiel 22 is probably the most direct example of a court setting where the prosecutors bring charges against the defendant who is Jerusalem. It’s clearly a law court setting. Now, we’re going to look at **Ezekiel 22:1-5.**

**Ezekiel 22:1-16 “Israel’s shedding of the blood.”**

**Ezekiel 22:1-5 the call, the summons and the charges against Jerusalem**

**1** And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, **2** “And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then declare to her all her abominations. **3** You shall say, Thus says the Lord God: A city that sheds blood in her midst, so that her time may come, and that makes idols to defile herself! **4** You have become guilty by the blood that you have shed, and defiled by the idols that you have made, and you have brought your days near, the appointed time of your years has come. Therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all the countries. **5** Those who



are near and those who are far from you will mock you; your name is defiled; you are full of tumult.

*And so, Israel has become a reproach to the nations and being called “the bloody city” which then calls to mind another part of Scripture, the prophet Nahum who lived about a hundred years before Ezekiel. Nahum too calls another city “the bloody city, but that city is Nineveh. In the ancient world, even to say the word ‘Nineveh’ would send fear and trembling down the backs of any listener. Nineveh was the epitome of cruelty. You know it was Nineveh the capital of Assyria. The Assyrians invented crucifixion; so they were the first people in the ancient world to execute their captives by nailing them to cross-shaped trees. And so, the Romans learned crucifixion by studying the history of Nineveh and the Assyrians. The Assyrians were also infamous in the ancient world. When they captured the people, they would march them out of their land and back to Assyria and put hooks, rings in the noses of their prisoners and then they would tie their prisoners together, nose by nose from their nose rings. And they really had a terrible gift for inventing misery and torture. And so, for God to accuse Jerusalem of being “the bloody city,” is just a breathtaking comparison to Nineveh. Blood is on the hands of Jerusalem and this whole section now we are to remember the holiness code of Leviticus especially **Leviticus 17-20**. Those chapters are the core of what’s called, “**holiness code**,” of how you are to treat people of moral and immoral deeds, etc. Part of that says that life is in the blood, and you are to take the blood of the life of a person and animal seriously. And so, Israel has broken “the holiness code.” You may remember, and we’ve said this many times, that the ancient rabbis said that The Torah was the most important part of the Bible; and within The Torah, Leviticus was the most important book. And so, you could argue that the ancient rabbis made the point that Leviticus was the most important book in the whole Bible, what we would call The Old Testament. And so, what we are seeing then that Jerusalem Israel is violating the core of the core.*

In **Ezekiel 22: 6-12** we find the **presentation of the evidence**. 6 “Behold, the princes of Israel in you, every one according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. 7 Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. 8 You have despised my holy things and profaned my Sabbaths. 9 There are men in you who slander to shed blood, and people in you who eat on the mountains; they commit lewdness in your midst. 10 In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they violate women who are unclean in their menstrual impurity. 11 One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter. **12** In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take interest and profit and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; but me you have forgotten, declares the Lord God.

*Tragically, this sounds very much like today. We are doing all these terrible things, these sexual immoralities, and all this violence and we are forgetting God.*

*God's case begins with the evidence against the political leaders. Her sin begins with her leaders and then the sin, then, trickles down to the people. It's always the case, right? You think, for example, just recently terribly, tragically, sadly about Ravi Zacharias; died sometime ago from cancer; and then after his death all this evidence came out that for years he had been a sexual predator; and, obviously, the hypocrisy of all that. On the one hand Ravi Zacharias, for a long time, was considered the go-to guy for good Orthodox Apologetics; and his teaching was sound. But, he was living a different life than he was publicly proclaiming. And so, what's happened now is that the Ravi Zacharias ministry will probably shut down. There are 300 people employed by that worldwide ministry. Now, secularists, non-believers just point to that and say, "You see, all of them; all those Christian conservative people; they're all just a bunch of hypocrites." Sadly, as so in Jerusalem when the leaders go south; the nation goes with them.*

*The Holiness Code is foundational to this section. It's a nation and revolt not only against civil authority but against the authority of God. Here is a list of the sins committed: (1) First, they violate the 5th commandment: Honor your father and your mother. Their contempt of their parents which is a way to talk about the contempt toward their authorities; for the authority of the land undermines the foundation of Israelite society. So any time we have "contempt for authority," we are going to have a culture that is undermined. We can think of all kinds of examples today of how authority is being undermined. (2) Secondly, they violate the Mosaic guarantees for the well-being of aliens, orphans, and widows. In other words, they are not taking care of the most vulnerable members of society. We think again today about the unborn, the poor, refugees and others. (3) Thirdly, they violate the sanctity of the Sabbaths (v 8). They do not set apart a day of the week for the holy things of God. All of their life revolved around Sabbath-keeping to the glory of God. It was a way to remember God. The Sabbaths thus serve as a test of faith: Could they trust God to care for them when, at His direction, they were not cultivating their fields on the Sabbath Days? In other words, can we trust God enough that we will not work seven days? That we will trust Him that He will provide enough in six days that will sustain our lives? This generation of leaders obviously could not.*

*Famously, Chick-fil-A does not open on Sunday. Our son-in-law Jonathan whose married to our daughter, Emily, works at the home office of Chick-fil-A in Atlanta. It's been fascinating to hear Jonathan talk about the culture at Chick-fil-A and foundational to their culture is not being open on Sunday. And that was the first business decision made by Mr. Cathy (S. Truett Cathy) who founded the company. He said all the competitors will be open. But, we are not. This is a part of our culture and our DNA. How many of us take a Sabbath; how many of us really trust God enough to rest, knowing that God will take care of us. (4) Fourth, they violate the sanctity of human life by spilling blood within the city (v 9a). These perpetrators are identified as "slanderers," those who go about in malicious gossip. The overtone here suggests these criminals are actually robbers and bandits. (5) Fifth, they participate in pagan ritual meals at cult centers on the hilltops (9b). (6) Sixth, they violate a variety of sexual taboos (9c-11), in*

*violation especially of Leviticus Holiness Code.*

Ezekiel 18 and 20. Five specific sexual crimes are listed:

*(a) They engage in sexual sins with their mothers. According to Lev 20:11, this is a capital crime. (b) They engage in intercourse with women during their menstrual period. This indicates a euphemism for men abusing women. In the Holiness Code a man was not to have intimate relations with a woman during her menstrual period. And for a man to do that was really an abuse of a woman. (c) They commit adultery with their neighbor's wife. (d) They defile the land by lewd behavior with their daughters-in-law. (e) They commit incest with their sisters. This is Israel we're talking about; it is one depraved society. But, of course, this is also the United States in many ways. (7) Seventh, they violate the people's right to justice by accepting bribes for murder (v 12). (8) Eighth, they violate the people's trust by using positions of power for their own advantage. (9) Ninth, and worst of all, the people of Jerusalem have forgotten God. "To forget God" is equivalent to abandoning the covenant. So in just in a few verses, we see that the case against Jerusalem is airtight. By any standards of a court, the evidence is overwhelming. Without a doubt, they are guilty.*

**Ezekiel 22:13-15** **The announcement of the sentence;** and we'll stop for comments.

**13** "Behold, I strike my hand at the dishonest gain that you have made, and at the blood that has been in your midst. **14** Can your courage endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you? I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it. **15** I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries, and I will consume your uncleanness out of you. **16** And you shall be profaned by your own doing in the sight of the nations, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

*God "claps his hands" in anger at their sins and crimes (13). God declares his judgment and punishment will be upon them (v 14).*

*Then in v 15a the sentence is announced: In fulfillment of Lev 26:33-39 and Dt 28:64, the punishment that you, Israel, knew about all along from The Torah will be fulfilled and the people of Jerusalem will be scattered all over the world. Only when she suffers under the full weight of God's wrath will Jerusalem finally acknowledge the Person and Presence of the LORD. It's like you will be driving along and the police officer will stop you for speeding and you will try to make the case that you had no idea it was a 35 mph zone and thought it was a 55 mph zone. And he pointed out the sign ten feet behind that you just drove past; so no excuse. Israel had no excuse. The Torah had been given to Moses, a thousand years before this happened and this is happening now in the five hundreds. And Moses and Israel were somewhere around 14 BC. So, a thousand years before this exile The Torah had been given; and so they knew that if they did these things they would deserve and God would bring His punishment. And, everything that God says in Leviticus 26:33-39 and Deuteronomy 28:64 is being fulfilled here. So, God has not changing the rules of the game in mid-stream. He's simply enforcing the rules that have been in place for a thousand years.*

**Theological Implications** as we end this section of Ezekiel 22

A society that thrives on violence, not only self-destructs, but will also have to contend with God. We look at every culture and nation and society in the history of humankind. And, I don't think there's an exception that when they forget God, they end up in ruin. Any example you can bring from history, eventually their ruin will be that they have lapsed into so much sin that they have absolutely no idea or faith in God any longer. Sooner or later, His fury will be known.

A community's leaders bear special responsibility for the maintenance of justice and the welfare of its citizens.

Knowledge of the will of God is no substitute for obedience to that will. The knowledge of The Torah is no substitute for obedience to The Torah

Although humans may renege on their covenant commitments, God will not. God's judgment does not signify betrayal of His covenant but fulfillment of its fine print. God is simply saying, "Have you read the fine print of the covenant? This is what you are reaping from your sin."

Another heavy chapter. Let me stop and that sets us up to go into Ezekiel 23 which, I told you before, Ezekiel 16 was one of the hardest chapters in Ezekiel. Well, it's got competition with Ezekiel 23, but that's coming up. Any questions or comments or observations about this section that we just finished? (silence)

Well, it certainly causes me to worry about the United States. I don't think any believer can read what we just read and not say, "Lord, have mercy." There are so many comparisons to our country today. To the western world; to Europe; to United States. I mean, we are just a mess. You know if this new Equality Act gets ratified by the Senate, it's going to be horrible. The House has passed it and it's going to the Senate soon. I hope they do not get the votes for it because if you've read the fine print of that, it jeopardizes, for the sake of so many people; i.e., boys, girls, men, women, the Church, society, children. I just read today in the Roanoke Times a long front page article about how important this past year of legislation in Virginia has been. And, they break out about 25 different subject matters. If you've read the paper you will see that. And, I think the intent of the article is to celebrate how much wonderful legislation was passed. And, if you read what legislation has been passed right here in our own state in the past year, it's breathtaking how many points, much legislation flies straight in the face of God. I mean, directly in opposition to The Word of God for all He knows is best for His people. So, "Lord have Mercy." You know Jesus on the Cross says, "Father forgive them for they know now what they do." And now I hope He can also say, "Father, forgive them for they know exactly what they are doing" which is even worse.

**Linda Handy:** Mark, I think of Nineveh and our dear friend who went to rescue them under duress because he didn't want to do what the Lord wanted him to do. Our friend Jonah. They repented and the Lord forgave. So, while we see our whole nation totally disintegrating into this world of sin; i.e., self, sex and degradation of God, those who repented; Nineveh repented and God gave them the victory. So (let us) keep that hope.

**Mark:** *And, we are very thankful for that. And so, they repented; and, if you remember, they repented and how long did their repentance last? According, to the Scriptures if we compare the Book of Jonah, which is about 800 BC and compared to the Book of Nahum about 150 years later, Nineveh's repentance lasted about 80 years. We rejoice that there was 80 years of repentance, about four generations. So they repented in the time of Jonah and then the whole short Book of Nahum is about how Nineveh is going to get it because she has lapsed into even deeper sin. So, the repentance lasted about 80 years. It's sad that Nineveh's repentance was not lasting, but it was temporary.*

**Terrie:** I had this really stupid idea that we should just cut it down the middle; that Mississippi is a nice dividing point and all the righteous people live on one side and all the unrighteous people live on the other side. Just let us do their thing and we'll let you do your thing. But then in further thinking, No, we've got to mingle among the unrighteous so we can be the Jonah's. We can influence them as little or as lot as we possible can. We will pick some other better righteous example, JESUS! We need to be those little Jesus influencers walking around among society (so to speak) trying to influence (the unrighteous).

**Mark: Amen.** Thank you Terrie and Linda for your comments. *We understand the fact that Jonah was so reluctant to go to Nineveh. We understand that. They were the cruelest people in the world. "Why in the world, and he said, "I knew if I did go You would forgive them and I did not want You to forgive them." But, we are to call even the people of Nineveh today (and those who are like like those in Nineveh) to repentance. And, it's going to take our words and it's also going to take our whole lifestyles. Others are going to have to see it to believe it.*

We are at 1:00 so let me just set up next week's **Ezekiel 23**, very similar to Ezekiel 16 in terms of its graphic sexual nature of the sins that will be exposed. And, so as you see at the heading of Ezekiel 23, an allegory of **Oholah (Israel)** and **Oholibah (Judah)** which are two sisters. It's going to be about the marriage covenant and how, first the Northern Kingdom of Israel broke the marriage covenant; and then the Southern Kingdom of Judah broke the marriage covenant. And, God then brought His judgment down on them. Again, we're going to see some really graphic language meant to shock us just as it was meant to shock the exiles. It's meant to get our attention and it's meant to understand that sin is dark; sin is ugly but sin needs to be exposed. So, next week, God willing, we'll tackle Ezekiel 23. I don't know if we'll have time to move to anything beyond that, but we'll see.

Well, bless you brothers and sisters. Thank you again for your time as we close in prayer. **Closing Prayer:** Father of Mercy we give You thanks that You sent Your son who lived and died and who defeated sin, death and the devil for us from the resurrection of the dead. And now by Your Holy Spirit who comes among us to make Your will and Your love and Your grace known. So, Jesus, even as we lament and point our fingers at ancient Jerusalem for her sins, may it lead us today, also, to confess our

sins because, Lord, we stand with all people, with our only hope as our hope in You. And, we give You thanks, Jesus, that You are not a god who breaks promises but fulfills the promise that as all of us repent from our sin and turn to You by faith, You promise Your eternal forgiveness and the second chance that we all need day by day. So, Lord, for this nation, for this world, for the Church, for our friends and family, for ourselves, we pray this in our Lord's Name. Amen. Thank you all. God Bless you.

### **End of Ezekiel 22 Discussion, Handont on the March 2 recording**

**(Class 22 continues below with Ezekiel 23:1-49; transcription begins at Location: 00:05:20 on the March 9 Zoom Recording):**

*Obviously, God is not breaking His own Torah by suggesting one man married two sisters. Such a marriage arrangement was prohibited by The Torah. The allegory is necessary to have Oholah and Oholibah as sisters because, obviously, they represent Israel the Northern Kingdom and Judah the Southern Kingdom. So in that sense, they are wives both married equally to the one husband Yahweh.*

*Again, when we're talking about allegory it's never going to be a perfect correlation to life and to The Torah and to The Law, but obviously it's all to make a point and I think we all can get the greater meaning.*

*Here in Ezekiel 23, we see a parallel; a very short parallel in **Jeremiah 3:6-11**. Remember, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are contemporaries. Jeremiah, the faithful lonely suffering prophet left behind in Jerusalem who would have had it tougher than Ezekiel after the Babylonian sack of the City, while Ezekiel is in the first wave of exiles to Babylon. They know each other and God is using each prophet in those particular places. So, we do find, as we've mentioned before, a number of parallels between similar words given by God through Jeremiah and Ezekiel which does not surprise us. God is speaking to His people in two different places, but they're both His people so God is trying to reach them with that same Word.*

*And again, just as we get into Ezekiel 23, the marriage covenant is foundational to this allegory with Oholah and Oholibah and the covenant of marriage is the primary way that we are to understand the relationship that God has made with His people. "I am your Husband says God. Israel, You are my wife." We understand what the larger point is even as it may be odd for some of us, for all of us to say, "God is my husband," we understand what's going on here. There's a covenant of fidelity, of faithfulness, a commitment one to each other. So with that foundation let's begin with*

**Ezekiel 23:1-4** 1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. 3 They played the whore in Egypt; they played the whore in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosoms handled. 4 Oholah was the name of the elder and Oholibah the name of her

sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.

***It's the introduction** with the graphic language returning, along with five essential data points concerning these two women, Oholah and Oholibah:*

- (1) Their common origin: they are daughters of the same mother.*
- (2) Their relative positions as siblings: Oholah is the elder sister (represents Israel).*
- (3) Their character from early days of their youth, very graphically we are told that they played the whore in Egypt.*

*God through Ezekiel is giving us some background to Egypt and Israel. This is prior to the Exodus. Remember, we've said this before. In the Book of Exodus in The Torah, we don't get any background information about what was happening to the Israelites, the Jews, when they were still in Egypt other than they became slaves. Remember, they were there 430 years; the first 100 years or so were great; the last two or three hundred years were awful. But, now in Ezekiel we are getting now a prequel to the Exodus; and we are told that actually during those years; all those centuries, Israel fell into terrible apostasy, adultery with the Egyptians.*

*We get the background here in Ezekiel 23 (no scholar has been able to sift out the exact meaning. The best that we can say is that their names are a bit of a riddle. Both incorporate the word "tent." Oholah means "her own tent," and Oholibah "my tent in her." So, it's the idea that Israel is the tent; Judah is the tent within; they are under this tent. Now, when you hear the word "tent," probably immediately we think of a Tabernacle, "The Tent of Meeting" in the wilderness prior to the building of The Temple itself. Their names would suggest that part of their unfaithfulness to God may be the largest part was their unfaithfulness in worship because their names, I think have to have some sort of connection to The Tabernacle, The Tent.*

*Their relationship with Yahweh: they are God's wives, and as I said before, this is not to suggest that God is advocating simultaneous marriage to sisters. It is just to keep the allegory analogy going that both Israel and Judah belong to Yahweh in the same manner. "I am your Husband," says God. "You are my wife."*

*Now, they bear children which means their marriage to God has been consummated. So again with this real life historical allegory, the marriage is consummated and God is a Husband jealous for His marriage. Again, within the allegory now they are two wives of Yahweh; Oholah represents Samaria and Oholibah is Jerusalem, the respective capitals of the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. So, we learn a lot in these opening first four verses.*

Any questions, comments concerns in these opening four verses of Ezekiel 23? (None,) so we will continue with verses 5 through 10. This is the indictment of Israel, Oholah, the northern kingdom: **Ezekiel 23:5-10** **5** "Oholah played the whore while she was mine, and she lusted after her lovers the Assyrians, warriors 6 clothed in purple, governors and commanders, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on

horses. 7 She bestowed her whoring upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them, and she defiled herself with all the idols of everyone after whom she lusted. 8 She did not give up her whoring that she had begun in Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her and handled her virgin bosom and poured out their whoring lust upon her. 9 Therefore I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted. **10** These uncovered her nakedness; they seized her sons and her daughters; and as for her, they killed her with the sword; and she became a byword among women, when judgment had been executed on her.

*Again, we know the historical background on this. In 722 BC the Assyrians come and destroy the northern kingdom of Israel, and it is no more. The indictment is that Israel has lusted after the Assyrians. And you notice that she is lusting after the choicest sons, nobles of Assyria, staff officers, governors, provincial governors, charioteers. So, Oholah is entering into all sorts of illicit commitments with the Assyrians. She has abandoned her first love which is God and finally then she's wiped off the map in 722 BC. She ends up being judged by the very one she lusted after. Her lover the Assyrians becomes her executor at the hands of Assyrian regent Salmanser VI.*

*In Ezekiel 23:11-21, we move to the indictment of Judah, the younger sister, Oholibah.*

**11** “Her sister Oholibah saw this,

*Now this is why God is going to be even more angry with Judah because Judah saw what happened to Israel when Israel de-committed from her marriage relationship with God and yet Judah did not learn. She did the exact same sin that she saw her older sister Israel do. So, if anything, the greater fault lies with Judah because she has no excuse after seeing Israel being wiped out in 722 BC.*

and she became more corrupt than her sister in her lust and in her whoring, which was worse than that of her sister. 12 She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and commanders, warriors clothed in full armor, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. 13 And I saw that she was defiled; they both took the same way. 14 But she carried her whoring further. She saw men portrayed on the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, 15 wearing belts on their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them having the appearance of officers, a likeness of Babylonians whose native land was Chaldea. 16 When she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. 17 And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoring lust. And after she was defiled by them, she turned from them in disgust. 18 When she carried on her whoring so openly and flaunted her nakedness, I turned in disgust from her, as I had turned in disgust from her sister. 19 Yet she increased her whoring, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the whore in the land of Egypt 20 and lusted after her lovers there, whose members were like those of donkeys, and whose issue was like that of horses. **21** Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom and pressed your young breasts.”



*Obviously, this is graphic language. It's really the mirror image of the Song of Songs. You know the most appropriately beautifully erotic Book in the Bible is The Song of Songs that celebrates God's gift of sexuality and intimacy between a husband and wife in the setting of the wedding night between a young couple on their marriage night. There, you get graphic language and you get anatomical references, but it's not in any way lewd or crude. It's beautiful, and you realize that when human sexuality is understood in the way that God intended it, it is a beautiful thing and does not bring us into wrong or dark thoughts, but elevates it to a place where we realize that anything less than that becomes then something dark and wrong. So, here in Ezekiel 23 we get the mirror image, if you will, of The Song of Songs. All that is beautiful about human sexual intimacy between a husband and a wife and The Song of Songs becomes this dark terrible sin-filled lustful thing between Judah and now Babylon. So even though now that Judah saw Israel lusting after the Assyrians and that ended in a death note. She now also goes after the Babylonians and the Egyptians. She not only has one lover, she has three, Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians. In other words, Judah will go after anybody, and that's not going to end well for her (Judah).*

*And so, here you have some very tough language and imagery. So again we see that this is the flip side of marriage; that when marriage becomes this organizing metaphor for the whole Word of God (I tried to speak to this a little bit on Sunday in the sermon. It's a beautiful thing. It ends up being The Marriage Supper of the Lamb, Revelation 19), but the dark side is when married people and when God and His people are not faithful to the covenant, then it becomes this. It becomes Ezekiel 23, and this is really, really tough stuff. This is not stuff that you can read to your children. I would never teach Ezekiel to a seekers Bible Study class; to people who aren't sure that they believe. I mean, certainly there are parts, but I would wait and say, "This is the Word of God and this is really important, but let's come back to Ezekiel 23 after we get some other foundational things down because I think this is challenging for all of us."*

**Mark:** Shall we move on or do you just kind of want to get through this quickly or do you have comments or questions?

**David Leamon:** I have a quick comment, Mark, or a suggestion rather. Surely, there's a parallel between this and the apostolic church in our day, which maybe you can reflect on and comment on as you go through this.

**Mark:** Well, does one reflection come in your mind, right now, David? No, not really. No, I mean there's a whole broad spectrum of things that are going on that just seem to parallel this.

**Mark:** Right, and thank you for that comment David because, again, that's a germane comment because *we cannot read Ezekiel as just a historical mode of interest, it is to speak to us today as well. You are absolutely right, brother. So, when I hear and think of this, you know I think of Romans 1 where Paul says that the foundation of all sexual sin is idolatry and what is idolatry? It's loving self. That's how Paul understands the sin of*

*homosexual sex. In a homosexual sexual encounter, it is loving yourself. It's looking at yourself in the mirror and loving yourself because there's no difference there. It's male male and female female, right? And so, the difference and the differentiation is lost.*

Dr. Bob Benne, is going to be teaching for us this fall in Sunday School, this extraordinarily important book by Carl Trueman on the "Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self" in the 21st Century. So, it's self love. It's love for what I think is true; love for who I say that I am versus who God says that I am.

*You know, I would say, if anything, the sins of Judah and Israel in Ezekiel's day and before, those things are certainly no worse than our sins and perhaps less worse. And, things are not getting better. Things are getting worse. We have all these sexual sins. Everything in Ezekiel we know happens all the time today plus everything else that's going on.*

*So, the marriage image, the marriage theme is so durable. It works in **Genesis 2** as the foundation of creation. It works through all the prophets. It works in **Revelation 19** as the foundation of Heaven. It works today to tell us what's wrong? What's wrong with us today? We just have to put our culture; our society, our Church up against the Biblical image of marriage. And then, we compare with what's going on now to the marriage between that God has said what He wants His people to enter into. And then, we can start to count all the ways of the Church the world has gone into apostasy. And, the worst part is the Church. Just like Judah's sin was greater than Israel's sin, so the Church's sin is greater than the culture. You know, if people don't believe in Jesus Christ; if they've not been regenerated, born again; if they don't have The Holy Spirit; you can almost understand; they don't get it; they simply do not get it at all. And so, what are they going to do? They are going to do crazy, stupid, sinful, dark, terrible stuff.*

*But, for people who know who Christ is and have been baptized and say, "I'm part of the Church." For them to celebrate these same sins and to call them good. I mean, who's sin is worse? I mean obviously? So, as we read this and I don't mean to talk too much about this, I think now that you mentioned that comment, David, we should read Oholibah as The Church. Oholibah being Judah whose sins are more grievous than Israel's. So if we read Oholah Israel as the society; and if we read Oholibah Judah as the Church, it would impress upon us how much more for those who say they are Christians and who belong to the Church; how much more we have to grieve and lament and repent from the sins all around us.*

**Lisa Bond:** I don't\_\_\_one to be big obstructions for a lot of people in terms of faith. They will say, "Well, the Church is full of hypocrites and all I see are people who say one thing and do another." And, Dr. Alan () is going to be teaching a class this summer on these hard questions so what is a good response for an unbeliever who says that?

**Mark:** Alright, Dr. Alan, you have 60 seconds.

**Dr. Alan:** Well, one is, sure the Church is full of hypocrites. There's always room for one more, come join us. Everybody is hypocritical to a large extent because the problem with us is that we're broken and we can't even live up to our own standards, no matter who sets them. And, and another one, this is getting back into the marriage imagery, I've hear it said that sexuality and love are a lot like fire, if you keep it in our fireplace, it warms the home and you can cook food over it, but if it gets outside the fireplace, it will burn your house down.

**Mark:** I've never heard that analogy, Alan, thanks, okay. Lisa do you want to say more? Do you want to give a 60 second response. How do you respond to the person who says that to you? That, "I don't want to have anything to do with the church; they're a bunch of hypocrites; they're worse than my neighbor next door who is an atheist?"

**Lisa Bond:** I think I've always sort of thought to start with the fact that, well, just like Alan said, we all are sinners and that's why we need Christ and we will fall. But, the difference I guess in a Christian is that she or he will always come back and repent to God of their sins and won't remain a lifetime against God. We will always be coming back to God. So, yes, we are sinners, but we do have the grace of God and the forgiveness of Christ.

**Alan:** One thing that's a little less tongue 'n' cheek. Yes sinners fail, but Jesus does not fail. So even in horrible cases like Ravi Zacharias right now, you know he failed miserably, but Jesus does not fail. So I think what we have to do is make a distinction between people who have failed us and recognize that that is why it spread; that there are in fact hypocrites everywhere; we can't even live up to our own standards. Jesus is not a failure because His followers fail. And in fact, just like Lisa said, you know if anything our failings prove The Gospel message. The fact that we are fallen and that we need a Savior, just like Lisa said.

**Mark:** Great point.

**Linda Handy:** And I would say with regard to Ravi Zacharias. He did indeed fail. He was indeed a sinner as we all are, but he had some great works and he had some great messages that we can all use and learn from; so it goes back to (the fact that) the Lord can use sinners. He can use us. What are we called to be? We are called to be light and prophet and priest to the nations and bring His Word. We are all sinners. There's nothing redeeming in me or any of us other than The Holy Spirit and The Lord Jesus Christ. HE is The Light.

**Mark:** Right, thank you, Linda and Alan and Lisa. Those are good comments. *And, you know so much of what we are seeing here, and especially in this chapter and in other chapters too in Ezekiel has to do with overt sexual matters and what we do with our bodies and how that affects our souls; our relationship with God. And so, it's a package deal and in that context, I've been very concerned. I don't necessarily want to name them because (pause) but there are two really good conservative Christian*

*denominations that right now just in the last couple of months are starting to be (pause). There's this great turmoil going and each one, independent of each other, over issues of homosexuality and LBGTQ stuff. And these are two denominations that you would go, "What!" And, these are not the Southern Baptists. These are two groups that either one I could say, "Yes, that's a trustworthy denomination. If you move from Roanoke and you move to a town and a church in one of these two denominations is there, you ought to check it out." But, now there is this internal strife developing that is growing within each of these two denominations over matters that most of their church membership thought were settled ten, twenty years ago, but have come back full face. And it all has to do over LBGTQ plus things. So, you know, I just (pause). This is not lessening. It is getting more and more and more. And, you know I just pray that the North American Lutheran Church can stay true, but you look at these other groups and you go, "WOW, well are we next?" In our lifetime, the Church who follows Christ faithfully may indeed be a very small remnant even in our lifetime, let alone another two or three generations.*

**David:** I would like to make a comment since the name Ravi Zacharias came up. I have automatically been sending a donation to RZIM every quarter for some years. And, I just got a check in the mail yesterday back from them with a letter that said, "We have stopped receiving donations." That's really to me a very strong statement as to their commitment to address the issues. I really hope they survive because as best I've been able to see the last couple decades at least, it's the leading apologetics organization with its outreach to the world and a team of around 100 people who are apologists continually holding meetings and such.

**Mark:** Thank you for that update. We get back to our text; thank's David. *Let me just state the obvious. This (Ezekiel text content) does not suggest that the women are the sexual sinners and the men get a free pass. We're talking about two sisters, the wives of Yahweh, if you will, because of the allegory, because of the metaphor, because of the analogy of marriage. But, men are held every bit as accountable as women. So even though the language and the graphic nature of this is pretty hard sounding when we hear, "You have whored" (repeated); you've done this terrible thing from your youth." Let's keep it that men are held to the same standard and they don't get a pass. So, that's just the obvious, but I wanted to make sure we said (and understood) that.*

**Ezekiel 23:22-35 22** Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I will stir up against you your lovers from whom you turned in disgust, and I will bring them against you from every side: 23 the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans,

*And by the way, Chaldean and Babylonian are synonyms; Chaldean is just an older word for Babylonian so it's the same thing; it's a redundancy there.*

Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, desirable young men, governors and commanders all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses.

*The Assyrians were the first ones to develop a calvary in terms of military tactics. They were feared in the ancient world for their fierce looking horses that were dressed in armor. And, the Assyrians would tie the horse's tail up into a circle, a curve to replicate a scorpion's stinger. And so, from a distance it would look like a whole horde of scorpions were running toward you. Just the image of that alone would often cause whole armies just to turn and flee before the battle even started. The Babylonians, then, learned horsemanship and calvary fighting from the Assyrians. And then, it gets handed down to the Greeks and the Romans. When we talk about the United States Army today; we have a calvary, The Army, the tanks and the others, they're all descendants of the Assyrians. So whenever we see a whole collection of Army tanks and Army people who are in the calvary going to battle, all that goes back to Assyria.*

24 And they shall come against you from the north with chariots and wagons and a host of peoples. They shall set themselves against you on every side with buckler, shield, and helmet; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments. 25 And I will direct my jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in fury. They shall cut off your nose and your ears, and your survivors shall fall by the sword.

*I'll get to that in just a moment, but that's what Assyrians and Babylonians did to their prisoners; they would cut off noses and ears. Can you imagine being maimed and having then to try to live the rest of your life in that way marked always as a captive, a prisoner?*

They shall seize your sons and your daughters, and your survivors shall be devoured by fire. 26 They shall also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels. **27** Thus I will put an end to your lewdness and your whoring begun in the land of Egypt, so that you shall not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore.

*I think we get this. God again is going have the lovers that Judah sought turn on her and do to her what was commonly done to captives in that day and age. And so Judah sin is worse. And then God doubles down on the sentencing. There's a second announcement; the famous "cup of wrath" in Ezekiel.*

28 "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will deliver you into the hands of those whom you hate, into the hands of those from whom you turned in disgust 29 and they shall deal with you in hatred and take away all the fruit of your labor and leave you naked and bare, and the nakedness of your whoring shall be uncovered. Your lewdness and your whoring 30 have brought this upon you, because you played the whore with the nations and defiled yourself with their idols. 31 You have gone the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand. 32 Thus says the Lord God: "You shall drink your sister's cup that is deep and large; you shall be laughed at and held in derision, for it contains much; 33 you will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow. A cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria; 34 you shall drink it and drain it out, and gnaw its shards, and tear your breasts; for I have spoken, declares the Lord God. **35** Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have forgotten me

and cast me behind your back, you yourself must bear the consequences of your lewdness and whoring.”

*So her former lovers will seize her property and will abandon her like they abandoned Ohola. Literally in the Hebrew, “this cup” is called “the cup of woe” or sometimes is called “the cup of wrath.” Another image to remind us of God’s judgment and how it pours over Judah.*

*And finally, the case against the two sisters in verses 36-49. 36 The Lord said to me: “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Declare to them their abominations.*

*Remember sexual sins are often called abominations, one of the strongest words in The Hebrew language for sin. Sometimes people ask why discuss sexual sins, “Can’t you just let people live their life and not interfere. Why are you Christians (SJLC, etc.) obsessed with that? Well, The Word of God really casts such sins in a very dark and judgmental light so we take that very seriously.*

37 For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me.

*So again there is child sacrifice going on.*

38 Moreover, this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my Sabbaths 39 For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it.

*So, child sacrifice, the blood of their children they bring into the very Temple of God.*

And behold, this is what they did in my house.

*And the inference there is they even killed their children within The Temple itself and so horror upon horror upon horror.*

40 They even sent for men to come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and behold, they came. For them you bathed yourself, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself with ornaments. 41 You sat on a stately couch, with a table spread before it on which you had placed my incense and my oil.

*Those are all illusions to the frankincense and the oil of Temple. The inference is that Judah has committed child sacrifice in The Temple; and she’s committing a sexual act with false lovers and others in The Temple. All this is going on in the sanctuary of God.*

42 The sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and with men of the common sort, drunkards were brought from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on the hands of

the women, and beautiful crowns on their heads. 43 “Then I said of her who was worn out by adultery, ‘Now they will continue to use her for a whore, even her!’ 44 For they have gone in to her, as men go in to a prostitute. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, lewd women! 45 But righteous men shall pass judgment on them with the sentence of adulteresses, and with the sentence of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands.”

*As we read this, it's important for us to hear in our mind and to physically read with our eyes John 8, an extremely important Revelation Scripture where a woman caught in adultery (what happened to the man we don't know) is brought into the town square to be stoned to death and obviously Jesus stops and offers her unconditional flat out forgiveness that she accepts and He says, “Go, you're free, sin no more.” While Ezekiel is not quoted directly in the New Testament, as we've said many times, implicitly Ezekiel is all over the place in The New Testament. We see this section of Ezekiel 23 and we see it as the opposite of **John 8**; and are immensely grateful for the merciful ministry of Jesus Christ. Because, who among us has not sexually sinned. All of us are guilty, now maybe not physically, maybe physically, but certainly mentally. All of us have had wrong thoughts and Jesus doesn't let us off. He says in The Sermon on the Mount, “You even think about this, you've done it.” So what are we going to do, are we going to hold onto it or are we just going to say, “Lord, I'm sorry, thank You for Your forgiveness, help me another day.”*

*So, you see, we can't just point our fingers at these terrible Israelites and these terrible Judaeans and how could they do this to God. And, we have to say, “Lord, before I examine the speck in my brother and sister's eye, please forgive me of the great log in my own eye.” Again, the only way we can interpret Scripture is to interpret it wholly and completely. The Great Reformation principle “Scripture interprets Scripture.” So we would never study Ezekiel in a vacuum. We would always study it in its relationship to the total Word of God; and only then do we get The Total Word of God in the fulness of, both The Law, as well as the grace and salvation.*

*And, then there's the sentencing at the end of Ezekiel 23:43-49 and I will stop and take a few minutes to reflect on it.*

46 For thus says the Lord God: “Bring up a vast host against them, and make them an object of terror and a plunder. 47 And the host shall stone them and cut them down with their swords. They shall kill their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses. 48 Thus will I put an end to lewdness in the land, that all women may take warning and not commit lewdness as you have done. **49** And they shall return your lewdness upon you, and you shall bear the penalty for your sinful idolatry, and you shall know that I am the Lord God.”

*So, an army shall come up, first it was the Assyrians, of course, and then it was the Babylonians, and they'll get the due justice to their sins.*

**Theological implications**

The community of faith stands in constant danger (*that's what we've been talking about*) of forgetting the grace of its covenant God and expending its energies in the satisfaction of its own cravings. God considers devotion (worship) to any other person or object adultery, a violation of the marriage covenant. We've talked about that; even when the Church is not faithful to the marriage covenant with Yahweh how horrible.

God abhors adultery not only because it perverts the sex act but especially because it violates the covenant bond of marriage. Illicit intimacy always yields contempt and disgust. Marital infidelity is self-destructive and brings the wrath of God.

Only by the grace of God is one able to shake the patterns of sinful behavior established in one's youth. Hope is to be found only abandoning one's sinful ways and casting oneself on God's mercy.

So at the end of Ezekiel 23, we all stand in judgment. We all have fallen short and we all stand in need of the blood of Christ to save us.

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I have a question. I'm wondering. Do you think that God maybe holds the Jews to a higher standard. It almost seems like when the Gentiles were brought into the Church that He kind of maybe was trying to change the approach or something? You know I grew up in The Middle East as a young child and so we kind of saw firsthand a lot of the opinions of Muslims toward the Jews and how hated the Jews were. And, I remember as a child I used to ask my dad, "Why, why, why in the world does everyone hate the Jews the way they do?" I just never could understand it, and my dad's answer, who was really not a very devoted Christian, and his answer was, "Well, the Jews, you can look at them throughout history and they've been more successful. Wherever they go, you put them into a situation where their lives are bad; and you know, they work so hard and they become successful and they always show up; whoever's land they go into they make it better than the people originally there. And so, my dad kind of said it was like a jealousy sort of thing. But from what you're reading today, and also from last week there was a verse in Ezekiel 22 where God said, "I will scatter you among the nations, and you shall be profaned by your own doing in the sight of other nations." It's almost like God was saying, "All the nations will hate you." I saw that as a kind of answer to my questions, but then after reading today's, I kind of feel like maybe because they were His chosen people He held them to a higher standard than He does us. I don't know. Does that make sense, even what I'm asking?

**Mark:** *It makes great sense and the Apostle Paul addresses that very question and his answer is, "Yes, yes. Listen fellow Jews you have The Law. For those Gentiles don't know anything about The Law, how can you hold them (Gentiles) accountable, right? They don't know; you Jews have The Law; I mean..." And Paul will then go on to say, "That's why He can't save you because even though you know The Law and you are held to a higher standard, you still fall short." Therefore, yes, The Law is beautiful in that it leads us into righteous living, but only after we understand that it's grace upon grace upon grace.*



*So, the answer to your question is Yes, God does because to the Jews was given The Torah and not to other nations. But, at the end of the day (both) Jew and Gentile are only saved by grace. And, you know, that's why I think (pause) Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5 when he's talking to the church there and they have so many sexual sins in the Church of Corinth because it was a place where sexual perversion was part of the air they breathed. And there is a man whose living with his stepmother. And, Paul says, "Are you kidding; that's tantamount to incest; and they're both in the church; and that man is in your church and he's living with his stepmother and you're not doing anything about that. That's why he needs to be cast out. I'm not talking about the world. In the world that happens all the time because they don't know any better and we just have to assume and just understand that those things are going to happen because people are ignorant of the way of God. But, you've got a person in the church who knows the way of God and is doing that. You must excommunicate him so that he can come to his senses and come back and ask for repentance and be restored to the fellowship." So there again, that answers your question. Paul's very clear that for those Jew and Gentile who know The Word of God and are in the fellowship of the church of Israel; and they are the ones who are held to a higher standard because people who don't know the Lord, you have to assume they're going to do lots of crazy stuff.*

**Chris Miller:** I liked the sermon that you preached about the Judeans being the ones who were calling for war...Jesus, rather than saying "Jews." And, I think, to what Vickie was saying, I kind of think about anti-semitism, the direction our country's going. And the fact that \_\_\_ is written and Adolph Hitler was very upset about when he wrote \_\_\_ the Jewish people's success. So that, I think, all ties in and I appreciate your response to these questions a lot. But, I have a question of my own. What do we do with modern day prophets who, I know we measure them against The Word of God. What do we make of these events that are happening like earthquakes everywhere, volcanoes erupting, and the prophecies it might have these days about God's people and the nations and?

**Mark:** Well, somebody want to answer Chris on that. It's a good question. Anybody want to venture and weigh down on that?

**David Leamon:** Well, I would just say, isn't there a need for the presence of the Jewish people for all of God's purposes in history to be accomplished right through the end times?

**Mark.** 100 percent.

**David:** And, therefore, satan is always inviting people to hate them and try to get rid of them and God's purposes can't be accomplished.

**Mark:** Right, that goes back to your dad's comment, Vickie. He was absolutely spot on. *I mean that's why they became slaves in Egypt. Initially, when the Jews developed*

*and grew in Egypt, they became prosperous; the business people, the teachers, the middle class. They are running the country, and the pharaohs became jealous of their importance and (inferred that) "Egyptians were being squeezed out." So, there's been no people, no particular demographic in the history of the world so persecuted as the Jews; nobody even a close second. When we look at history, and, because they're God's chosen people and they tend to land on their feet and excel wherever they are, even in very difficult circumstances. It's a double-edged sword, but that's the reason that God's purposes includes the Jews because The Messiah is going to come back to Jerusalem and Jerusalem has to be a Jewish City and it all has to work out. And so, the Jews will always be God's people for the particular purpose of salvation history.*

Getting back to Chris, your question, I mean, it's an important one because we have people today who are making prophetic utterances and, I think, two things, one as you said, always must be measured against Scripture. If anybody utters a prophecy that is contrary to the Word of God, then he or she (*words/prophesy*) must be rejected. And, there are prophets and there are prophetesses, men and women both have this potential gift, right? The second Biblical criterion is, "Does their word come true?" I mean, that's in the Book of Jeremiah and other places. "Let's give our prophecies and let's see." The one who prophesies and it comes to pass, that's a true prophesy. The one who prophesies and it doesn't come to pass, that's not of God. So, there are these practical tests, but sometimes the prophetic word is not..."In 50 years this will happen," which obviously is a long time to wait to see if that's a true prophesy. So, I think you have to judge the full measure of it, especially against the Word of God.

Next we move into the new section called "**The Judge of the Nations,**" and I am going to summarize **Ezekiel 25** consisting of a lot of short oracles of judgment of Israel's neighbors so it goes from Amman to the north; Moab to the east; Edom to the south; and the Philistines to the west going clockwise around Egypt. They're going to be proclamations of God against them. So, next week for Ezekiel 25 and 26 we probably are not going to read all those chapters. I am just going to summarize them because there's redundancy. And I think we can get those points pretty quickly. We are going to get through those two chapters pretty quickly next week. And then we'll get into Ezekiel 27 and 28 probably as well.

So, by the grace of God if we're here next week and Christ hasn't come back to Jerusalem I will see you at noon on Tuesday, March 16th.

**Closing Prayer** Lord, thank You for these dear beloved brothers and sisters. Thank You that You save us by Your grace. May we always call upon Your Mercy and may we pray for this world, O Lord, who is so far from You. We pray for this Church and all churches that have strayed from You. Lord, in these days, please, please, may more men and women call upon You for Your saving grace. We pray this in Jesus Name. Amen. Thank you, God bless you.

**End of Class 22 Discussion, Handout and end of March 9 Recording**

**Class 23 Handout from March 9th which concludes with Ezekiel 25 and 26 on March 16, 2021 Zoom Recording**

**Opening Prayer** So we pray to you Father through our Lord Jesus Christ and Your Holy Spirit. And we thank You Lord that once again You've made a way for us today to be in Your Word. Lord do not let us take any days for granted; let us not take one moment for granted. Let us count each breath as a gift from you and Lord as You've given us the gift now may it be returned to Your glory. So Holy Spirit, give us insight into Your Holy Word that we may know what You said through Ezekiel in the past and what You say through Ezekiel to us in the present. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

*We are in the section now with Ezekiel as the judge of the nations. We're taking a break from Yahweh's judgment of Judah and Israel into Yahweh's judgment of the nations around Israel. And so, in effect in this section we're seeing a clockwise listing of nations. Today Israel continues to be surrounded by her enemies. So in some ways very little has changed after all these years from the time of Ezekiel*

*To the north of Israel is Lebanon. Lebanon technically is not at war with Israel, but it's getting more and more militant every day. Beirut used to be what's called the Paris of the Middle East until civil war between Muslims and Jews and Christians broke out. And then you have Syria, of course, which is an enemy of Israel, then you have Jordan. Jordan is probably the closest to Israel today. And thanks, I think in large part, to the fact that the previous King of Jordan married an American Christian woman, I think she had influence. So Jordan and Israel obviously share a border, and people who live in Jordan come and work in Israel. And so there is some cooperation there.*

We always go to the city of Jericho on our trips to Israel. And Jericho is not far from the Jordanian border. And there's a lot of crossover. And then, you know, as you go around Israel, you have Egypt in the south. Again, there is at least some detente between Egypt and Israel. But again, Egypt is becoming more militantly Muslim. And then Israel is no longer on her west coast.

*We'll see about the Philistines, "The Sea People," who were Israel's historic enemies. And of course, on the west coast of Israel today, you have the Gaza Strip, where Hamas is definitely out to destroy Israel. So again, Israel's an amazing little country about the size of Delaware, and yet a power house because of God's presence.*

*So these short oracles against Israel's neighbors are intended in some ways to be a kind of backhanded message of hope for Israel, because she realizes that she still is in God's heart, even as God is so upset with Israel for her unfaithfulness. But still God's hand is upon her, and her neighbors will be judged. And that is true.*

*We see back in the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12. And then we see it throughout The Torah, where God says that the nations that bless Israel will be blessed, and the nations that despise and harm Israel will fall under God's judgment. And that practically, historically has been the case. And some people really push back against*

*that and find that way too “playing favorites.” But that's the reality, and that's God's Word. And He's always true to His Word.*

*If you look at your handout, this section of the judge the nations, it goes from, as you see, in these passages that we have listed from Ezekiel 25 through 32. You see this this amazing literary symmetry, that we have exactly 97 verses about the oracles of judgment against the six nations, Ezekiel 25-28. And then we have kind of an interlude in Ezekiel 28:24-26. And then we have exactly 97 verses of God's judgment specifically upon Egypt. And so you can see how the hand of God has worked through the prophet in this amazing theological, but also this amazing literary way.*

*This is what we would call, perhaps, the fulcrum upon which this whole section of oracles against Israel's neighbors rotates. **Ezekiel 28:24-26 24** “And for the house of Israel there shall be no more a brier to prick or a thorn to hurt them among all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the Lord God. 25 “Thus says the Lord God: When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and manifest my holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they shall dwell in their own land that I gave to my servant Jacob. **26** And they shall dwell securely in it, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards. They shall dwell securely, when I execute judgments upon all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am Yahweh their God.”*

*And so in the midst of these judgments of all these nations is this abiding promise that God will restore and keep His people on the land. So we do get the glimmer of hope in the midst of this. And then we dive into the first nation under which God brings an oracle of judgment is against Ammon and the Ammonites.*

Before we get into this, any comments or questions at this point? (silence)

Okay, then let's look at **Ezekiel 25:1-7 1** The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, set your face toward the Ammonites and prophesy against them. 3 Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord God: Thus says the Lord God, Because you said, ‘Aha!’ over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile, 4 therefore behold, I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst. They shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. 5 I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and Ammon a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the Lord. 6 For thus says the Lord God: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within your soul against the land of Israel, **7** therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as plunder to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples and will make you perish out of the countries; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

*And so this is the ancient people, the Ammonites and you can see in the name, "A-m-m-o-n" that the modern name A-m-m-a-n, which is the capital now of Jordan. And so if you think of Jordan, with the ancient capital city of Amman, you can kind of get a geographical image in your mind of where the Ammonites are living. So the Ammonites are in a territory of modern day Jordan. And Amman, which is now the modern day capital city of Jordan, is considered to be around the second or third oldest continuously inhabited city in the world.*

*So the three (now, I don't know about China and the ancient Far East); but in terms of biblical landscape, Damascus, Jericho and Amman are considered the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. And so, this is an ancient one. And they are distant relatives of the Israelites. You will see both Amman as well as Moab. If you look back in **Genesis 19**, and we know that sad alarming story of Lot, Abram's nephew and going to Sodom and Gomorrah and being cast out. And, of course, Lot's wife dies, because she looks behind her when she was told not to and turns into a pillar of salt. And then Lot is left in a cave with his two daughters. And they are worried that they're not going to have husbands and won't carry on the family line. And so it's a very sordid story. They ply their father Lot with wine. He gets drunk. And on two successive nights, they have intercourse with their father and become impregnated. And from the births of these children come the Ammonites and the Moabites. And so, obviously, that's a dark story with lots of sinful ramifications and darkness to it. And so, you know, we're not surprised that all these centuries later, the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Israelites are at odds with each other.*

*We trace it back through Lot and Abram, and you can trace it even farther back. Lot is not a very nice guy. He's got a lot of sinful issues. You remember way back when, when Abram, the uncle, he didn't have to do this, he gave Lot the choice of what land he wanted. And, of course, Lot immediately chose what looked to the eyes to be the best. And Abram honored that. And, of course, that all turned out to turn upside down for Lot, because he ends up in Sodom. And we know the story of that. And so the whole thing is, you know, once you make that first step into sin, the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth steps are so much easier. And so all these centuries later Now, what happened back in Genesis 19, comes to two very dark conclusion with this.*

*So the Ammonites and Israel had a very tenuous relationship, off and on. But basically, as you see, as we heard in the Scriptures, as you see in your handout, they ultimately were always Israel's enemies. They were always jealous of Israel. They would do anything they could to get the land from Israel. So the jealousy between Ammonites and Israel comes and plays out in different ways as you see.*

*So God is going to bring judgment against the Ammonites from the people of the East. that is a very general description of probably Nomadic tribes who lived in the Arabian Desert, and so these nomadic tribes would come, and God says that through these tribes, Ammonites will be judged and destroyed. So that's the first oracle against the nation of Ammon. And then God will be known in that judgment.*

*And then the second nation to have an oracle of judgment is*

**Greg:** Before we move on. So it says that the Ammonites will be destroyed. So can we technically say they have been destroyed? Or is there a remnant?

**Mark:** Well, that's a great observation, Greg. *So I would say, "Yes," to your question. On the one hand God's Word Yes, of course, was fulfilled. The Ammonites, as they are described in the Bible, certainly fell under God's judgment, and their nation fell apart, dissipated, was destroyed by various attacks over a long period of time. The judgment that God brings against all these nations does not come in one fell swoop; it's not like one kind of nuclear attack and they're wiped out. It comes over many, many years that they will fall under judgment until finally they are no more.*

*At the same time your observation, "Is there a remnant?" Yes, I think there is some connection probably still today of the people in Jordan and the Ammonites. And still today we've got this..really we're dealing with a remnant..We're dealing with the remnant between Abraham and Lot, and we're dealing with the remnant between Jacob and Esau. And, of course, Jacob and Esau, the grandsons of Abraham and Sarah, become kind of the first of the line of the Jews and the line of the Muslims ultimately. And so, you trace all this back to Genesis. I mean, Genesis really lays out the whole salvation history. In fact, you could argue that even the first three chapters of Genesis lays it out. So yes, so I think they were destroyed. At the same time, we are still seeing the remnants of the ancient Biblical history still being played out in different ways. But what is your response? That was a long response to that. What do you think (Greg)?*

**Greg:** I'm inclined to agree that as a nation, Ammon is no more. It was overrun and absorbed, so to speak, culturally and genetically by invaders? And so as a distinct people, it is no more. And I think that's, part of the dissolution that we're referring to, you know. Is there still a genetic trace? As a ruling people? No.

**Mark:** Right. So, that's a good point. *I mean, most of these nations are no more. Moab is no more; Edom is no more; the Philistines as a nation are no more; Tyre as a city state is no more. Among all the oracles of destruction and judgment, Egypt is really the only one among these still in existence as a nation today, along, of course, with Israel. But, of course, Egypt fell under great judgment and so forth.*

Anything else? Any other comments? I appreciate that Greg.

**Linda Handy:** I was going to say that having been blessed to visit. The nations are no more and certainly none of them have achieved, including Egypt, have been blessed with the growth in economy and economic stability that Israel has. So they have never come back from that destruction. If you travel in Jordan, for example, they only have one highway that runs from north to south; it's full of potholes. I don't think, when we were traveling what they called an interstate, we ever got more than 40 mph because

of potholes and swerving to avoid obstacles, etc. So, do they still exist? Yes. But they never came back as the powerhouses that they had been; ever.

**Mark:** That really is a good point. Yes, *I mean I hope all of us can get over to Israel and the Middle East at least once. I mean, we will all end up in The New Jerusalem. So if we don't get there in this life, we'll be there in the life to come; that's where we'll all end up. But, if you can get there, it is, as Linda said, the difference between Israel and all the nations around her is just stark. And, the comparison between Jordan and Israel is a great example of that.*

*If you think about these nations around Israel that these oracles are against, the image that comes to my mind in more recent days is the 1967 war; the first war that Israel really established herself as the military power in the Middle East. Where, in the 1967 war and again in 1973, all the nations around Israel were poised with enormous military prowess to collectively attack this one nation. And yet, this one small nation, not only defended herself, but beat all those nations back. And really, because of the attack, Israel geographically doubled in size. She's still a very small nation, but before '67, before '73 about half the land that she has now [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli-occupied\\_territories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli-occupied_territories) had. And so that's a modern picture of really the judgment against these same nations; that God's hand was upon Israel.*

*There's a book that I mentioned many years ago about the '67 war called "The Lion's Gate: On the Front Lines of the Six Day War" by Steven Pressfield. Everybody needs to read this book. The author has gone back and interviewed Jewish Israeli military people from generals down to privates as to their experiences. And, it is a fascinating first person testimony. In that book, even secular Jews, those who served in the war who see themselves as Jews, not by belief but only by kind of identity as a nation, even they had to say that this could only have been done by God. I could not put that book down. If you really want to see the picture where even agnostic and atheistic Jews had to say there was something more going on than just what they did. That only a supernatural explanation can explain it.*

**David Leamon:** Mark, have you watched any of the DVD's on that history. I have a whole bunch by Carroll Cartwright that were given to me and another one in my collection that I haven't watched yet. I was just wondering if those (might) reflect adequately what happened?

**Mark:** No, I don't know and I have not seen those, David. I would love to, but the book is certainly "The Lion's Gate..." by Pressfield is certainly one I can recommend.

**Greg:** One last quick comment. I happened to look up, just very briefly, the difference in the Gross Domestic Product "GDP" of the two side by side nations of Israel vs. Jordan. Jordan's GDP is \$45 Billion in 2019; Israel was \$394 billion in 2019 so, just economically speaking, it (Israel) is a major player.

**Linda:** And militaristically it was a miracle on the scale of The Battle of Jericho or any of the others. There was militaristically, Walter and other military men have discussed it. There was no way on the basis of military might that they could possibly have won that war. No way. It was God start to finish who won that war.

**Mark:** Right, you're absolutely right, Linda, and that's the biggest takeaway I had from the book *The Lions Gate*; that was a supernaturally done. Practically, from a human standpoint, Israel should have been wiped off the map.

*We see now in Ezekiel these oracles against these nations. I think what our discussion just now emphasizes again how Biblical history is the foundation for all history. And so, the history we have in the Bible is not just a reflection of the past. It is the foundation for the present and for the future. So, Biblical history is the foundation for all history. I don't think it is an error to then extrapolate from these oracles in Ezekiel 25 to what we see in the 20th Century and what we see in the 21st Century and what we'll see by God's grace in the centuries to come. If anything, it simply emphasizes the Truth of these oracles.*

Then in **Ezekiel 25:8-11** we get the prophecy against Moab: **8** "Thus says the Lord God: Because Moab and Seir said, 'Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations,' **9** therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities, from its cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim. **10** I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession, that the Ammonites may be remembered no more among the nations, **11** and I will execute judgments upon Moab. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

*Again, very similar. As we said before Moab is the result of Lot and his daughters back in **Genesis 19**. And again, Moab was always at odds with Israel. But we cannot forget the most famous Moabitess in history, who was in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, and that is Ruth. And so when we hear about the judgment on Moab, it's important, I think, to read about the **Book of Ruth**, that God searches every heart individually, and God searches every heart individually for His people. And so even though Moab is judged and falls under God's destruction, there we have *The Gospel of the Book of Ruth*, where, through her mother-in-law, she is brought into Israel, brought into Jerusalem. And then obviously, David comes along, down the road, and then from the house of David, the Messiah Himself. And so, it's a beautiful, powerful story of how all salvations from the Jews, as what Jesus says in **John 4** that salvation is from the Jews, and that ultimately the Church is saved by being grafted into Israel. So Ruth herself, this amazing, assertive, strong woman becomes emblematic, symbolic of how every Gentile comes into salvation. All the Gentiles, we come into salvation by being grafted into Israel. And so the *Book of Ruth* is a history of that theological premise that Paul will then make begin. And so, it's important then for us to, even as we read one chapter of the Bible, somehow we need to see all the chapters, the constellation of chapters, and*



*how the whole Word of God fits together beautifully. The Book of Ruth is one of my favorites. It's an amazing history of God's grace and faith and all sorts of things.*

So then the oracle in **Ezekiel 25:12-14** against Edom **12** “Thus says the Lord God: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance on them, **13** therefore thus says the Lord God, I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast. And I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. **14** And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath, and they shall know my vengeance, declares the Lord God.”

*Edomites are the people descended from Esau. And so, we know the story of the tension between Jacob and Esau. By God's grace, they were able to kind of have forgiveness and repentance as brothers. Then they are separated. Last time we see Esau in the Bible, he's come back with his brother Jacob to bury Abraham. So they bury their father together, and that's the last we see of Esau. But we know the tension between the brothers and that tension never really leaves Edom in Israel. And so again, these two nations are living out their Genesis, and Edom was never fully supportive of Judah and Israel. And so God's fury is going to come against Edom.*

And then finally, in this section of **Ezekiel 25:15-17**, the oracle against “The Sea Peoples, otherwise known famously as “The Philistines.” **15** “Thus says the Lord God: Because the Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of soul to destroy in never-ending enmity, **16** therefore thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the rest of the seacoast. **17** I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I lay my vengeance upon them.”

*So again, we see in every oracle, every prophetic utterance, the judgment is always so that they will know who God is. The oracle divides into three parts, the indictment, the announcement judgment, the effect of the judgment. And so God is protecting His own people, as He brings His severe discipline.*

So that **ends Ezekiel 25**, with the oracles of judgment against those nations, and then this section continues to flow into **Ezekiel 26**, with a long oracle against the city state of Tyre.

Comments, questions, observations. I really appreciate it when you all speak up, so feel free to do that.

**Jacque:** I have a question about the Nabateans. Where do they fit in? Because they were a powerhouse at one time or other?

**Mark:** That's a great question. *Well, the Nabateans had a short but profound history. If I'm hitting all cylinders here, Jacque, I think in Jordan, we have gone many times to Petra and Petra The Rock City if you trace it back, probably was an outpost of the Nabateans. So they are connected with the nation of Edom as well.*

But if I said much more than that, I would just be making things up to make you think I knew more than I do. So that's about all I know for right now. That's a great question. Anybody else know about the Nabateans?

**Linda:** They were mostly a trading people. I don't think they were warriors as much as just a trading outpost. That's how they made their money.

**Jacque:** Yeah, that's kind of what I thought too.

**Mark:** Good, well, thank you all.

**Linda:** I thought it was interesting that the Philistines were great warriors. And yet, they and the Moabites were destroyed by the Hand of the Lord. And that kind of goes back to the 1969 War. The Lord does not need anyone to do His work for him. He used the nobodies from the east to destroy the Ammonites. But the others, He rolled over; absolutely no need for anybody's help, including ours.

**Mark:** That's right. That's right. Yeah, *the Philistines were known as fierce, war people, sea peoples, they did a lot of raiding along the coast, and so forth. But they met their end. It is interesting, then, when the Romans come and occupy Israel. Part of their way to try to destroy Israel, as a people, as a nation, was to destroy the idea of Israel. And they did that by capturing language and vocabulary. If this sounds familiar today, that's what's happening today.*

*In a lot of the ideology, it's a war over words. And, if they can change the meaning of a word, they can change the meaning of the heart. And so, back to this, the Romans took the word "Philistine," and they corrupted it into the word "Palestine." And they renamed Israel "Palestine," which is a corruption of the Philistine name. This was a Roman way of trying to get the people to forget even the name of Israel. And they said, "This is not the Land of Israel. It is Palestine," which is a corruption of Israel's great enemies the Philistines.*

*So when you hear the word, "Palestinian" today, Palestinian is a modern version of the word, Philistine. And so again, Biblical history is all history. And we are seeing today in the 21st century, a continuing iteration of these same tensions that we find in Ezekiel. And so it's just, if you trace this out and really follow the clues long enough, you see how everything fits together. And it then teaches us the importance of words.*

I know that Chris Miller, you've done a lot of teaching on this and how, you know, you think about sanctity of life. Okay, so here at St. John, we're a sanctity of life Church; it's

really important. Just think about the vocabulary. We've moved from the vocabulary of abortion and pro life. And now, the pro abortion people have renamed it, "Women's Reproductive Health." So, no longer does a person say, "I'm pro abortion, or even I'm pro choice." Now the new language is, "I am pro women's reproductive health."

And so you can see how the language is an effort to change the meaning. And so it's much easier for somebody to say, Well, yeah, okay, great. I think women should have reproductive health measures too. That sounds great versus, "I'm pro abortion or I'm pro choice." We have got to be careful, folks, and really parse out what is being said. And just like the Romans tried to play the word game to dismiss Israel, we too, need to be aware of this. So that's not directly here (in Ezekiel), but it's these correlations that God's people must make to see the big picture. So before we get into Ezekiel 26, anybody else want to say?

**Chris Miller:** Might even be the case that as reparations and changes happen in this country. If they do, IF they do, if this nation will go by another name.

**Mark:** Could happen. Yes. We are people of The Word because we are people of The Book; we are people of The Word of God. So words, vocabulary, sentences, paragraphs pages, books really matter because we are people of the Word of God. So what we call things; how we name things have deep, deep theological and practical consequences.

**David:** Mark, is there any sense in which the Palestinians are descendants in any natural way from the Philistines?

**Mark:** Again, that's a great question. *Part of what happened when Joshua brought Israel into the "Land of Canaan," which was a general term that all these people would have been a part of that, including the Philistines, etc. God told them (Israel) that they needed to wash the land of the pagans because if they did not, they (pagans) were going to have influence on Israel. Of course, they didn't completely wash the land. And so, we can probably make an argument, just like we are talking about with Greg, that there are going to be remnants of all these people still here. And so, is there a direct descendant from current Palestinians to the Philistines, probably a remnant of that, but I don't know enough to say more than that, another great question (David). Part of what a Bible Study does is bring up a lot of great questions. If you want to do some research on that, David, and bring a report back, I would love to hear that.*

**David:** Well, I had a co-worker years ago when I asked him who the Palestinians were, he told me they were descended from the Philistines. But, my understanding is they're probably people from The Middle East and there should other nations around rather than Israel rather than striving for the land of Israel.

**Mark:** *No question, modern day "Palestinian" is a synonym for a person of that whole area. And, there are some Christian Palestinians, of course, mostly Muslim. But your*

*friend is correct. Technically, the word comes from the "Philistines," so at least in terms of etymology he is correct in that.*

**David:** Yes, but I think he meant the people themselves descended.

**Linda:** Baruch told us once on a tour that the Palestinians bore no nationality, in and of themselves; that they were wandering tribes who were not inhabitants of the land as a nation, but were nomadic peoples who just traveled the desert.

**Mark:** Right, so that's a great point, Linda. *I'm glad you mentioned that. So, the argument then, when Israel was reinstituted in 1948, the great outcry by many was that this was unfairly, evil, apatite, kicking the Palestinians out of their country, out of their land. But, what you just said, the historical fact is, there was no nation of the Palestinians. They were, as you said, they were just a \_\_\_group of different tribes, clans, different peoples. There was no unity; no true nation of the Palestinians. They were roaming nomadic tribes that lived in a land off and on and in and out. So I believe, technically, that argument that Israel displaced the Palestinians as a nation is not accurate. There was no nation; these were all different groups and tribes of groups. Again, it goes back to what we're talking, that the Palestinians are probably remnants of the Moabites, Edomites, Philistines and Tyrenians and others. It is just a real accumulation of different peoples under one umbrella. And so then if you want to extrapolate beyond that you can say that what we're reading right now in Ezekiel is still being played out. That Israel is still at odds with the Moabites, Edomites, etc. and collectively you could call them the Palestinians. And so, it all fits, ultimately.*

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I have kind of an observation, I guess. There might be a question along with it. But from what we're studying today and from what we've previously studied, it almost seems that God's Words here are almost like we, today, can say whatever we want to say about our family, but you let somebody else say something and then we jump in and defend them. And, it's kind of like God has used Ezekiel to tell the Jews over and over again how they're going to face His wrath and His judgment because of all the things that they're doing wrong, And, you know in a lot of cases His wrath is played out by using other countries to go against Israel and do things to them. And then, He turns around and with all these people who He is punishing, it's because they have done things to Israel. So, it's kind of, I don't know what my point is here except that it kind of feels like I said, you know. I can say whatever I want to say about my own family, but don't you say anything about them because I'm gonna...

**Mark:** I think that's a great observation. It's kind of like when you were raising Tori, as your daughter, you disciplined Tori and you could get very upset with Tori when she broke your rules and she would know the wrath of her mother in punishment. But, if anybody said something bad about your daughter, you would be all over that person protecting your daughter. *So that's a very astute parallel, Vickie, a great way of looking at this. That reminds me of The Book of Mark. Mark, especially. The Disciples are always being chastised by Jesus, "What? Why so little faith? What's wrong with you*

*guys? Why aren't you getting this?" Jesus is very kind to all the others who He approaches; but to His own disciples, He's pretty hard and pretty hard nosed and strict with them. But, let anybody say anything against them, He's all over them. So, yes, we see that played out. It's a good observation (Vickie).*

Anybody else?

**Alan :** Just two quick things. One, there's a really good video series called "Against All Odds," describing how Israel has managed to hold its place in the world in spite of its small size. And then the other one is the arabic name for Palestine still starts with an "f" Philistine or Philistine

**Mark:** And so these are DVD's, Alan? "Against All Odds" is a DVD series. So, let's see if we can get through Tyre so that we can get up to today, but this (discussion) has been great.

**Ezekiel 26:** *There's a long oracle against the city state of Tyre in Sidon there were a number of city states that were countries into themselves, much like Singapore is today. Singapore is a city state city nation.*

*So think of Singapore, you can think of Tyre and they're very similar because Singapore and Tyre both are our Merchant commercial cities, primarily through the maritime connections with the sea, with the ocean. And Tyre was populated by the ancient Phoenicians. So the Phoenicians came over many centuries ago in the BC era, and then they kind of migrated to different political entities in these city states. And the Phoenicians are part of the ancient Canaanites who were in the land of Israel when Joshua brought Israel over through the River Jordan. The name Tyre comes from the rock upon which it was built. And so, in the ancient days of Ezekiel, even before Ezekiel, Tyre was an island state.*

*But then, as time went on, sediment, built up between Tyre the island and the coast. And so, eventually the coast and Tyre the island state were united. So today and in the days of Jesus, by the time you get to the New Testament, Tyre is along the coast of the northern part, just north of Israel. So Tyre was not part of Israel proper. And Tyre today, would probably be in Lebanon. And so, but the coast had grown out to it. But back in the day, Tyre was a stand alone island fortress in the ocean.*

*And so, this oracle comes against Tyre in the sixth century BC, but it's going to be not until time of Alexander the Great that it's finally conquered. So we have to take the long view of God's judgment. Remember, the Bible says, "A day is like 1000 years to the Lord." And so God counts time much differently than we do.*

*And then the basic issue, I think, is that both Tyre and Egypt, tried to enter into an alliance with Israel with Judah to thwart King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to bring his judgment. So you have to kind of get your mind around this, that both Ezekiel and Jeremiah, you hate to say it, but they're almost pro Babylonian because they*

understand that God is using the Babylonians and their King Nebuchadnezzar, to bring judgment rightfully against Judah and Israel. And so any nation that tries to thwart the Babylonians, ultimately, is trying to thwart the will of God, and that always then results in God's judgment.

*So it's hard for us to imagine Jeremiah and Ezekiel as pro Babylonians. The Babylonians brought terrible destruction against Jerusalem and Judah. Well, but Ezekiel and Jeremiah said that's because of Judah's great sin and the need for judgment. And so, don't stand in the way of the Babylonians, because then you stand in the way of God. So that's the background to the oracle against Tyre.*

I'm just going to read these portions. First, **Ezekiel 26:1-6** **1** In the eleventh year, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: **2** "Son of man, because Tyre said concerning Jerusalem, 'Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken; it has swung open to me. I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste,' **3** therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. **4** They shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers, and I will scrape her soil from her and make her a bare rock. **5** She shall be in the midst of the sea a place for the spreading of nets, for I have spoken, declares the Lord God. And she shall become plunder for the nations, **6** and her daughters on the mainland shall be killed by the sword. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

*And so, verses one through six, the announcement of Tyre's demise. And Tyre in the ancient world was one of the great commercial centers the ancient world. It was a city with splendor of gold and money, and its merchants were some of the wealthiest people in the world. And we'll see that that's part of its pride. It was voracious in its appetite for profit, and that will lead to a demise.*

**Ezekiel 26:7-14** **The agent of Tyre's demise**, as you'll see in the text, will be Nebuchadnezzar. **7** "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, and with horsemen and a host of many soldiers. **8** He will kill with the sword your daughters on the mainland. He will set up a siege wall against you and throw up a mound against you, and raise a roof of shields against you. **9** He will direct the shock of his battering rams against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. **10** His horses will be so many that their dust will cover you. Your walls will shake at the noise of the horsemen and wagons and chariots, when he enters your gates as men enter a city that has been breached. **11** With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will kill your people with the sword, and your mighty pillars will fall to the ground. **12** They will plunder your riches and loot your merchandise. They will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses. Your stones and timber and soil they will cast into the midst of the waters. **13** And I will stop the music of your songs, and the sound of your lyres shall be heard no more. **14** I will

make you a bare rock. You shall be a place for the spreading of nets. You shall never be rebuilt, for I am the Lord; I have spoken, declares the Lord God.

*For 13 years Nebuchadnezzar is going to besiege Tyre until it falls.*

And then in **Ezekiel 26:15-18 15** Thus says the Lord God to Tyre: Will not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when slaughter is made in your midst? 16 Then all the princes of the sea will step down from their thrones and remove their robes and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground and tremble every moment and be appalled at you. 17 And they will raise a lamentation over you and say to you, “How you have perished, you who were inhabited from the seas, O city renowned, who was mighty on the sea; she and her inhabitants imposed their terror on all her inhabitants! **18** Now the coastlands tremble on the day of your fall, and the coastlands that are on the sea are dismayed at your passing.”

*The international impact of Tyre’s demise will be all nations, as you’ll see, will shake and groan. Because, when the other nations see that the great city of Tyre has fallen, they will understand that they, also, are very vulnerable.*

And then in **Ezekiel 26:19-21** God, of course, is the one that does all this. **19** “For thus says the Lord God: When I make you a city laid waste, like the cities that are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you, and the great waters cover you, 20 then I will make you go down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you to dwell in the world below, among ruins from of old, with those who go down to the pit, so that you will not be inhabited; but I will set beauty in the land of the living. **21** I will bring you to a dreadful end, and you shall be no more. Though you be sought for, you will never be found again, declares the Lord God.”

*Tyre will fall under His fury. So, then that is going to lead into a second great oracle against Tyre because Tyre is going to be sent down to sheol. And that’s a really important thing in Ezekiel that will pick up with next week.*

And so then if you will close with me with some **Theological Implications:** History flows from the will, work and purposes. The Lord God alone is sovereign.

And then, as I said earlier, nations that support Israel, God will favor; nations that oppose Israel God will oppose. And so that **brings to a close Handout for Class 23.**

Next Tuesday we’ll pick up with our handout for today, **March 16**, which begins with **Ezekiel 27**. It’s again more about Tyre, but what is probably the most fascinating to us is going to be what Ezekiel says about the after life, etc. So, we’ll get into that next week.

Questions or comments before we close with prayer? (silence)

Just to whet your appetite, *Ezekiel probably says more about eternal life than any other one prophet. And what he says is extremely important; that we do have a real life in the world to come; that we're not dust in the wind; we're not just spirits that flutter off; we have a real embodied eternal reality. And Ezekiel, therefore, is going to be foundational to what the New Testament says about eternal life. And so once again, we see how important Ezekiel is to the whole scope of Scripture.*

**Closing Prayer** So Lord, thank You for today. Thank You for these dear brothers and sisters. We pray Lord that You would measure our words, that we may speak according to Your will. And that we would pay attention, Lord, to Your Words and that we most of all, Lord, will pay attention to You. For You are The Word of God. We love You. Lead us O Lord in obedience and worship. We ask this in Jesus Holy Name. Amen.

Thanks so much everybody. By God's grace, **see you next week, March 23, 2021.**

**Continuing beginning at Ezekiel 27 on March 23, 2021 Zoom recording:**  
**(Pastor Mark:** Next Tuesday (March 23) we'll pick up with our handout for today (March 16) which begins with **Ezekiel 27:1-36**



**Class 24 - March 16, 2021 on March 23, 2021 Zoom Recording**

**Pastor Mark:** We've got the mass murder in Atlanta last week and the mass murder in Colorado yesterday. And, all Lent especially we are praying against abortions. We've really got the spirit of murder that's taking hold, and we need to pray against the spirit of murder. "Freedom of Speech" was mentioned and Pastor Mark's response is that he is just finishing Rob Dreher's book "Live Not by Lies," and that will put the fear of God in us; about how freedom of speech is being attacked in a variety of ways; sometimes subtle; sometimes overt. Let's pray.

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to You Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in Your Holy Spirit in thanksgiving for today; that you've made a way for us; that You, Lord, take a pandemic and from it we see new blessings that we would not have had before, even as we lament the way the pandemic has also harmed Your people and the Church. And so Lord for Your Mercy and always moving forward, we pray now for Your guidance and anointing of Your Holy Spirit upon this study of Your Word. And, we also pray, Lord, in the context of this nation and the Church, we are called, Lord, not to be just citizens but to be Christian citizens. And it is our duty Lord, therefore, to be people who pray for this nation. So we do pray, Lord, against the spirit of murder in our nation. We pray, Lord, in great lament for the mass shootings in Atlanta, and Colorado, for the tragic loss of life. We pray, Lord, against anybody who would have such a spirit of murder today. We pray for healing help for those most affected. We also Lord pray against the spirit of death and murder with the abortion industry. We pray that, Lord, against abortion clinics. We pray for changes of heart among doctors and nurses who work there; and for those mothers and fathers who go there. So Lord, we know that You are the Giver of Life. We know that You can bring change and conversions; we do pray for that. And Lord, we pray too for the boldness to speak, even as there are forces, Lord, in our society that would seek to mute us and to cause us to be afraid to speak up. We pray, Lord, that would only be encouragement to us to be evermore bold, in proclaiming Your Truth; because we know Your Truth is the Truth of love. So for all these things and for all the other prayers that we hold in our hearts, we do so in Jesus name. **Amen.**

All right, well, it's good to be with you. And we're going to pick up today, continuing with this section we're calling "**The Judge of the Nations,**" **Ezekiel 27**. So we're in a section now where we are going to hear oracles of prophecy against a number of nations Tyre, Sidon and Egypt in particular. Then after we finish this section, we will go back and hear, in particular, oracles against the rulers of these nations. So the way the Book of Ezekiel is set up, we hear, side by side, God's Word of prophetic judgment against the nations in whole and then against the leaders in particular. So we may or may not get to the next section today, but we will, by God's grace, may finish this section.

So, if you have your handout before you, just a quick preliminary word. We are now in **Ezekiel 27**, which is the lament over the shipwreck of Tyre. We've heard of Tyre in the

New Testament. In fact, just this past Sunday, in John 12, some Greeks come to the Temple in Jerusalem and approach Philip because they wished to see Jesus. Now, if you drill down far enough in the scholarship behind all this, almost certainly they approach Philip because Philip's name is Greek. But Philip's name is not just Greek, it's a Phoenician Greek name, which probably means that the Greeks who come in John 12 are Greeks in Phoenician background which almost positively makes them from Tyre and Sidon.

Now, it's fascinating today, that in the Book of Ezekiel, we're going to hear prophetic utterances against Tyre and Sidon. These were city states in the ancient world, very powerful, very rich. But then 600 years later there are going to be Greeks from Tyre and Sidon who come to Jesus; and, almost certainly, become part of the Christian fellowship by faith. So again, we see the dots to Scripture being connected, that from judgment of these cities, we find some of the first Gentiles coming to Jesus. And, we also have been in Tyre and Sidon before. The Syrophenician woman who comes to Jesus in great petition for healing is from Tyre and Sidon. So these are important places geographically in the Bible. And it's important to see how it all fits together.

So Tyre and Sidon, as we said, last week, were part of a kind of Phoenician confederacy. So, the Phoenicians were seafaring people. They come, but they do not set up, like, one nation. They divide into city nations, city states. And so, the Phoenicians are more in a network, and more of an association of cities than one uber nation. But they are very powerful, and they are fortresses in and of themselves.

Now, the probably the closest approximation today would be, like Singapore. Singapore is the city state, one city that's a nation. Singapore is on the coast, it's very wealthy. It's very, you know, it's a small little city state, but it has enormous influence around the world because of its commercial enterprises, its banking, manufacturing. Hong Kong used to be that way. But, of course, the insidious nature of what's happening with communism in China, is that the Chinese are shutting down Hong Kong as a refuge of democracy. So that's a very alarming turn; and not to get too far afield, but please do pray for Hong Kong because a lot of Hong Kong residents are Christians. Christianity has taken a deep, deep foothold in Hong Kong. And, you don't hear about it, but the backstory for a lot of the protesters advocating for democracy and freedom are coming out of Christian context.

So, we do have some modern parallels, I think, with Tyre and Sidon. And so, in Ezekiel 27, the metaphor for Tyre is that it's a ship that's become shipwrecked. And so we have to understand that when the Ezekiel is writing, Tyre is an island fortress. It's a city state entirely self-enclosed as an island. Huge, a huge fortress of an island. Now over the years, by the time we get to the time of our Lord, 600 or 700 years later, there's enough fill and sediment and other debris that's come into the channel between Tyre and the mainland that now Tyre is a part of the mainland. So by the time of Jesus, the island (of Tyre) has become an extension of the mainland; and so it becomes part of the coast. But back in Ezekiel's day, it was still a self-contained island. It was the one city state that all nations were kind of jealous of; it was extremely wealthy. It had its

commercial tentacles in almost every nation, including Israel, and was the envy of all nations.

But what happens to Tyre is what happens to every nation and person who allows his or her power and wealth to go to their head, whether it's a person or a nation, and pride takes over. And pride, of course, goes before the fall. It was the great C.S. Lewis who said that pride is the chief of all sins, because pride is the deepest, most powerful sin that blocks us from submitting our lives to Christ by faith. And, it goes back to the Garden of Eden, where satan tells Eve, "You don't need God because you can be like God," and that goes to her head, it goes to Adam's head, and then, of course, they're cast out. So we see throughout Scripture, a great teaching against the sin of pride, and Tyre is a great example of that.

**Verses 1-3a of Ezekiel 27 1** The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Now you, son of man, raise a lamentation over Tyre, **3a** and say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrances to the sea, merchant of the peoples to many coastlands, **3b** thus says the Lord God:

*And then we get into the prophesy*

*And so, again you can see that she controls the harbors. So, Tyre is off the coast in the Mediterranean. It's in Lebanon today. Tyre and Sidon are both on the coast of Lebanon. I'm not sure what they're called; there are still remnants of these cities still today, but certainly not like they used to be at all. So Tyre is not a politically powerful city, but commercially powerful, which makes her powerful in many, many ways.*

And then in **Ezekiel 27:3b-11**, we get the magnificence of Tyre's glory. **3b** thus says the Lord God: "O Tyre, you have said, 'I am perfect in beauty.'

*Already you get the pride, perfect, no; no one is perfect*

4 Your borders are in the heart of the seas; your builders made perfect your beauty.  
5 They made all your planks of fir trees from Senir; they took a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you. 6 Of oaks of Bashan they made your oars; they made your deck of pines from the coasts of Cyprus, inlaid with ivory.

*So, you get the metaphor now, that the city is being described as a magnificent ship.*

7 Of fine embroidered linen from Egypt was your sail, serving as your banner; blue and purple from the coasts of Elishah was your awning. 8 The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers; your skilled men, O Tyre, were in you; they were your pilots. 9 The elders of Gebal and her skilled men were in you, caulking your seams; all the ships of the sea with their mariners were in you to barter for your wares. 10 "Persia and Lud and Put were in your army as your men of war.

*"Put" is the ancient name of Ethiopia.*

They hung the shield and helmet in you; they gave you splendor. **11** Men of Arvad and Helech were on your walls all around, and men of Gamad were in your towers. They hung their shields on your walls all around; they made perfect your beauty.

*And so the magnificence of Tyrian glory, as you see the three dimensions of her magnificence; i.e., her superior construction, her impressive decoration and her first class personnel.*

And then the source of the Tyrian glory we see in **Ezekiel 27:12-25**. And this is all about the commercial wealth that she generated. **12** “Tarshish did business with you because of your great wealth of every kind; silver, iron, tin, and lead they exchanged for your wares.

*Tarshish today is on the coast of Spain.*

**13** Javan, Tubal, and Meshech traded with you; they exchanged human beings

*So we've got early reference to human slavery.*

and vessels of bronze for your merchandise. **14** From Beth-togarmah they exchanged horses, war horses, and mules for your wares. **15** The men of Dedan traded with you. Many coastlands were your own special markets; they brought you in payment ivory tusks and ebony.

*So we can see the magnificent trading routes here. We're talking about Asia, Africa and Europe. And so one city has commercial interest with several continents.*

**16** Syria did business with you because of your abundant goods; they exchanged for your wares emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral, and ruby. **17** Judah and the land of Israel traded with you; they exchanged for your merchandise wheat of Minnith, meal, honey, oil, and balm. **18** Damascus did business with you for your abundant goods, because of your great wealth of every kind; wine of Helbon and wool of Sahar **19** and casks of wine from Uzal they exchanged for your wares; wrought iron, cassia, and calamus

*“Calamus” is also called “sweet cane,” and it was grown for medicinal purposes for GI issues. The oil was extracted from the plant.*

were bartered for your merchandise. **20** Dedan traded with you in saddlecloths for riding. **21** Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your favored dealers in lambs, rams, and goats; in these they did business with you. **22** The traders of Sheba and Raamah traded with you; they exchanged for your wares the best of all kinds of spices and all precious stones and gold. **23** Haran, Canneh, Eden, traders of Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad traded with you. **24** In your market these traded with you in choice garments, in clothes of blue and embroidered work, and in carpets of colored material, bound

with cords and made secure. **25** The ships of Tarshish traveled for you with your merchandise. So you were filled and heavily laden in the heart of the seas.

*Obviously, a long observation of the trade and the commerce and the wealth and the luxury of this one island city state.*

*We're going to see eventually that all of this information that Ezekiel puts into the book, in this long oracle ultimately is to emphasize that our strength and our greatness, if it's found in ourselves, will always lead to destruction.*

*So what's happening now is that the Word of God is setting up one of the most envied and esteemed city nations in ancient history. And ultimately, Tyre is going to be shown that she is really nothing. She is just a vapor, because all of her magnificence is tied up in herself for money.*

*And later I'll make an observation that, again, as we've said many times, while the Book of Ezekiel is not quoted explicitly in the New Testament, I would argue that the Book of Ezekiel is foundational to the whole New Testament. And we hear a lot of the teaching of our Lord and the apostles about money and wealth and material goods, right? We all know that. Well, the foundation for our Lord's teaching and the apostolate teaching about how Christians are to understand money; i.e., that is the love of money that's the root of all evil, not money itself, but the love of it goes back to Ezekiel. So this is foundational theology for the whole Bible.*

So then **Ezekiel 27:26-36**, we then get the first mention of the imminent destruction and end of Tyrian glory. **26** “Your rowers have brought you out into the high seas. The east wind has wrecked you in the heart of the seas. **27** Your riches, your wares, your merchandise, your mariners and your pilots, your caulkers, your dealers in merchandise, and all your men of war who are in you, with all your crew that is in your midst, sink into the heart of the seas on the day of your fall.

*“The fall,” of course was Augustine’s classic description of what happens in Eden, the fall of mankind and the sin.*

**28** At the sound of the cry of your pilots the countryside shakes, **29** and down from their ships come all who handle the oar. The mariners and all the pilots of the sea stand on the land **30** and shout aloud over you and cry out bitterly. They cast dust on their heads and wallow in ashes; **31** they make themselves bald for you

*They’re pulling out their hair because they cannot believe that Tyre’s being destroyed because they know that if Tyre goes down what hope do they have.*

and put sackcloth on their waist, and they weep over you in bitterness of soul, with bitter mourning. **32** In their wailing they raise a lamentation for you and lament over you: “Who is like Tyre, like one destroyed in the midst of the sea?”

*It's a rhetorical question, of course.*

33 When your wares came from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with your abundant wealth and merchandise you enriched the kings of the earth. 34 Now you are wrecked by the seas, in the depths of the waters; your merchandise and all your crew in your midst have sunk with you. 35 All the inhabitants of the coastlands are appalled at you, and the hair of their kings bristles with horror; their faces are convulsed. **36** The merchants among the peoples hiss at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.”

*This is ultimately a warning to all nations, that if you put your stock in your wealth, in your own sense of your own strength, you will fall. And so Tyre becomes then emblematic of world history.*

*The rise and fall of nations right, much like Tyre, famously the Roman Empire. What happened to Rome? Well, we all know what happened to Rome. Rome became a cesspool of sin, love of money and sexual sin and destruction of the family and pride. And so, you know, brothers and sisters, it's not a far, far throw from Tyre to Rome to the United States of America. And, we all love our country, but we cannot read the Book of Ezekiel in the 21st century without a great lump in our throat, that this is about America.*

*Now we're not Israel; Israel's unique, but we are grafted into Israel. And in the beginning, our country was set up, both in Jamestown and on Plymouth under Christian impulse. There's no question about that historically. And yet, just in our lifetime, my lifetime, in the last 20 years, last 10 years, we have seen a sea change in this nation that's been mostly of satan.*

*And so, it's not coincidental, I don't think, at least from my life, that this is the first time I've been reading, really reading Ezekiel; not just getting through Ezekiel, but reading it. And, "for such a day as this," the Lord would have us, I think, read Ezekiel like never before.*

*And so just to finish up Ezekiel 27, we can see a couple of **Theological Implications**. We've talked about pride. And then, we talk about the fact that the fate of all nations is ultimately in the hands of the sovereign God.*

*So what do we take away from this? Learn from the pride of Tyre and also learn and humble ourselves because God's in charge and nations always fall under His Lordship whether they realize it or not.*

Questions, comments, observations.

**Terrie:** Mark, I have something I was just thinking about asking and answering my own question that I want to understand what you all think. I was thinking about Tyre being separate from the coast land as an island, and then later, it's not. And why is that? So there might be a tie here that they were powerful. And then they became less powerful.

And so they kind of blended in with everyone else who wasn't set apart. And the word "holy" came to mind, because you taught us "holy" means "set apart." So maybe they self-proclaimed they were "holy," not God—God wouldn't call them holy, probably not in the God sense, but set apart by their own definition. So then they weren't set apart. I just thought maybe their power and their fall from power were connected to the island \_\_\_\_\_ the coast land.

**Mark:** That is a great insight Terrie. And that did not occur to me? To hear you say it, that seems absolutely spot on. So what you're doing is that you're being a good theologian of geography. In Scripture, the land, the geography, has enormous theological importance. And so when I hear you make the observation, that Tyre, this independent set apart, powerful city state, has now just joined everybody else in her fall, that's a great observation. I would say that's the way to look at it. Good point. So glad you shared that.

You all are great students of Scripture and theology. Anybody else, comments, observations, questions on chapter 27?

Let's move on to **Ezekiel 28:20-23**, which is now moving to the Prophet. (We will come back to the first part of Ezekiel 28, the prophecy against the ruler of Tyre.) So let's go to the prophesy against Sidon, a kind of a sister city state, if you will, always under Tyre's shadow, but still a Phoenician city state, smaller, less prominent, but still important. Just a little section here at the end of the chapter. **20** The word of the Lord came to me: **21** "Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against her **22** and say, Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Sidon, and I will manifest my glory in your midst. And they shall know that I am the Lord when I execute judgments in her and manifest my holiness in her; **23** for I will send pestilence into her, and blood into her streets; and the slain shall fall in her midst, by the sword that is against her on every side. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

*So, again, Yahweh's agenda for the nations. Again, Tyre becomes symbolic of all nations. Eventually, we're going to see prophecies against all the nations around Israel. And, Sidon lived in Tyre's shadow. Probably this oracle comes against them, because they entered into a secret alliance with Judah against the Babylonians. And we know what happens when Judah and other nations do that. They are thwarting the actions of Yahweh, and He will not allow it.*

So Yahweh is first determined by His actions to manifest His glory in the city. Secondly, His Holiness; both will be judged and found wanting.

*If you look on your (March 16th) handout, point six, people will sometimes say, "Well, how can you trust the history of Scripture? I mean, isn't it all just made up?" And then, we get these remarkable indications that we find that other historical records confirmed the biblical record. It's interesting that the fall of Sidon into the Babylonians is confirmed by the ancient record that we have of what's called Nebuchadnezzar's Court Register. So, Nebuchadnezzar, eventually turned against Tyre and the besieged Tyre. But, 13*

*years Nebuchadnezzar attacked Tyre. He (Nebuchadnezzar) left without sacking the city; the city was incredibly fortified. It wasn't until the fourth century, around 330 BC, that Tyre ultimately fell to Alexander the Great.*

*We should not think that God's prophecy through Ezekiel didn't come to pass. It's just that God's plans were still a little bit mysterious. But, they came to pass in due season. Sidon also fell to the Babylonians. It fell much easier. It was a smaller city state, less fortified.*

### **Theological Implications**

- Studying the history of Yahweh's involvement in the rise and fall of nations in ancient times must lead us to consider the movement of God among the nations today. In particular, we must ask, "How does God's word in Ezekiel lead us to pray for, and see his judgment at work, in our nation?"
- Any reliance on any power other than God himself will always fail us in the end.

Any other comments along those lines?

**Annette Meyer:** One thing that strikes me so much about all of this is Ezekiel was sitting over as an exile in Babylon. And yet, The Word of the Lord came to him and you know, the Lord spoke to him to make these oracles against places that he was not anywhere close to. He was not in the thick of it with what was going on in those places. And these things came true. I mean, he truly was a prophet. And that's just so powerful to think about. The Word of the Lord was speaking to him. It's not like he was near these places, knowing what was going on.

**Mark:** Annette, that's a great point. I mean, when he got taken away from Jerusalem in the first wave of exiles, he was taken far, far east into Babylon. So he is really far from Tyre and Sidon. So this is truly The Word coming to him. So when you say that, Annette, it makes me think of how, in our lifetime, missionaries are coming to our nation from Africa and Asia, to say, "Listen, America, you first brought The Gospel to us 100, 200 years ago, and now we see what's happening in your nation, and we're coming back to you, as prophets to warn you.

So, we see these connections from history to today, and how we're hearing the warnings against our pride and wealth and sin coming from great Christian leaders, male and female where The Word of God is on fire in the continents of Africa and Asia. The fire has almost gone out in Europe; not quite yet in United States, but certainly in Western Europe it's gone now.

Good, thank you Annette. Other observations?

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I have something I was noticing. In all of these prophecies of Ezekiel, it seems like so many of them end with, "then they will know that I am the Lord, their God." And it makes me think; like today we have all of these things going on. We've got earthquakes and volcanoes and pandemics and locust swarms over in



Africa. And yet, the only people who know that it's God is the believers. And it's like God is wanting the unbelievers to realize that, but they are saying, "Oh, it's climate change and global warming." I'm wondering how these people who are not believers are ever going to understand by seeing these things that are going on that it actually is God who's doing this. See what I'm saying?

**Mark:** That's a great lament. You're absolutely right, Vickie. When I hear you say that, I remember what Paul says in one of his letters that you can't hardly explain spiritual matters to people who are not spiritual, right? So those peoples whose minds and hearts have not been transformed and converted by the Holy Spirit will blame climate change for what's really great spiritual attacks of satan. So you're right. So the only answer is "Maranatha," "Come Lord Jesus, change the hearts, open the eyes of the blind."

Throughout the Lord's ministry, especially in the Gospel of John, we see that those who can see are blind and those who are blind can see, right? So then Shakespeare picked this up in a lot of his plays. King Lear cannot see until he's blinded. So we see this constant observation that until our eyes are fully opened, not by our work, but by the work of The Holy Spirit, can we really see the Truth.

So, we just need to pray. We need to pray for conversion; we need to pray for revival; for repentance. Otherwise, you're right. What we say, what the Bible says, just falls on deaf ears like that silly stuff.

**Vickie:** Doesn't it say somewhere in the New Testament that in the last days God puts a veil over the eyes of unbelievers or something like that?

**Mark:** Paul talks about that with the Jews; that they still have the veil and that needs to be removed so they can see the Lord face to face. Your're right. So, those images are definitely in the Scripture. And you know the other real concern I have is that, we see in Scripture, that when people repeatedly reject God and reject His overtures, not once but over and over, finally the Lord says, "I will give you what you want," and your heart becomes hardened. And, at that point the Lord says, "You rejected me enough times that, well then, you'll have to suffer really what you want and it's going to be suffering.

So, I just pray for softening of hearts. And, I was encouraged today I had coffee this morning with a pastor in town. He reached out; he's been very lonely. He used to get together with four or five ministers in town and then the pandemic hit. They got divided and he's been kind of isolated and first time I ever met him and it was just a (Mark's connection froze) Long story short, he went to First Baptist and almost instantly he fell on his knees and went up front and gave his life to Christ; hee heard The Gospel 17/18 years old. And then he went off to Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, came back did some ministry; didn't work out initially. But, now he's back as a pastor. And so his story is one of true, almost instantaneous conversion. I mean, from zero to sixty. So I hear those stories, and it gives me encouragement that the Lord is working. And we must

not give up, even as we see sadly, those stories are fewer than the stories of rebellion and resistance. So we must never give up. God is God. And we pray, "Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, change the hearts of our friends, our family members, our neighbors. Thank you, Vickie. Other questions or comments before we move into **Ezekiel 30**?

**David Leamon:** Mark, on Sunday, one of the passages in the Beauty class that we looked at was **Ezekiel 28:11-19**, which appears to speak, not only of Tyre but of satan. Are there connections there between chapter 27 we looked at and what we've just been looking at in chapter 28 that you might want to make?

**Mark:** Absolutely. So we're going to get back to chapter 28 with prophecy against the prince and King of Tyre. We haven't gotten there yet. Right? Okay. Put a placeholder on your comment because, yes, I agree. And chapter 28 is one of the prophecies that, from way back when, people have associated with the fall of lucifer and so the whole kind of geology of satan. So **Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14** are the two biggies, along with **Genesis 3 and Revelation 12**. You're right, and I definitely think that we're talking now about background of how it all happened with satan.

So that was brought up in the class on Sunday? I've not listened to the class yet. So did the people in class agree that Ezekiel 28 was functioning as a prophecy about the fall of Satan as well?

**David:** I think so. We didn't spend much time on that. But, but yeah, it was brought up.

**Mark:** Good observation.

We move now into **Ezekiel 30**, the lament, the oracle against Egypt. Now Egypt is going to get the longest material in Ezekiel in terms of judgment because Egypt is a hugely important nation in Biblical salvation history. Egypt initially was the source of life and food for Israel during the time of the famine, that Joseph and his brothers relocate to Egypt. And, and so the people of God, the Hebrews, survived because of sustenance they received in Egypt. But then, of course, it turned against them, they became slaves. And so God judges, the Egyptians, and the Exodus.

Later, Egypt will become the place of safety for the Lord and for Joseph and Mary, when they flee, and we're told this in Matthew chapter two, I guess. So they flee from Herod's murderous ways, and they take refuge in Egypt. Again, we think of Jesus, The Fulfillment of Israel so it makes sense that He would go down to Egypt and come back.

At the same time, Egypt is an adversary of Israel and so in church history, the Coptic Christian Church, the Egyptian Christian Church is one of the oldest defined Christian churches in history. The Coptic church probably goes back to the early second century. And, there's one Coptic church here in Roanoke. The priest looks very much like an Orthodox Jew. He always wears a black robe. He's married and has children at Faith Christian School, as a matter of fact. He has a really long gray beard. He wears a little

black skullcap. So you might mistake him for a Muslim, Iman or an ultra Orthodox Jew with a kippah on his head, but he is a Coptic priest in the Coptic Egyptian church. Egypt has a long history; and Egypt today, in terms of Israel, has a hate/ love relationship with Israel today. Egypt is not overtly after destroying Israel. They do trade and have commerce back and forth, with Egypt still wary of Israel. So Egypt is not Israel's friend or Israel's overt enemy right now. And so it's kind of like, "That's always the way it's been." Israel and Egypt have always had a tenuous relationship with each other.

**Ezekiel 30**, then, is **the day of Yahweh**, which is obviously a very famous prophetic term meaning, "the day of God's judgment." We see in the Book of Joel, where the prophet Joel's whole book is premised on "The day of the Lord" or "The day of Yahweh," which is "The Day of Judgment." We can date this oracle in Ezekiel sometime between January 7th and April the 29th 587 BC. I love that about the book of Ezekiel. You can date some of these so specifically that it's breathtaking.

**Ezekiel 30:1-19** beginning with the first five verses with the Announcement that God's coming to Egypt. **1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** "Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord God: "Wail, 'Alas for the day!' **3** For the day is near, the day of the Lord is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. **4** A sword shall come upon Egypt, and anguish shall be in Cush, when the slain fall in Egypt, and her wealth is carried away, and her foundations are torn down. **5** Cush, and Put, and Lud, and all Arabia, and Libya, and the people of the land that is in league, shall fall with them by the sword.

*Now, that's what the ESV says in verse 5; that's not a great translation "the people of the land that is in league." Literally in the Hebrew "the sons of the land of the covenant." That is a clear reference to Israelites who remained in Egypt and bought into the whole Egyptian culture and became "in league" with the Egyptians.*

*Ezekiel tells us more about the background of Israel and Egypt than even the Book of Exodus does. So, through Ezekiel we get little windows into the history that even in Egypt, many Jews were not faithful. And, after 400 years they became acculturated to the Egyptian ways and, therefore, against God.*

*It's an ominous tone The Day of the Lord, The Day of Yahweh. It's Egypt's pride that prompts this judgment. "The sons of the land of the covenant" living in Egypt would be Jewish troops, who then were mercenaries, if you will, in the Egyptian armies.*

**Ezekiel 30:6-9, The effects of the Day of Yahweh on Egypt's allies** **6** "Thus says the Lord: Those who support Egypt shall fall, and her proud might shall come down; from Migdol to Syene they shall fall within her by the sword, declares the Lord God. **7** And they shall be desolated in the midst of desolated countries, and their cities shall be in the midst of cities that are laid waste. **8** Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have set fire to Egypt, and all her helpers are broken. **9** "On that

day messengers shall go out from me in ships to terrify the unsuspecting people of Cush, and anguish shall come upon them on the day of Egypt's doom; for, behold, it comes!

*Ethiopia is singled out (Cush in the Bible). So many nations depend upon Egypt. I mean we don't think of Egypt today as a super power; and obviously they are not a super power, but in the ancient world Egypt was one of the super powers. They were eventually defeated by The Babylonians, but for centuries Egypt was the premiere power in the ancient world, certainly in the ancient near east. Many countries looked to Egypt as an ally protector. So when Egypt falls, many nations are worried sick.*

**Ezekiel 30:10-12, the agent of the Day of Yahweh in Egypt will be Nebuchadnezzar**

**10** “Thus says the Lord God: “I will put an end to the wealth of Egypt, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. **11** He and his people with him, the most ruthless of nations, shall be brought in to destroy the land, and they shall draw their swords against Egypt and fill the land with the slain. **12** And I will dry up the Nile and will sell the land into the hand of evildoers; I will bring desolation upon the land and everything in it, by the hand of foreigners; I am the Lord; I have spoken.”

*So, He's coming and the land and the people will fall.*

**Ezekiel 30:13-19, the scope of the Judgment of the Day of Yahweh in Egypt**

**13** “Thus says the Lord God: “I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis; there shall no longer be a prince from the land of Egypt; so I will put fear in the land of Egypt. **14** I will make Pathros a desolation and will set fire to Zoan and will execute judgments on Thebes. **15** And I will pour out my wrath on Pelusium, the stronghold of Egypt, and cut off the multitude of Thebes. **16** And I will set fire to Egypt; Pelusium shall be in great agony; Thebes shall be breached and Memphis shall face enemies by day. **17** The young men of On and of Pi-beseth shall fall by the sword, and the women shall go into captivity.

*verse 17, “The young men of On.” That's better known in ancient history as Heliopolis—literally the “Sun City;” center of the worship of Egypt's sun deities. There's a Sun City in Arizona. You probably don't want to move there because it's a bad association. Sun City was the center of the primary deity of Egypt which was the sun god. And so, again you've got different cities and military things.*

**18** At Tehaphnehes the day shall be dark, when I break there the yoke bars of Egypt, and her proud might shall come to an end in her; she shall be covered by a cloud, and her daughters shall go into captivity. **19** Thus I will execute judgments on Egypt. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

*These verses are like a geographic walk; the whole breadth of Egypt is going to fall; some important cities and military outposts throughout the land of Egypt so it's not going to be just in part but in full that Egypt will fall.*

*There's a little bit of hope here because the ray of light is that they are going to know He's God. And so, it's not surprising then that one of the earliest churches in history arises out of Egypt.*

*It's very sad for me while in Jerusalem and we go to Church of the Holy Sepulchre which is the magnificent huge church built over Golgotha, the place of the crucifixion. When Queen Helena, who was Emperor Constantine's mother, a very serious Christian put all of her wealth into sending archaeologists and historians to Israel to find these magnificent Bible sites. Queen Helena's people said that this is the place of the crucifixion so the Greeks built this magnificent Church to preserve it. Within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre you have really serious real estate conflict because one part of the church is run by the Roman Catholic people; one part by the Greek Orthodox people; one part is run by this people; and one little part upstairs with two little rooms, are run by the Ethiopians, Coptic, who came out of Egypt. And they are so poor and have just a few cubic feet that they are allowed. But, basically, the others kind of oppress them. I tell you, brothers and sisters, these tensions with Egypt and Ethiopia and Israel and Christians really continues today.*

### **Theological Implications**

- This section paints a powerful picture of God's absolute sovereignty. All nations and lands are subject to him.
- This oracle warns all who are guilty of pride and who worship idols.
- At the same time, it would offer hope to the exiles: the God who is able to dispose of Egypt in a Day can surely eliminate all other obstacles to their restoration as his people.

But there is hope for restoration.

Last comments or questions before we end?

**Alan Denakas:** Just coming back to Vickie's comment earlier about whether people will recognize the signs of God working. You know, someone said, "There is none so blind as those who will not see." And, I know a speaker I listen to a lot, Frank Turek, often asks students who seem unpersuaded by all the answers he gives to their questions. He just says, "Let me ask you this. If I prove to you to the degree of mathematical certainty that Christianity is true, will you accept it?" And, a lot of them will say, "No." Because it's a question of their will, not their intellect. And, there's a professor, I think his name is Thomas Nagel who said, and I'm pairing down his remarks, he said basically, "I don't want there to be a God because I don't want the universe to be like that," because he wants to live the way he wants to live without any moral restrictions. And so, a lot of people don't want to believe; they don't want to see because they want to live their lives without any moral accountability.

**Mark:** Wow. And only God can change the will of the heart.

**Terrie:** You talked earlier about pride being the deadliest of the seven big sins. It just occurred to me that the gay and other people use this word, “pride” in their parade names, “Gay Pride,” “Gay Parade.”

**Mark:** Good observation; that’s indicative of what we’re dealing with here. Pride has become the rallying cry for a lot of the LGBTQ plus agenda, and that should tell a Christian a lot right there.

**David:** And they’ve taken the symbol of God’s Promise as their flag.

**Mark:** A lot of the Christian Biblical foundation has been appropriated for an agenda that’s opposed to God’s Truths. It’s breathtaking, and the foothold it has is really unbelievable. But, God’s in charge so if we take anything away from Ezekiel, God is sovereign, okay, top to bottom, don’t despair, God’s in charge. We may not see it right now, but God’s in charge.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, we give You thanks that You are our sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We pray, Lord, that we will continue to follow You because, Lord, You have done it all for us. But, we pray for our neighbors, our friends our families who willfully reject You. We pray, Lord, that Your Holy Spirit would convict them; would slay (die to sin) them and then would raise them to new life by grace through faith. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

God bless you; thanks for your time today.

### **Class #24 March 16 Handout through Ezekiel 30 on March 23 Zoom Recording**

#### **Class #24 continues to completion on March 30 Recording with Ezekiel 32:17-32:**

**Opening Prayer:** So we pray to You Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in Your Holy Spirit in great Thanksgiving for this week of all weeks, this Holy Week, in which You entered Jerusalem, Lord, to give Your life for our life; Your death for our death; Your sinless perfection for all the darkness of our sins. So Jesus thank You for Holy Week and how our salvation cries out in great thanksgiving to You for it. So as we study Your Word on this Holy Week, we pray that Your Holy Spirit would guide and stir us into greater knowledge of the Scriptures and to greater obedience of them as well. We give You thanks for these praises today from our sisters, Toni and Linda, for both their personal praises as well as that for their families. And, we all sing out Lord in praise to You. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

We are falling behind. I don't know what your summer plans are, but I still would like to finish this up before Memorial Day. I can test your patience just so long, and then you will all rebel. So we may end up beginning today doing a little more of a summary than drilling down to every detail. But we certainly don't want to skip any of it.

We are now in this section where Ezekiel is speaking God's judgment against both the nations that have assembled around Israel and the rulers of those nations. I think that the two themes we see today and over the next several times are themes that we've talked about many times already; and that is, "pride goes before the fall." It was C. S. Lewis who said that pride is the chief of all sins. Historically in the Church that's always been the case. And secondly, that God is the sovereign Lord of all history; that God governs individual lives as well as the lives of nations and great historical movements. And so, I think another reason why Ezekiel is such an important Book to study here in the year 2021 is because pride is being played out in ways that we never thought; i.e., the pride of self; people even saying, "I am. I recreate myself. I am who I say that I am," vs. "I am how my Creator has made me."

So we have seen the evolution of pride growing to a degree that we've never seen in previous generations. And then secondly, it's such an assurance that God is sovereign; that history is not happenstance. It's not out of control. You and I and the leaders of nations are not in control. But ultimately God's purposes always always are fulfilled. And so these are really important mega themes that we see in Ezekiel that have really contemporary resonance with us today.

So we are actually going to pick up today from the **Class #24 March 16 Handout**, and moving forward. We are now looking at **Ezekiel 32:17-32**. This section describes the prophecy of Egypt's descent into sheol. And, in just a moment we'll talk about sheol, another really important teaching and revelation in Ezekiel; that life does not the end when we die here; that there is eternal life after this. And we'll talk more about sheol and how sheol becomes the Biblical foundation for what then develops by the time we get to the Book of Revelation. So again Ezekiel, not quoted explicitly in the New Testament, but Ezekiel implicitly, underneath all of Scripture. It's an amazing work of God.

Again, Ezekiel is prophesying to the exiles in Babylon; many of whom were still looking at Egypt as Judah's savior. Many of them still held the hope that the Egyptians would come; would attack the Babylonians; cast them away from Jerusalem and Judea; and they could all return home because, "Yay! the Egyptians have saved us." And so over and over and over, God is saying to His people, "You need to trust Me and not these nations that often are wicked nations." And so again, a great teaching for us. Where's our trust, ultimately? Our trust must be in the Lord; and all other sources of trust are illusions.

So let's look at **Ezekiel 32:17-21** as we pick up halfway through the chapter. **17** In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: **18** "Son of man, wail over the multitude of Egypt, and send them down, her and the daughters of majestic nations, to the world below, to those who have gone down to the pit:

*There are many euphemisms for sheol; i.e., "the world below," "the pit," "the netherland/netherworld," word in Hebrew that we see in Ezekiel.*

19 'Whom do you surpass in beauty? Go down and be laid to rest with the uncircumcised.' 20 They shall fall amid those who are slain by the sword. Egypt is delivered to the sword; drag her away, and all her multitudes. **21** The mighty chiefs shall speak of them, with their helpers, out of the midst of Sheol: 'They have come down, they lie still, the uncircumcised slain by the sword.'

*Here we have the preamble and the lament over Egypt's descent into sheol. Egypt gets more attention in the Book of Ezekiel than any other nation; lots of oracles. At the end of this, we'll see there's a ray of hope for Egypt. Egypt has a love/hate relationship with Yahweh and Yahweh's people. On the one hand Egypt, as we said last week, provided the means by which Israel survived the great famine of seven years that fell over that part of the world. Without Egypt and provisions of Egypt; without Joseph being part of Pharaoh's administration, Jacob and his sons would have died. And so Egypt becomes the incubator. Egypt becomes the place where the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph flee and find refuge until it's safe to return to Judea. On the other hand, Egypt also turns Israel into slaves and oppresses them in horrible ways and is punished for that. And then Egypt becomes a nation in which Israel and Judah would enter into allegiance off and on. Sometimes they were allies, Israel and Egypt. And sometimes they were enemies.*

*So historically, from the very beginning of Israel of Jacob and the 12 sons, Egypt and Israel, Egypt and God, have been in a push-pull relationship. And so Egypt gets special attention in Ezekiel because through all that, we have to believe that Egypt has a little soft spot in Yahweh's heart because He appreciates and has used them for His purposes in positive ways, even as He has punished them for the wickedness in other ways.*

*And so today, we look historically at Ezekiel; and then we look at Israel and Egypt today. It's the same thing. Egypt is one of the few countries around Israel that does not explicitly have in their constitution that Israel must be annihilated. There is commerce between Israel and Egypt. So there's a detente there. Now, just a few years ago in 1967 and 1972, Egypt went to war against Israel. And so we see this back and forth in history and in our own lifetime. So I say all that just to confirm to you, brothers and sisters, just to give you further confidence of the continuing power and relevance of the Word of God. Yes, on the one hand, this is ancient history. On the other hand, this is ancient history that completely explains current history and prophetic Word for the future.*

*So if you look at your handout, then at the preamble, we can date this prophetic oracle. And I love this about Ezekiel. So much of this is historically nailed down. March the 18th 585 BC. Isn't that something!! almost 1,436 years ago to the day Ezekiel said this; and we know that; we know that 100 percent.*

*And so God calls Ezekiel to send Egypt down to the pit announcing to Israel, Egypt's doom. They are going down to sheol. (We'll talk about sheol in just a moment.) They're going down to sheol with the uncircumcised. And please remember the Egyptians were*



*circumcised people. From Israel, from the Jews, the Egyptians learned to circumcise. And they practiced it. So, to be with the uncircumcised, even for an Egyptian, let alone for an Israelite, would be the worst possible place to be. And so in the ancient world, there were many points of division between people. And the practice of circumcision or not was one of the prominent points of difference.*

*So they (Egypt) would go down to sheol with the uncircumcised, with murderers, with executioners. They would not be given then a sacred or honorary burial, but a detestable one tossed in a heap in a disposable place. So you know, from your history, that the Egyptians, especially the pharaohs, put enormous time and wealth into their burials. I mean, the pyramids, of course, are the tombs of the pharaohs. A pharaoh or a queen; so pharaohs were both queens and men. So early in their reign, all of them would immediately begin to build their burial tomb. That was the first thing a pharaoh did. And most of the time, the construction of this tomb lasted over most of their lives, because each pharaoh wanted to have a more magnificent tomb than the previous pharaoh. And then as you know from history, the Egyptians would practice that once the pharaoh died, his primary servants would all be executed. Many of his wives would be executed. Not the firstborn, but other children would be executed. Animals would be executed. Provisions would be stored. So they were all embalmed, so that when the pharaoh was entombed, he would not be entombed by himself, but he would be entombed with servants, family, his animals, his camels. So the pyramids had to be huge because they were going to house, not just one person, but a multitude of people and animals.*

*And so when God gives this prophetic oracle against Egypt, He is striking at the very heart of their greatest fear; that they would die without proper burial; because their immortality would depend upon that. They believed that all these people and animals that were sacrificed with them at their death would go with them into the next life. And so God is cutting down the legs of the Egyptians; i.e., where they had their greatest concern and where they put their greatest money.*

**Ezekiel 32:22-32 '22** “Assyria is there,

*Egypt’s going to be with Assyria and Assyria was the epitome of a wicked, awful nation to all the other nations. Nobody liked the Assyrians! Nobody liked the Assyrians!*

and all her company, its graves all around it, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, 23 whose graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit; and her company is all around her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living. 24 “Elam is there, and all her multitude around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised into the world below, who spread their terror in the land of the living; and they bear their shame with those who go down to the pit. 25 They have made her a bed among the slain with all her multitude, her graves all around it, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for terror of them was spread in the land of the living, and they bear their shame with those who go down to the pit; they are placed among the slain. 26 “Meshech-Tubal is there, and all her

multitude, her graves all around it, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for they spread their terror in the land of the living. 27 And they do not lie with the mighty, the fallen from among the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, whose swords were laid under their heads, and whose iniquities are upon their bones; for the terror of the mighty men was in the land of the living. 28 But as for you, you shall be broken and lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword. 29 “Edom is there, her kings and all her princes, who for all their might are laid with those who are killed by the sword; they lie with the uncircumcised, with those who go down to the pit. 30 “The princes of the north are there, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who have gone down in shame with the slain, for all the terror that they caused by their might; they lie uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit. 31 “When Pharaoh sees them, he will be comforted for all his multitude, Pharaoh and all his army, slain by the sword, declares the Lord God. **32** For I spread terror in the land of the living; and he shall be laid to rest among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord God.”

*So when we hear this great prophecy about Egypt and the nations, it's also, I think, an implicit encouragement, to remind us and comfort us that the wicked do not get away with their wickedness. So all these nations, in sheol among the uncircumcised were all wicked nations who do wicked things, and they did not get away with it. So sometimes, like we read in **the Psalms** and throw up our hands and say, “Lord, how long? How can You allow this? Why are these wicked people getting away with all this stuff?” And ultimately, we know they do not.*

*And then in **Ezekiel 32:31-32**, the final word concerning Egypt; that pharaoh will be in sheol with the other victims of the sword who have died dishonorable deaths; and they have been refused an honorable burial for Yahweh will have the last Word.*

We will look at the **Theological Implications**, and then I want to be quiet and get your feedback on this. There are many theological implications from this one little section of Ezekiel 32. And all of them kind of revolve around death and the afterlife and sheol. And you've got some points on your handout about how we begin to understand sheol in the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel, more than any other prophet, gives us a greater insight into what happens when we die. And as we go through Scripture, there's a developing revelation from God until finally we get to **Revelation 19**, where Heaven is the marriage feast of the Lamb of God, and all the saints are there. But we have to read the Bible all the way through to try to get the full revelation of it.

- And what I find extremely important here is that Ezekiel underscores the reality that
- when we die, we are not dust in the wind.
- There is a life after this;
- it is a conscience life;
- we're not living corpses;
- we're not just asleep;

- we know each other,
- we recognize each other.
- Pharaoh recognizes all the other people in the part of sheol in which he is sent.
- There is personal awareness and personal experience of eternity.
  
- And if there's anything about Ezekiel in this section of the Book of Ezekiel, then it's important for us to really understand; we all believe that; we all know that. But we (just)
- have to understand that in the Scripture as God begins to give that revelation very early on that it's not just a New Testament concept.
- Resurrection and life everlasting is not a novel thought that Jesus and His apostles made up on the fly, obviously.
- It is the continuing revelation of God from His Scriptures.
  
- The best way, I think, to understand sheol is to compare it to Paradise.
- By the time we get to the end of Scripture,
- we have this understanding that when we die,
- there is a kind of intermediate holding place, if you will.
- And you can think in broad strokes that the wicked and evil who die apart from Christ are in a place called sheol;
- and those who die in Christ are in Paradise, like the thief on the cross.
  
- Paradise is a wonderful place,
- full of joy and experience and
- we're with the Lord and with each other. Sheol's a gloomy place, full of anticipatory dread and terror.
- But then there's a second coming.
- And then there's the resurrection of the living and the dead
- and the final judgment.
- And then we have a final judgment to hell or to Heaven.

And so it was N. T. Wright, the renowned New Testament scholar, Bishop of Durham who, in fact, preached at St. John about 14 or 15 years ago. We had him here as our theologian resident one weekend. Really it was N. T. Wright's book on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, a massive 1000 page book, that really began to open people's eyes to what the Bible really says about what happens when we die. And it was N. T. Wright **who talks about life after life after death**. And so it's Wright, who teases out all the Scripture, and then begins to put all the pieces of the Bible together; to talk about death, paradise, heaven. So, it's not a linear jump from one to the other. You need to kind of look at it from different angles and really kind of push and pull a little bit on it. But, I think we certainly begin to see that here in Ezekiel 32.

Let me stop here for questions or comments.

**Linda Handy:** Question. Compare the dark and gloomy sheol to Paradise, the light place, to Catholic purgatory? How does that relate to purgatory?

**Mark:**

- It's a good question and certainly my guess is there will be some good Catholic scholars who would love to answer that question much better than I can.
- One of the big differences is that Paradise is in the Scripture.
- The Lord clearly points to paradise.
- Purgatory is not (in Scripture).
- Purgatory is inferred from 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, where Paul talks about a continuing refinement; a fiery refinement, if you will, in order to go into Heaven.
- You really have to use your imagination, but there's this one Scriptural text that seems to suggest some sort of purgation, which is a fiery trial to burn away sins, that we bring with us when we die so that we go into Heaven sinless.
- Explicitly, purgatory is mentioned kinda sorta in the apocrypha, those books that Catholics have but that Protestants do not.
- Martin Luther removed the apocrypha from the protestant Bible because he said
- the Jews do not see them as Scripture and neither will we.
- But the Catholics continue to hold the apocrypha as scripture.
- There are about four or five verses in the apocrypha, I forget which book it is, that speak a little bit more directly about some sort of process of purging purgation before you go into Heaven.
  
- So I would say the biggest difference is when you're justified by Christ's blood.
- In other words when you're saved,
- is the full forgiveness of God over you?
- Are you cleansed?
- Now, yes we need continuing (*forgiveness/cleansing*) for the sanctification of our lives.
- Or does that justification process still continue after we die?
- The Catholics would say that it continues after death; therefore, purgatory is needed to finish it and to get rid of all the other sins that are still clinging to us.
- And that might take a long, long time.
- (*Catholics believe*) And then, we can go to Heaven because we have to be pure.
  
- Well really, in the Protestant Reformation this was a huge topic, a huge debate.
- And those that followed the Protestant leaders, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer and others, said (and believed) justification was (*is*) by Christ alone through grace alone, by faith alone; it was total; and we were redeemed totally.
- Sanctification then continues beautifully as the Holy Spirit continues to work on us.
- But our justification is a one; it's done; praise God; we're saved,
- even as we say, "Lord, please continue to shape us into more and more Your people through Your Holy Spirit."
  
- So you see, purgatory gets at some of these great debates that have happened in the Church over 500 years over different theological interpretations.

- Not that we get a lot in the Bible about it, but Paradise is generally understood as not a purgation event.
- We don't go to Paradise to get the rest of our sins burned off;
- we go to Paradise to be with our Lord in the most beautiful wonderful setting we can imagine
- until we get to Heaven and then that will blow our mind again.
  
- So it really becomes kind of a Catholic/Protestant divide;
- that we're done;
- we're justified,
- we're cleansed;
- we go to Paradise;
- we enjoy it;
- we go to Heaven
- and He (God) blows our mind for eternity.
  
- Whereas, purgatory is a continuing,
- not very nice experience,
- where pain and suffering are still felt
- because to have a purgation is to go through a trial by fire.

That's a long answer. I would love to have a Catholic here to say where I was wrong, but that's how I have always understood it.

**Linda:** In very simple terms, "All good people go to Paradise."

**Mark:** What do you mean by "good people?"

**Linda:** Believers in God.

**Mark:** All those in Christ, yes.

**Linda:** But those before Christ, believers in God who did not know Christ, who were waiting for The Messiah; those who died before Christ, where are they going?

**Mark:** Right.

- So getting back to Ezekiel, in sheol not every part of sheol is the same, right?
- There's a part of sheol for the uncircumcised—bad, terrible, you don't want to be there.
- And there's a part of sheol for the circumcised—well not great but, you know, we'll take it.
- So within sheol, you know, what the realtor says, "it's location, location, location."
- So that's the way it is in sheol.

**1 Peter 3:18-22** 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

**1 Peter 4:1-7** 1 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. 3 For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. 4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. 7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

- So remember in 1 Peter where we get to, "He descended into hell" in the Apostle Creed. That's where we get that. 1 Peter 3 (*1 Peter 4*), I think. Where Jesus goes (descends into hell), it's a victory lap through sheol, through hell, to laugh in satan's face.
- But is also to bring The Gospel to those who died before His death and resurrection,
- who need to be brought out of sheol into Paradise into Heaven,
- Noah, Abraham, Moses. So there is then in the New Testament still this echo of Ezekiel that those (*shift in dialogue*).
- We are only saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- There is no salvation apart from that. Zero.
- So for those who lived faithfully in Yahweh before Christ;
- God's not going to penalize them, saying, "Hey, too bad you got born before 33 AD; you're out of (it)." No, of course not.
- So, Jesus' death and resurrection, the only way of salvation, is for all those of God before Him and for all those of God after Him.
- This idea of sheol implicitly is carried into that idea that Jesus has gone.
- And so within sheol itself, not all parts are the same.

**Mark:** Now I said more than I know, I have reached the Peter's Principle where I have been elevated way beyond my knowledge. This is one of the reasons why Jesus said,

- “Don't worry about the next one;
- don't get all consumed about what happens (*next*).
- Just be faithful now and trust that God's going to work it all out.

**Mark:** So my final advice to you and to all of us is,

- “Trust God;” it's all going to be good
- even as people have fought wars over it for all these years.
- I mean these are things that really get people stirred up.
- And in the era of the 16th century,
- this was a huge stirring up point (*as to*) what happens.

**David Leamon:** Doesn't **1 Corinthians 1:9** say that we will be cleansed from all our sins when we confess them?

**1 Corinthians 1:1-9** **1** Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, **2** To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: **3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **4** I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, **5** that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— **6** even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—**7** so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, **8** who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness

**2 Corinthians 5:17-21** **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. **20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Hebrews 10:19-31** **19** Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, **20** by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good

works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 29 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." **31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

**1 Corinthians 3:10-15** **10** According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. **11** For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— **13** each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. **14** If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

- That is the text from the New Testament on which the Catholics built purgatory:
- 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, the one and only text (for that), but that is it and then a brief reference to the apocrypha.
- Our work will be tested, but the believer will be saved. That's how I read it. What are your thoughts about that?
- Yes, Alan, that's the way I would read it.
- It gets at the bigger teaching of the apostle Paul who was a great law abiding Jew;
- that we're not saved by works.
- Paul would say that we're made for works,
- but we're not saved by them,
- and they do not become the reason why we're saved;
- they become the purpose by which we glorify God.

#### Mark:

- That's what the reformers were latching onto because purgatory fed right into indulgences.
- So the whole indulgence thing;
- to buy this piece of paper signed by the pope to get one's self out of purgatory
- was all all wrapped up in this commerce
- that they (*Reformers*) thought attacked at the very heart of The Gospel.
- So when we start talking historically about purgatory
- we are talking about indulgences
- and how forgiven



- and what does it mean to be saved
- and it's a big long story.
- So, you know, thankfully Catholic theology has not remained static.
- It has changed some.
- For example, I forget what day it was, but it wasn't that long ago in the 20th century, so am thinking 50 or 60 or 70 years ago, Catholics decided that “Limbo” was no longer to be believed as a doctrine. Limbo was this, what I would call, very cruel doctrine, that any baby or child who died without baptism would be in Limbo forever. And Limbo, according to ancient Catholic doctrine, is not a pleasant place. Can you imagine being a little baby, two years old, six months old, stuck in limbo for eternity. It's pretty horrendous.
- But that was Catholic teaching up until the 20th century where thankfully, by God's grace, for the sake of Catholic consciences, they omitted that; erased that from doctrine. That's no longer to be taught.
- So you know, we're all works in progress.
- Lutherans don't have, by any stretch of the imagination, the final word on this.
- I mean, some of the things Martin Luther said were were pretty horrendous.
- Some of the things he said were glorious.
- So it's all a mixed bag.

**Mark:** C.S. Lewis, in his book “Letters to Malcolm,” talked about his belief in purgatory. Lewis was Anglican not a Catholic, but he appreciated the doctrine. But, his take was that when he dies, the Lord will say to him, “Come into your heavenly rest, Clyde Staples Lewis.” And, he would say, “But no, Lord, I need more classes. I need more refining. I want to serve you beautifully. So please, is there something I can do because heaven is so beautiful. I just want to be more appreciative of You before I come in.” And so C. S. Lewis’ idea of purgatory was not a punishing fire because he wasn't saved. But, (instead) it was something he would choose because he wanted to be more prepared for Heaven than less (prepared). So Lewis had this nuanced, not really Scriptural but more theological, hope that purgatory was a voluntary experience, and that he would volunteer for it in a heartbeat.

Other comments or questions?

**Alan Denekas:** Mark, I read that passage in Corinthians. Paul’s talking about people's works in the context of the different speakers or teachers that the Corinthians congregation is divided over. So he's talking about the work they do; and the fruit they bear; and the churches they build and plant; and the communities they build. And the way I read it is that he’s (Paul’s) talking about their works being burned up. And if you haven't sewn on a sound foundation your work will be demolished, but you're still saved.

**1 Corinthians 3:10-15 10** According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let

each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Our work will be tested, but the believer will be saved. That's how I read it. What are your thoughts about that?

**Mark:** Thank you and David both, Alan. That is the text from the New Testament that Catholics built purgatory on; that is the text; that's the one and only text, but that is it and then a brief reference to the apocrypha.

Yes, Alan, that's the way I would read it. It gets at the bigger teaching of the apostle Paul who was a great law abiding Jew; that we're not saved by works. Paul would say that we're made for works, but we're not saved by them, and they do not become the reason why we're saved; they become the purpose by which we glorify God.

### **Theological Implications**

- Ezekiel has as much, if not more, to say about death and the afterlife as any other Biblical author. He must not be ignored on these matters.
- First, sheol represents the lowest level in Ezekiel's three-tiered universe. Chapter 31 perhaps best illustrates this view of the universe. The "Pit" and "netherworld" are synonyms for sheol.
- Second, sheol is perceived as a massive communal cemetery, in which graves are arranged by nationality, with the principal grave in the center, surrounded by the graves of attendants. It is also subdivided into compartments by class, those being buried with honor separated from those buried dishonorably.
- Third, sheol is a place to which the wicked are consigned. Those who practice oppression and demonstrate pride meet their due reward in the hereafter.
- Fourth, in sheol the deceased live on as "living corpses." They are not disembodied spirits but whole persons. They are not asleep but fully conscious. They know each other.
- Fifth, Yahweh alone holds the key to death and sheol. He determines everyone's ultimate fate.

**End of Class #24 March 16 Handout on Zoom Recording for March 30.**

## Class #25 March 23 Handout on March 30 Zoom Recording (Location 45:12)

Let's continue by going to **Ezekiel 28** to discuss satan and the fall of satan. Where do we get the genealogy of satan? There's not a chapter in the Bible that completely lays it out chronologically, but God's revelation is very clear that Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 are the two primary texts where we get the genesis of satan. This follows our discussions about "sheol" and ultimately the sheol euphemism "the pit" that we recognize from Revelation. Satan will be cast down to "the pit." What is "the pit?" For that, we will you go back to Ezekiel. So, we can see how the dots connect, right?

We have moved from the last section of the Ezekiel, prophecies/oracle's against nations into prophesies/oracles against the kings of those nations. There's a little bit of redundancy, but it's important because we recognize that God is sovereign over the movement of nations and God is sovereign over the movement of people. Jesus Christ is the sovereign King of our life, personally, as well as the movement of the United States of America and communist nation of China and \_\_\_\_\_(fill in the blank). It is a beautiful, important way to understand that God is our God of the big picture; and God is our God of every detail within that picture. He knows the forest and He knows the trees and He holds it all in His hands.

**Ezekiel 28:1-10** *beginning with the oracles against the prince, the king of Tyre. Last week we talked about Tyre the Phoenician city state; important commercially, politically, etc. and two themes "pride before the fall," "God's in charge."*

**1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord God: "Because your heart is proud, and you have said, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,' yet you are but a man, and no god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god—**3** you are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you; **4** by your wisdom and your understanding you have made wealth for yourself and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries; **5** by your great wisdom in your trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth—**6** therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you make your heart like the heart of a god, **7** therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you, the most ruthless of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor. **8** They shall thrust you down into the pit, and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas. **9** Will you still say, 'I am a god,' in the presence of those who kill you, though you are but a man, and no god, in the hands of those who slay you? **10** You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners; for I have spoken, declares the Lord God."

*The king of Tyre has become arrogant and claims to be divine and to have divine authority and divine intelligence. God is going to send invaders and destroy him. For 13 years the Babylonians besieged Tyre, an island that withstood that siege because it was incredibly well fortified. Tyre had natural water springs, food, walls all around it. But, it's not going to be until Alexander the Great, about 200 years later, that Tyre is going to fall and be completely destroyed. God's Word is certainly true; Tyre and its king are*

*destroyed, but sometimes God's prophetic Word doesn't always fit the time that we think it's going to happen, but it always happens.*

**Ezekiel 28:11-19 11** “Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me: 12 “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord God: “You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created, they were prepared. 15 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. 16 In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. 17 Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you. 18 By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; so I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you. **19** All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.”

*So the king is now compared to a seal or to a signet ring. Seal signified authority so the king was deputized to be Yahweh's divine presence in Paradise. He's compared to Eden, and adorned with gemstone(s). He's God's creative work. And he's identified as a guardian cherub of the Holy Mountain of God. What he has been given by the grace of God is extraordinary. And so, he's Yahweh's officially designated signet, his guardian cherub, his gardener. And yet his soul is rotted within him. He has been corrupted by his pride, self-wisdom, and he is banished to sheol forever.*

*Another reason I love Scripture is that it never operates on a one dimensional plain. Scriptures are always three, four or five dimensional. This is a perfect example. So on the one hand, this is obviously a prophetic utterance of judgment that will come to the king of Tyre. And that happens; historically as a fact that happens. But the way the prophecy is spoken, readers of Scripture over the years have understood this to also point, as a type, to the fall of satan. Because notice in this section, **verse 13** for example, “you were in Eden, the garden of God.” Well, no. No, the king of Tyre was not in Eden, not the historical king. Of course not. But who was in the garden? The serpent, who is satan. In Eden the king is adorned with these beautiful, precious stones. Isn't the last sentence of verse 13, “on the day that you were created” interesting? It doesn't say “born.” It says “created.” Angels, the angelic hosts of heaven, are not born; they are created.*

**Verse 14** “You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.”

*Only time in all of Scripture is a human being, in this case, the king of Tyre, equated to an angelic being, in this case, a cherub? Well, no, the king of Tyre was not a cherub in the garden. So there's got to be more going on here than at first blush, and so for those reasons... (did not continue this sentence; ended it here)*

And then in **Ezekiel 28:15** "You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you."

*So then the king, the cherub gets cast out of the garden, which is obviously symbolic of Heaven to sheol.*

*Since the time of the church fathers very early in the history of Christianity, this part of Ezekiel 28 has always been read as a revelation of the background of how in the world did this key angel of the Lord in Heaven turn out to be fallen satan, the evil one.*

*The comparison begins to take off in **Isaiah 14:12**. This is God through Isaiah taunting the king of Babylon. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!*

*"Day star," Lucifer. One of the names of satan.*

**Isaiah 14:13-15** You said in your heart, '**I will** ascend to heaven; above the stars of God

**I will** set my throne on high. **I will** sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north;

14 **I will** ascend above the heights of the clouds; **I will make myself like the Most High.**'

15 But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

- You see how those compare; how that's so close?
  - A very obvious reference to Lucifer; i.e. satan.
  - That combined with **Revelation 12** and **Genesis 3**, and you come out with this idea
  - that before history,
  - before God created,
  - there in Heaven with all the hosts,
  - lucifer the day star, the head angel with all the angels
  - to the point where he got so full of himself with pride,
  - that he wanted to be like God and take over from God.
- And, of course, that's the most ludicrous hubris of all.
  - And he gets cast out.
  - When he gets cast out all the angels that were part of his coup said, "Yeah, Lucifer, we'd like to serve you and not Yahweh,"

- and (*they*) get cast out with him
- resulting in the demons and evil spirits.
- So demons, evil spirits, satan, are all angelic figures,
- who got cast out of Heaven because, just like the king of Tyre, pharaoh of Egypt, and Israel and Judah,
- their pride got to them.
  
- And then you look back at Genesis 3 when the serpent satan tempts Eve.
- What does he say to her?
- He (serpent/satan said, the very sin that he did, because misery loves company.
- In Genesis 3:5 where the serpent satan says, “For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be open, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
- Satan is passing his sin directly to humankind because he wants to be like God,
- which is a way to say he wants to be God.
  
- What does he tempt the first couple to do?
- The same exact sin.
- The sin of Heaven is the sin of the earth.
- That we don't want God to be God,
- we want to be God.
  
- And that, brothers and sisters, is exactly the sin that we're dealing with in the 21st century in spades.
- This is the sin which causes people to say,
- “You can't tell me who I am.
- **I will** create myself in my own image.
- **I will** tell you who I am.
- **I will** tell you my pronouns.
- **I will** tell you my gender.
- **I will** tell you what is right and wrong.
- **I will** tell you what I think and what I think is right for me.”
  
- **What does that sound like?**
- **“I am the sovereign of my life.”**
- That's Genesis 3;
- that's Isaiah 14;
- that's Ezekiel 28;
- **that's what we're dealing with today.**

So we didn't get that far and only have a couple minutes left for feedback from you all.

**Alan Denekas:** I couldn't agree more, Mark, I think you hit the nail right on the head.

**Mark:**

- It sends chills down my spine,
- just to see how all the dots are connected.
- And, we're in a dark time.
- We live by the grace of God
- and we are a people have hope.
- And we have joy in the midst of this darkness.
- And nothing's going to take that away.
  
- But we have to (STOP/STUDY) recognize
- that we're living in a time
- in which the foundational sin of Scripture is,
- "I want to be like God.
- I don't want God to be God,
- I want to be God."
  
- It is coming to pass so quickly,
- in our lifetime,
- before our very eyes.
- It is worse today than it was a year ago.
- It's worse today than it was five years ago.
- I shudder to think what it is going to be like five years from now.
  
- So we just need to get on our knees.
- We need to pray
- because the temptation of satan and his minions is getting louder and more tempting all the time.

Alright, brothers and sisters, thank you. We will pick up next Tuesday, **April 6th** with **Ezekiel 29:1-16**, God willing, with the oracle against Pharaoh, the crocodile of the Nile.

So we'll try to do a little bit faster next week. But I do appreciate your feedback, your questions and your insights. Anyone want to pray us home?

**David Leamon:** "Lord, we thank you. We thank you for making us Your own. And we thank you for the promise in **1 Corinthians 3** and other places in Your Word that we can know that we're born again. And we also thank You for the promise that walking with You in obedience to You and building on the foundation laid in our lives gives us hope of reward, eternal reward. We thank you for both the security of our salvation and the opportunity for reward. And we know that whatever You have for us is worth being obedient to You in order to gain. We thank you for being with us today and we ask You to go with us. In the name of Jesus. Amen."

Amen. God bless you all. See you soon. We will pick up next Tuesday, April 6th with **Ezekiel 29:1-16**.

Continuation of Class #25 March 23 Handout, April 6 Zoom Recording

We can say “Happy Easter” for awhile longer, as the season lasts until Pentacost with 50 days of Easter. And on the 50th Day, the Holy Spirit came down in Pentacost at the Great Feast of Jerusalem. We have a long time to celebrate our Lord’s resurrection.

We will begin today with **Class #25 Ezekiel 29:1-16 March 23 Handout**. We’ll get through that and finish today with **Class 26, "The Conscience of Kings, March 30 Handout**. You did not find a new handout for today so we can get caught up. I am feeling pretty confident we'll be able to **finish the Book of Ezekiel study on May, the 25th which is the Tuesday before Memorial Day**, which was my hope all along. Next week we'll do **“Ezekiel the Pastor,” which is Ezekiel 34**; the last two Tuesdays of April we'll finish “Ezekiel The Herald of Good News,” which will leave us a month of Tuesdays to finish “The Apocalypse” and “The new Moses.” Now obviously, the last part of our study is engaging the **last eight chapters of Ezekiel 40-48**. I think we're on track to finish; and I do appreciate you all hanging in. It can be a long time to spend a whole year in a book of the Bible. Your contributions and your faithfulness have been very encouraging and I love your questions and comments.

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to You Lord in Your Holy name, the name of God the Father Son and Holy Spirit, in great thanksgiving for this amazing book of prophecy. We thank You Lord for the faithfulness of Ezekiel, but we thank You most of all for Your faithfulness Lord in ancient times and in times today. You're always so faithful to bring Your people Lord from their sins, to You and to Your grace and to turn us back to You, even as we live in a world Lord increasingly turning away from You. So may Your Word now reach us deeply as we continue our study. We pray this to Your glory always, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

**Ezekiel 29:1-16** I'll go ahead and read that whole section, the continuing prophecies against Egypt. And as we said, there are more prophecies directly against Egypt than any other nation, and we can understand the Biblical complexity of Egypt and Israel and the historic interplay they've had. Ezekiel brings God's judgment against the kings and rulers of the world. So this oracle is specifically against the Egyptian pharaoh that really is “The crocodile of the Nile.” Ezekiel 29 is a prophecy against Egypt; but, in particular, a prophecy against the Egyptian king the pharaoh.

**Ezekiel 29:1-16** **1** In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: **2** “Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt; **3** speak, and say, Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, ‘My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.’ **4** I will put hooks in your jaws, and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales; and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams, with all the fish of your streams that stick to your scales. **5** And I will cast you out into the wilderness, you and all the



fish of your streams; you shall fall on the open field, and not be brought together or gathered. To the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the heavens I give you as food. 6 Then all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the Lord. "Because you have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel, 7 when they grasped you with the hand, you broke and tore all their shoulders; and when they leaned on you, you broke and made all their loins to shake. 8 Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will bring a sword upon you, and will cut off from you man and beast, 9 and the land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste. Then they will know that I am the Lord. "Because you said, 'The Nile is mine, and I made it,' 10 therefore, behold, I am against you and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Cush. 11 No foot of man shall pass through it, and no foot of beast shall pass through it; it shall be uninhabited forty years. 12 And I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of desolated countries, and her cities shall be a desolation forty years among cities that are laid waste. I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through the countries. 13 "For thus says the Lord God: At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered, 14 and I will restore the fortunes of Egypt and bring them back to the land of Pathros, the land of their origin, and there they shall be a lowly kingdom. 15 It shall be the most lowly of the kingdoms, and never again exalt itself above the nations. And I will make them so small that they will never again rule over the nations. **16** And it shall never again be the reliance of the house of Israel, recalling their iniquity, when they turn to them for aid. Then they will know that I am the Lord God."

*So this prophetic Word of the Lord we see and know that in every way historically it was fulfilled. Overall, what we're finding here is that Ezekiel is prophesying that The Lord will send out Nebuchadnezzar to the Babylonians who will devastate and conquer Egypt and humble them; that's exactly what happened. And then you see there's a reversal, just as Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness after escaping from Egypt, now, Egypt will have its own 40 years of wilderness, of humility. But then at the end, the hope is there that the kingdom will be restored, but it will not be prideful. It will be a humble kingdom, and they will never rule over the nations. And that's exactly, to the letter, of what happened. And so the Bible says we can trust that when prophecy is from God and when it comes to pass, we can trust this prophetic utterance once again. So looking at your notes, Ezekiel is going to turn to Egypt now for the next section, the next four chapters. As we have said, it's the Babylonians who will humble Egypt.*

*I believe last week I mentioned that Egypt has a hate/love relationship with Israel. It was first an incubator that saved Israel from famine when Jacob and His sons relocated there. Then it became a slave master over the Jews and then they entered into this political alliance with king Zedekiah and Judah. And so, finally now they're going to be humbled. But by the grace of God we've also said recently that Egypt has one of the oldest Christian presence in churches in history. The Coptic church, the Egyptian church goes back to the very, very early first century when the apostles brought the Word of God to Egypt. And so, the Egyptian church is quite ancient and quite faithful to this day. And they are under huge persecution in Egypt. Egypt has had a love/hate*

*relationship with Christians as well as with the Jews. And right now in Egypt, it's not a safe time to be a Christian. It is a very dangerous time. We don't hear a lot about it. And that's unfortunate, but let's not forget to pray for the Egyptians in our prayers.*

*So we know that the opening date fixes this prophecy on January 7, 587 BC. That's almost a year after the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem. And it's gonna be two years before the fugitives bring the news of the fall of the city of exiles. We live in a day of instantaneous news that back in the day it would take years to get reports like this. We know that the pharaoh, at this time of Ezekiel's prophecy, goes by two names. He is known as "Hophra." And he also is known by the name of "Apries." You can Google his name and see again that this prophetic Word came exactly to him. He was defeated at the battle of the Babylonians during this time when God is humbling Egypt. Ezekiel uses a kind of satirical form to deride pharaoh. He calls him, "the great dragon." Literally it's "the great crocodile." I guess if we were to read this in the English translations, "oh you great crocodile," maybe that wouldn't cause us to think much about it. Dragon certainly has a larger more fearsome image, but, we understand that, you know, it's better to use as much literal translation as we can so I certainly would encourage us to think of this as what Ezekiel actually said, "That you think you're a great threat crocodile", and we can understand that, with the Nile and the crocodiles, that would be an image that would resonate very closely.*

*And again, the Lord's going to punish him for his arrogance, his pride. I mean, if there's, if there's an uber theme in Ezekiel, it is that pride always gets judged by God. The pride of Israel Judah; the pride of Egypt, Assyria, the pride of Babylonians. There is a clear calling, brothers and sisters, "beware of the sin of pride." When we get too full of ourselves; when we take more credit for this or that than we give glory to God, we fall under God's judgment. And that's true for individuals; it is true for churches, and it's certainly true for nations.*

*So then the particular charge against pharaoh is that he had entered into a military political alliance with king Zedekiah to defeat the Babylonians. And again, we've seen throughout Ezekiel that any country that tries to thwart God's plans to use Babylon to punish His people, that country will also be punished. But Egypt cannot help Judah; it's only a reed crutch, which you can imagine is the image of weakness, as in putting pressure on the reed and as a result it collapses. So Israel Judah is not going to find any true strength through Egypt.*

*God is going to take pharaoh, the great crocodile, and cast him out and a crocodile left out in the sun, in the wilderness, apart from any water, will die and become just the food of vultures and other animals. And so God says that for 40 years Egypt will be laid waste. And guess what? The Babylonians had about a 40-year reign in Egypt. So again, this is an exact prophetic utterance. But then there's the ray of hope in Ezekiel:14-15, that God will restore Egypt, but it'll be humble, and smaller, and never again will it rule other nations.*

**Theological Implications** God is the Ruler of history, and those who stand in God's way are His enemies and they will be punished. So, these are themes that we continue to see. And, anytime in the Bible, especially within one book of the Bible, we find the same message repeated. Obviously, that's a strong indication that those are messages that we need to really listen to closely.

So that's the first part of Ezekiel 29. Questions, comments?

**Alan Denekas:** One interesting little sidebar is that the liturgical language that the Coptic Church still uses is actually a dialect of ancient Egyptian; the same languages that were spoken by the pharaohs.

**Mark:** I did not know that. Do you speak that, Alan?

**Alan:** No, just that when they had a little festival at the Coptic Church on Garst Mill Road, I went to it and just learned a little bit about it.

**Mark:** Wow. You know, I've never been that church or talked to the priest there, but that would be fascinating to do that. The Coptic church still is very much an Egyptian ethnic kind of church. I don't know, in terms of evangelism how many American westerners would be active in the Coptic church, but my guess is they continue to draw mostly from those with ethnic ties to Egypt. And certainly, the Egyptian language is still important, as Alan said, even the ancient Egyptian language.

Okay, continuing in **Ezekiel 29:17-21** **17** In the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: **18** "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre. Every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare, yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor that he had performed against her. **19** Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall carry off its wealth and despoil it and plunder it; and it shall be the wages for his army. **20** I have given him the land of Egypt as his payment for which he labored, because they worked for me, declares the Lord God. **21** "On that day I will cause a horn to spring up for the house of Israel, and I will open your lips among them. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

*We'll get back to very important verse in this Ezekiel Scripture, verse 21.*

*So, Ezekiel received this oracle on New Year's Day, which makes it April 26, 571, BC. So again, we're studying the Book of Ezekiel in the same timeframe, in terms of the year, that these oracles come. I find that just helpful to build an immediate connection to this book. So this is the latest of all the prophetic utterances. All the others came earlier.*

*Now we know historically the Babylonians did God's will and they besieged Tyre for 13 years, but as we've noted before, Tyre was an island city state, extremely well fortified and self sufficient and even the Babylonians could not break the walls of Tyre and destroy it completely. But that does not mean that God's plans were thwarted or were not accurate; just means that the Babylonians were thwarted at Tyre, but that just gave another way for God to use Egypt as a place to replenish the Babylonians. So it all works out in God's plans.*

*We know that finally Tyre fell around 231 BC under Alexander the Great. And then this section ends in verse 21 That God is going to give Egypt over to Nebuchadnezzar to repay all of His military costs for the long siege of Tyre. On the one hand, how can one verse (21) in Ezekiel be this important? **Ezekiel 29:21** is one of the great messianic promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. God will cause a horn to spring up from the house of Israel. We will recognize that horn immediately as a way to express the Messiah. It's in **Psalms 132**; throughout the book of Daniel; quoted prophetically in **Luke 1:69**, obviously getting us ready for the birth of The Messiah. This is part of Zachariah's prophesy; Zachariah being the father of John the Baptist. And so He's filled with the Holy Spirit at the Temple and he prophesied saying, **Luke 1:69** "and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David."*

*This prophetic utterance connects us to David and connects us to Jesus. And in looking at the whole Bible, we can see its importance. At the end of this prophecy, again, there is also this prophecy that God's coming in The Messiah.*

*I love that there's so much Messianic prophecy in Ezekiel. And when we finish up in May, especially with the Temple in the last eight chapters, that is just chocked full of Messianic hope and prophecies; that is just wonderful!*

#### **Theological Implications** for this short section:

- God often uses human agents to achieve His agenda in the world.
- His ways are often a mystery to us. We cannot fully know all the ways of the LORD in this life, but we are called to trust Him fully.
- The primary prophetic message through Ezekiel and every prophet is God's call to us to believe in Him, repent from our sin, and follow Him in obedience. Those are themes that we see throughout Scripture and certainly throughout Ezekiel.

Feedback, questions or comments about that? We must not read Ezekiel in a spiritual vacuum without being prompted to say, "Where are You working among the nations today? Where has our nation become full of pride and thus falling under Your judgment? Where are other nations doing that? Where are we sinning and where are we falling away from You, Lord?" We can't really answer those questions right now, but these are certainly questions that we can bring to God in prayer.

**Class #26 March 30 Handout - Zoom Recording April 6, 2021**

If there are no other questions or comments, we'll finish up this section in Ezekiel called **"The Conscience of kings."** So we continue now with the prophetic utterance against pharaoh in Egypt in **Ezekiel 30:20-26** **20** In the eleventh year, in the first month, on the seventh day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: **21** "Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and behold, it has not been bound up, to heal it by binding it with a bandage, so that it may become strong to wield the sword. **22** Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt and will break his arms, both the strong arm and the one that was broken, and I will make the sword fall from his hand. **23** I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them through the countries. **24** And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put my sword in his hand, but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he will groan before him like a man mortally wounded. **25** I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall. Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt. **26** And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

*Very graphic description of what God is going to do to pharaoh. Obviously the key Word, the key image is "arms, break the arms of pharaoh." Pharaoh had about 27 or 28 different titles, and one was "possessor of a strong arm." So obviously, this oracle of judgment is going directly against how pharaoh himself projected himself. So we know that this is dated April 29, 587 BC. And as we've noted before, it's in response to pharaoh's interference with Nebuchadnezzar's siege in Jerusalem.*

*So God will break the arms of this mighty king because the arm of The Lord is far and wide here. And then in the end when they are humbled and broken by the Babylonians, the Egyptians will acknowledge Him.*

*The Babylonians, for a time, were a mighty people and the agent of God in His purposes. But of course, in the end, the Babylonians too fell under His judgment and were no more.*

**Theological Implications:**

The arms of the strongest nation in the world crumble before God's mighty power; true then; true today. But I also think as we read Ezekiel and as we think about all this warfare, we do need to keep in mind and it's borne out in Ezekiel throughout the Bible, that our main battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the heavenly powers and principalities, as Paul will say, in **Ephesians 6**. And so if we look at the whole realm of spiritual warfare, it certainly is fought on earth and between people and nations today. But the primary war is all around us, and is one (that) of the heavenly bodies. And so as we read about this, this is always 3D. The spiritual war is always going on in different ways; the great cosmic battle that we know that God will prevail; that the

gates of hell will not prevail against God's ways, even as hell brings all of its might to bear.

Questions, comments, observations or concerns at this point?

**Alan Denekas:** Just that, we as a nation have had a lot of pride. I think we have tended to put a lot of faith in our military might in particular. We are getting farther and farther away from remembering that our might and greatness has come from God; and that so many of our forefathers put their trust in God. And, you know, I think, more recently we have forgotten that. "We're trying to make America great again without remembering what made America great in the first place." That's not a slam at political figures. It's just more of a national attitude.

**Mark:** Somebody in the class a couple weeks ago observed that in the LGBTQ agenda, their annual parades are called "pride parades." When we read Ezekiel, we really cannot see the advertisement for a pride parade in quite the same way; other than another real sign of mankind's hubris against the ways of God, to the point of kind of throwing up in God's face; just one example and by far not the only example. But a very obvious and prominent one; that they would name their parades "pride."

But The Lord also says in His teaching that before we judge the speck in our neighbor's eye, let's make sure that we examine the log in our own. So before I (we) criticize or judge the pride parade, or anybody or anything, or any nation, I've (we've) got a lot of repentance to do in my own heart for pride and for forgetting God. And that would take most of my time so if I really did that seriously I'd have very little time to judge anybody else because most of my prayer life would be "Lord, please forgive me." So let's not be prideful in our arrogance of the Truth. Let's be humble that we have The Truth of God's Word, but it always has to be a humble proclamation in love and never a, "We have it, you don't; you're going to hell, we're going to Heaven and that's it." So we've got to be careful ourselves.

**David Leamon:** I would just note that in reference to how we address what's going on around us, our primary weapon is prayer.

**Mark:** Amen, brother. Yeah, good.

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I was going to say also. In the spiritual battles that are being played out in the heavens, as opposed to our battles here on Earth, I've always kind of thought of them as being like God's angels fighting against the fallen demons. And they're up there battling it out, and we're down here kind of waiting to see what happens between them. But today after talking about this, I'm kind of feeling like maybe their battle is one that's being waged through us. I mean you can see how God is influencing so much, like Egypt and Babylon. It's almost like we are pawns because satan is constantly trying to influence us and make us take certain actions or do certain things. And, I almost feel like maybe the spiritual battle that's being played out is being

played out using us to see who can get as much control over us down here on Earth, and then make us do certain things. Does that make sense?

**Mark:** It does in the great and cosmic ways of God. Vickie I think you make a really important and astute observation that we do talk about the spiritual battle of the heavenly powers and principalities, even as we fight it on Earth, but those are never disconnected. So what I hear you saying is that there is a real connection between what's happening in the spiritual realms and the powers and what's happening in the earthly realms. And that those two battles are being fought in conjunction and the overlap.

The best book to get at your comment, Vickie, which is a really important one, is Gerry McDermott's book called "God's Rivals." Gerry wrote this book 15 or 20 years ago. "God's Rivals," in my estimation, is the best book to help believers really begin to understand this mystery of spiritual warfare above and below. Gerry is able to look really deeply into the Biblical accounts and to open our eyes to some amazing Biblical Truths about this. Gerry has a real gift of writing in a way that's very accessible, and he's able to take big huge Biblical and theological points and present them in a way that we all can understand. The older I get, the more I'm aware of these spiritual battles, and I think we'll see this growing in the years to come for sure.

**Annette Meyer.** In **Ezekiel 30:23** Where it talks about dispersing the Egyptians among the nations. I'm real aware of how the Jews were dispersed. I've never heard before that the Egyptians were scattered.

**Mark:** Thank you. The Babylonians learned this from the Assyrians. Verse 23 gets at the ancient military practice of a conquering nation's attempt (success) to control and conquer a nation referred to as "divide and conquer." The Babylonians would have come into Egypt; made slaves out of half or more of the population; taken them to other nations to work as slaves or sell them; or to somehow get them out of Egypt. And then, they would import people from other conquered nations into Egypt. And so the idea was to dilute the national identity. And that, no doubt, happened whenever Nebuchadnezzar came for those 40 years in Egypt. You're right that we don't hear a lot about that. The Biblical historical salvation record concentrates on what happened to Israel, even as we know it happened to other nations. And the Assyrians were the ones who practiced this the most and really brought it to perfection. The Babylonians, who defeated the Assyrians, learn from their ways and practiced it as well.

One of the great blessings, though, and one of the ways that we see God's sovereign hand in history is that the Romans did not practice this. You would have thought that this tactic would have been passed down from one conquering people to the next because it was extremely effective. I mean, when the Northern kingdom of Israel is defeated in 722 BC by the Assyrians, it's no more. And the only reason, by God's providence, that Judah was destroyed, Israel today, is because Cyrus allowed the exiles to come back. You would think that the Romans would have practiced this. But they chose not to, partly because they were so overextended and the Roman Empire

stretched all the way to Great Britain. And they just didn't have the manpower to do it. They were a smaller nation than Babylon or Assyria. By God's grace, they did not do this in a time of our Lord and the apostles. In fact, it was the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome, which gave stability to the whole Roman Empire, that allowed the Christian faith to, not only live, but to flourish. And so we see the hand of God, historically in ancient history, as well as today.

**Annette:** The scattering of the Jews is obvious (in the Bible), but not so much with other nationalities.

**Mark:** That's a great point. The Jews have a really God given, deep, deep identity of who they are. I don't know this for a fact; it may be true; that other ethnic people like Egyptians may have less of that; that they may have assimilated more into cultures versus wanting to remain uber Egyptian.

We continue with **Ezekiel 31:1-18**, with the 5th oracle against Egypt and pharaoh. **1** In the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: **2** "Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude: "Whom are you like in your greatness? **3** Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon, with beautiful branches and forest shade, and of towering height, its top among the clouds. **4** The waters nourished it; the deep made it grow tall, making its rivers flow around the place of its planting, sending forth its streams to all the trees of the field. **5** So it towered high above all the trees of the field; its boughs grew large and its branches long from abundant water in its shoots. **6** All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs; under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth to their young, and under its shadow lived all great nations. **7** It was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches; for its roots went down to abundant waters. **8** The cedars in the garden of God could not rival it, nor the fir trees equal its boughs; neither were the plane trees like its branches; no tree in the garden of God was its equal in beauty. **9** I made it beautiful in the mass of its branches, and all the trees of Eden envied it, that were in the garden of God.

*So I think the opening "prophetic utterance" is fairly understandable that now, God through Ezekiel is comparing the Pharaonic tree, the tree of pharaoh, to Assyria. This prophecy came in June 21, 587 BC. So we see that the prophecy is the command Ezekiel speaks to pharaoh. The answer to the question to "What do you compare your greatness?" is cedar. Cedar is Assyria and the cedar tree then becomes the emblematic symbolic of Assyria. The Cedar was valued for its construction in palaces, temples. And this particular cedar tree of Assyria is fantastic with towering strength and protective shade. And so the prophecy is that Egypt and Assyria compare in these attributes. And then Ezekiel expands on the beautiful branch. Its comparable beauty evokes even images of Eden. So there's this amazing comparison that none of the trees of the garden of Eden would even compare favorably to the cedar tree that was Assyria.*



*But then there's a real turn here, in **verses 10 through 14**, because suddenly without warning. The judgment is coming against the Egyptians. **Ezekiel 31:10-14***

**10** “Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because it towered high and set its top among the clouds, and its heart was proud of its height, **11** I will give it into the hand of a mighty one of the nations. He shall surely deal with it as its wickedness deserves. I have cast it out. **12** Foreigners, the most ruthless of nations, have cut it down and left it. On the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen, and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land, and all the peoples of the earth have gone away from its shadow and left it. **13** On its fallen trunk dwell all the birds of the heavens, and on its branches are all the beasts of the field. **14** All this is in order that no trees by the waters may grow to towering height or set their tops among the clouds, and that no trees that drink water may reach up to them in height. For they are all given over to death, to the world below, among the children of man, with those who go down to the pit.”

*And so now we set the stage that God is going to bring down this great cedar because of its pride, and God's arm will punish Egypt for its arrogance. Verse 11 is interesting. God says that He is going to give it to the hand of a mighty one of the nation's and literally, the Hebrew, God is going to hand it over to the ram of nations and Nebuchadnezzar's image was the ram with its mighty horns to conquer. Just like the eagle was the emblem of Rome; the ram was the emblem of Nebuchadnezzar. It makes it richer to be able to translate as close to the original language as we possibly can. I very much like and use the ESV translation all the time. It makes more sense to a general reader to hear, “I will give it into the hands of a mighty one of the nation's,” versus, “I will give it into the hands of a ram of the nation(s). I understand that it just makes better sense to say it that way. But historically, I think if we can hear it as Ezekiel would have said it, the imagery and the connection historically is just closer. So that's one of the reasons we want to study the Bible, is that we can get behind these Words because we are people of The Word and really try to understand as much as we can. So, their greatness is going to be judged, and death will come to them.*

*In terms of Assyria, on the one hand, we see the Book of Jonah; and we see that God loved the Assyrians; that God forced Jonah's hands through three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, to go preach repentance to Nineveh, the great capital, magnificent capital city of Assyria, and they repented. The king and even the animals repented, an amazing book of mercy and the love of God in the Book of Ezekiel. But 80 years later, the Prophet Nahum comes along, and the whole Book of Nahum is God's judgment of Assyria. Why? They forgot their repentance, and they returned to their prideful anti-God ways. Unfortunately, a serious repentance only lasted 80 or so years, and then they too were judged and destroyed.*

*And then verses **Ezekiel 31:15-18**, finishing up this chapter, we see the demise of pharaoh's tree. **15** “Thus says the Lord God: On the day the cedar went down to Sheol I caused mourning; I closed the deep over it, and restrained its rivers, and many waters were stopped. I clothed Lebanon in gloom for it, and all the trees of the field fainted*

because of it. 16 I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit. And all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the world below. 17 They also went down to Sheol with it, to those who are slain by the sword; yes, those who were its arm, who lived under its shadow among the nations. **18** “Whom are you thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? You shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the world below. You shall lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword. “This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord God.”

*And so Pharaoh will be judged. He will be sent down to sheol with all the uncircumcised in that worst part of sheol.*

### **Theological Implications:**

Once more, God is the Sovereign Lord over all history. Like the exiles in Babylon, the Church must find its confidence in God alone and not in the powers of the world.

Pride in human accomplishments draws the fury of God, especially in leaders who gloat over their influence or achievements.

We live in the world but we must not become of the world and that is always the hard but necessary line of faithfulness.

**Ezekiel 32:1-2** “Prophecy against Egypt” to finish this section. **1** “In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: **2** “Son of man, raise a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him: “You consider yourself a lion of the nations, but you are like a dragon in the seas; you burst forth in your rivers, trouble the waters with your feet, and foul their rivers.”

*And so, once again, you can hear that the word “dragon” is actually the word “crocodile.” This comes on March 3, 585 BC about two years later than the previous oracle. This oracle is against pharaoh who views himself as a lion, a long sign of royalty. But in the end, he is simply a crocodile who will be destroyed.*

*And then in verses 3-10 God describes how he will catch and destroy the crocodile who is pharaoh.*

**Ezekiel 32:3-10** **3** “Thus says the Lord God: I will throw my net over you with a host of many peoples, and they will haul you up in my dragnet. **4** And I will cast you on the ground; on the open field I will fling you, and will cause all the birds of the heavens to settle on you, and I will gorge the beasts of the whole earth with you. **5** I will strew your flesh upon the mountains and fill the valleys with your carcass. **6** I will drench the land even to the mountains with your flowing blood, and the ravines will be full of you. **7** When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. **8** All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness on your land, declares the

Lord God. 9 “I will trouble the hearts of many peoples, when I bring your destruction among the nations, into the countries that you have not known. 10 I will make many peoples appalled at you, and the hair of their kings shall bristle with horror because of you, when I brandish my sword before them. They shall tremble every moment, every one for his own life, on the day of your downfall.”

*So God will capture the animal in the company of many nations; we see the crocodile put out in the open field to die. Remember the pharaoh called himself “the sun king,” but God will cover the sun; i.e., He will cover pharaoh and his brightness will be no more. And then, all the nations will shutter when they see the work of God.*

**Ezekiel 32:11-16** “For thus says the Lord God: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you. 12 I will cause your multitude to fall by the swords of mighty ones, all of them most ruthless of nations. “They shall bring to ruin the pride of Egypt, and all its multitude shall perish. 13 I will destroy all its beasts from beside many waters; and no foot of man shall trouble them anymore, nor shall the hoofs of beasts trouble them. 14 Then I will make their waters clear, and cause their rivers to run like oil, declares the Lord God. 15 When I make the land of Egypt desolate, and when the land is desolate of all that fills it, when I strike down all who dwell in it, then they will know that I am the Lord. 16 This is a lamentation that shall be chanted; the daughters of the nations shall chant it; over Egypt, and over all her multitude, shall they chant it, declares the Lord God.”

*So, Egypt will be defeated by the great sword of the Babylonians. Even the livestock will die; the waters will be muddy; but then finally will run clearly. And the punishment of Egypt will result in universal acknowledgement of God's personal involvement in human affairs. And this ends then the oracles against Egypt. The final nail in Egypt's coffin has been cast.*

*The oracle, like many others, warns us against pride in which we celebrate our own magnificence. Humans who imagine themselves as noble masters of their own destiny are monsters in the eyes of God. This affirms that God is The Lord not only of individuals but also history.*

*Again, one of the books that I continue to tout is “The Rise and Fall of the Modern Self.” Dr. Bob Benne will be teaching this book in one of our fall Sunday school classes. When I read this in Ezekiel and read Dr. Carl Truman’s book, it just underscores that the greatest idolatry today by far, and Dr Truman’s great book, really, really captures it, “The self;” that we have become our own idols; and there's the worship of man versus the worship of God. This is not a new idolatry, it's a very ancient one. And, it's come in the 21st century, perhaps, greater than it ever has been. Down to how we identify and all those things that we know about. So the self has become the golden calf of the 21st century; this huge, huge golden calf. And I just think it's setting us up for a time of enormous judgment that's coming. And I don't know what that will look like, and my hope is in Christ. But we do need to pray; to be concerned about this; and to ask how then we shall live, given the idolatry of self in our day and age.*

*So that closes this section "The Conscience of kings." We've got three or four minutes so would love to have any final comments or observations or questions.*

**Alan Denekas:** Mark, going back to what you said about the Assyrians dividing nations up and then spreading them around and then bringing in people from outside to dilute their national identity. That sounds a lot like what's going on here. We're being polarized into various groups that are particularly oppressors versus oppressed in many different forums and then we're having a lot of people who don't share our heritage and democracy and patriotism and our Judea Christian heritage, etc. who are being brought in by the tens of thousands and that's kind of diluting our national identity. So I just wonder if you see that as being a judgment or an attempted judgment?

**Mark:** I have not thought about this in those exact terms. Again, that's another great observation that puts a whole new wrinkle on what's happening. So thank you for that. We can make a strong case that the Christian identity, or those identifying with Christ really are fewer and fewer, and the whole Christian movement is being diluted with heresy and lies. The Gallup poll just released last week that for the first time since Gallup has been polling in 88 decades, 80 years, fewer than 50 percent of Americans identify with any kind of church affiliation. So we've slipped down to 47 percent. And when they say that 47 percent identify with some sort of church affiliation, that affiliation can be extremely shallow. It can be just, "I'm kind of a Christian, I'm kind of a member of a church maybe." We're not talking about serious Christians here. So, of that 47 percent, I would think that less than half of that would actually be any kind of serious kind of Christian. Alan, that's a great observation, that Satan now is using the Assyrian tactic against Christ and His Church. And the Bible is clear that a remnant will be saved and we pray for a large remnant but it's going to be a remnant and I think we're seeing that.

**Alan:** Do you see progressive christianity, so-called "progressive," as the form of faith that's referred to in **2 Timothy 3:5**, "having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people."

**Mark:** Would you agree with the statement, That exactly what's happening? You probably would?

**Alan:** Definitely.

**Mark:** Thank you, Alan. Part of your gift is that you are very aware of all these forces going on with all the work you've done in apologetics. And so Alan just mentions "progressive christianity." And if we're not aware of that term or that movement, we need to get up to speed pretty quickly. It's pretty easy to find information. You've got to be careful to discern if it is accurate or not? If not, just run it by Dr. Denekas, and he can set you straight because he has such history.

Just go on internet and search for “progressive christianity,” and there’s a website dedicated to it. It's a huge growing movement. And so, when I hear the term now “progressive christian,” that to me is the oxymoron. They are not Christian and have gone way past any identifiable Christian movement or ministry. Almost all progressive christians deny a real actual resurrection from the dead of Christ; that He alone is Savior. All of them deny Holy living and obedience and sexual morality. All of them deny all the basics that you can imagine. And yet, they tout themselves that as “progressive christians.” They have progressed past Christ into the way of deep apostasy. So we need to get caught up on that.

Now this summer Dr. Alan Denekas is going to be leading a really important Sunday school class on really looking at some tough questions that believers face today. And so if you have tough questions to ask Dr. Denekas, please let Alan know. There's a box at Church where you can put your questions; or you can certainly email or talk to Alan, personally. Alan, that would be a great question for your class to devote a Sunday to the subject of “progressive christianity” and what it says and what a Christian response might be.

**Alan:** One new book out about that is called “Another gospel?” by Alisa Childers.

**David:** I’d like to make a quick comment about “progressive christianity. Many, if not most, of those who consider themselves progressive christians twist the Scriptures to justify what they're supporting and doing.

**Mark:** The contortions they go through to try to get the Bible to support what they're saying is mind-blowing. It's silly to anybody that knows anything about Scripture, but yet they just contort themselves silly in their attempts.

Alright, brothers and sisters, Ezekiel 34 next week.

Closing Prayer: Lord thank You for this time together. Thank You for these dear brothers and sisters. We pray Lord that You would help us all to live in this world, for the sake of the world, but never to be diluted by it or consumed by it or to become a part of it. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

God bless you. Next week God willing, see you Tuesday.

**NOTE: Class #27 became Class #26 Parts One and Two as we move next to Class #28 Ezekiel 34 “The Pastor”**

**Class #28 April 13 Handout Zoom Recording April 13, 2021**

**Pastor Mark:** I think from this point forward, the material is going to be fairly positive. We've seen a lot of judgment for a lot of weeks. But, Ezekiel ends strong with The Word of God and renewal of hope, and so we're looking forward to those chapters coming up.

**Opening Prayer:** Lord, we do pray to You Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in Your Holy Spirit in thanksgiving that You have given us a beautiful Tuesday afternoon in which to study Your Word. May Your Holy Spirit now illuminate our hearts to read and understand it correctly for Your purposes and glory. We pray this in Jesus Name. Amen.

**Ezekiel 34 "The Pastor"** is a stand alone chapter in the book that is one of the very well known chapters because it has these images of faithful shepherding, wicked shepherding. Again, even though the Book of Ezekiel is not explicitly quoted in the New Testament, it is implicitly foundational to the whole New Testament. And, I think we see the immediate application when we talk about Yahweh as Israel's Good Shepherd. John 10, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." And so, it's a direct correlation without any disagreement at all that Ezekiel 34 is foundational to what Jesus says in John 10. Those kind of connections are another encouragement for us; that we are using our time wisely by studying the Book of Ezekiel because to understand Ezekiel and what God says in Ezekiel is then to have a much fuller understanding of the full revelation of God in the New Testament.

We are moving now into a section of oracles of restoration, of hope, of renewal. And, scholars will call these chapters moving forward, "salvation oracles." After spending a lot of time in "judgment oracles" and understand what those are. Now we are in a section called "salvation oracles." While the salvation oracles still contain judgment because The Law of God is never compromised, there's a lot of hope and Good News Gospel as well and in God gracious intervention to restore His holy people.

These salvation oracles always include God's restorations in the nation of the Davidic kingship, the land, and The Temple. All these ultimately are to bring honor and glory to the LORD and do come to pass and are fulfilled in Christ. Ezekiel 34 is one of the great Messianic chapters in the Book of Ezekiel where we see the imprint of the coming Messiah Jesus throughout the chapter.

These last chapters of the book (Ezekiel chapters 34-48) can generally be outlined in the following scheme, emphasizing these eight points of restoration where we can see that these are very important chapters to grasp the full work of God. After judgment comes the new work of restoration:

Restoring Yahweh's role as divine shepherd/king of Israel (34:1-31)

Restoring Yahweh's land (35:1-36:15)

Restoring Yahweh's honor (36:16-38)

Restoring Yahweh's people (37:1-14)

Restoring Yahweh's covenant (37:15-28)

Restoring Yahweh's supremacy (38:1-39:29)

Restoring Yahweh's presence among his people (40:1-46:24)

Restoring Yahweh's presence in the land (47:1-48:35)

Here in chapter 34, as bad as the external threats against Israel are, after we have just finished looking at a whole constellation of nations that are opposed to Israel; i.e., Egypt, Tyre..the list goes on, it is Israel's internal enemies who are even more treating. And by that we see in Ezekiel 34 that the greatest threat to Israel is not from these external foreign nations but from her own leaders, particularly the king; all the political and religious leaders who are working against Yahweh, evil and wicked and working from the inside out, and are destroying Israel.

We think about today. For better or for worse recently in my sermons I have really just felt the need to speak about a lot of the external threats going on. And Vickie (Smith), was thoughtful to send me that op-ed piece from the LA Times which is breathtaking. And so, even as we think about all the external threats in the Church today, I would say, just like Ezekiel 34, it's the internal threat to the Church that's the most concerning. When you have lay leaders, pastors, bishops, leaders of churches who have, I would say, clearly have capitulated and taken up the world's agenda within the church, under the veil of being a Christian leader. That is most damaging and throws great confusion into the hearts of God's people. When a respected, beloved minister stands up and says things that are contrary to The Word of God, that can have devastating effects and can lead a lot of sheep astray. Ezekiel 34 has a lot of applicability as all of Ezekiel does to our current situation.

Questions, comments, observations before we get into the text?

**Linda Handy:** I have to say I just ran into this class from Bible Study at St. John. Here was the story we discussed today. The gentleman who was paralyzed at the Pool of Siloam where he was sent forth and afterwards they brought him before the Jewish Courts who said, "Who has healed you?" And he said, "I do not know His name." And yet later on he acknowledged that the Christ was the Christ who had healed him, and he was dismissed from the synagogue. And that has to do with what's happening now, today. That, as you just said, Pastor Mark, you've got pastors and leaders of the church speaking not The Word but a secular Word. And, it puts those of us who are willing to stand on The Word and believe in Christ and worship Him and Him alone at risk.

**Mark:** Thank you for those observations. A Church member a couple of weeks ago sent an email that said she had been reading and praying about John 17 where Jesus says He wants His people to be one. And, she's lamenting about all this division within the church and how can we overcome it? And I certainly, completely agree with her because she's agreeing with Scripture. It is lamentable that there is so much division within the church. Divide and conquer is satan's tool, always. The trouble is, how can

you stand with and be one with churches and church leaders who are preaching a contrary gospel. So it just gets at, "What does it really mean to be in the church?" And so I think of Romans chapters 9, 10, 11 where Paul talks about the Jews in Israel, will they be saved? And Paul makes the famous statement that not every Israelite is a true Israelite. And so, I think we're seeing that prophetically in the church today. This is not news to any of us, but not everybody who says they're a part of the church, who says they're Christian; well, I don't know where their hearts are when they preach a different gospel.

With that in mind, we didn't mean to get too far down that lane because we want to stay more positive these days. We want to end strong, and Ezekiel 34 is a good start.

**David Leamon** I just want to thank you for your sober minded adherence to the Truth. I deeply appreciate that.

**Mark:** Well, appreciate that. Turning now to the text. This is going to be God's announcement of deliverance in **Ezekiel 34:1-10** **1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? **3** You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. **4** The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. **5** So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; **6** they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. **7** "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: **8** As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, **9** therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: **10** Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

*So, it's interesting, isn't it, that God says, "You know, shepherds, you think these flocks belong to you so you can fleece the flock, but these are my sheep and I've given you responsibility for them, and you're hurting them, and I'll hold you responsible." So again, we hear the echoes of our Lord's teachings, especially in the Gospel of John, where The Lord looks out with great sadness as they are like sheep without a shepherd. And so we see the echoes of Ezekiel throughout our Lord's teaching in the New Testament.*



*This is a prophecy against the shepherds, primarily against the kings, who are considered the shepherds of Israel. That was one of the titles of the kings of Judah Israel. They were to be Israel's shepherd, but also understand this is a judgment against all those in leadership who have led the people astray and cared for themselves and not for the sheep.*

*There are two basic categories of charges against these shepherds; i.e., the sins of commission and the sins of omission. So there are three crimes of commission. They consume the milk of their flock. They fleece the flock for their own benefit and they even butcher the fat ones. And then the crimes of omission; they show no concern for the physical health of the flock. They have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured and could care less about the sheep that have wandered off.*

*That is an indictment that really makes my heart beat faster because right now one of my biggest concerns is those sheep of St. John who have not returned. Are they wandering off? Will they come back? And what can or should I do about that because I take this indictment against Israel's shepherds very seriously. And as we come out of this pandemic, certainly by June or July we'll kind of know who is coming back and who is not. Certainly, by then vaccines will have been fully distributed to those who want them. We'll be in the summer months. Hopefully things will be more open; so we'll see. That certainly is a Word of Scripture that is hanging heavy over my head right now. "Lord, please don't let me be an under shepherd who doesn't care about the sheep who have wandered off."*

*If you know people in our Church who have not come back; and I understand there are lots of legitimate reasons for that; I get that. But if you know of anybody who has seriously wandered off; and if you know that personally, then please let's care for the sheep together. I would encourage you to reach out to that person and show your care and love for them.*

*The flock is hurt and harmed as the result of these irresponsible shepherds. God says, "Listen, the flock belongs to Me so if you abuse members of My flock, I am going to really hold you in great judgment." We think of sins of omission of just not caring. We think of sins of commission as a shepherd actively abusing sheep. Tragically, today we have so many examples of shepherds abusing sheep. We think of what's happening within the Roman Catholic Church. And then, the Southern Baptist Convention has really been struggling the last couple of years with new evidence of abuse cases that baptist ministers, leaders, pastors have hidden and put under wraps. That's one of the most graphic and terrible issues of the abuse of children, women, boys and girls. But there are other types of abuse as well.*

**Vickie Smith:** When God gets angry at these kings and rulers for their behavior, the one thing that actually gives me peace of mind right now with all the crazy stuff politically that's going on in the country is that God chooses the rulers for us. And I feel comfortable with whoever is there because I know they are there because God wanted them to be there. So it makes me question. I mean, aren't these kings in these roles

because God chose them to be there? And then when they do all the things they're not supposed to be doing and God gets angry. It's almost like a "catch 22." Do you see what I'm saying?

**Mark:** Right, that's a great point. I mean when you say that, I think about the twelve apostles, the key leaders. And, one among them was Judas. And Jesus knew what was in Judas' heart all along. So, why in the world was Judas included among this core group of twelve men that Jesus bound around Him. So it is a great mystery. And, God even uses leaders like Nebuchadnezzar. We've seen that throughout Ezekiel. This pagan king is actually an instrument of God and His purpose is to bring judgment against His own people. So it's a great mystery, and I don't have a great answer for you, but I bet somebody in class does.

**David Leamon:** It's very encouraging to me that all of God's purposes for Jesus, in His days on this earth, were fully accomplished despite the fact that there was a rebel, one who was completely against Him was a part of His band. And, we should be encouraged in that. We try to have people with true motives around us; people like you especially, BUT, God is Sovereign and He rules and overrules.

**Lisa Bond:** And sometimes God gives us what we want, like King Saul who was the people's choice, a word person and God allowed him to be in that position leading up to God's choice of David. It is encouraging that God is sovereign. I think He also allows us to see what our choices will bring for the bad and for the good sometimes.

**Linda Handy:** Thank you, Lisa, I was going to say the same thing. Sometimes satan is allowed to rule, to open our eyes so that we see the true Truth and not the false one.

**David Leamon:** I think that may be what's going on with our current President, he being there instead of, quite frankly, who really should be there based on the vote.

**Mark:** Well, thank you all for your comments. From the very beginning, when the people cried out for a king, God finally relented and said so I'll give you a king, but it's not going to work out well for you. I just want you to know that; you'll get the king but it's not going to solve your problems. It's going to create more problems for you. And, that's exactly what happens. Eventually, God Himself becomes The King, The Messiah, The Christ. The bottom line is, when we put our trust in any human leader, any politician, any leader, ultimately we're going to be disappointed because that leader is going to make decisions that are not right and are sinful. There is no perfect leader except God and so, if anything, I think it draws us back to say, "God, You alone are my King," even as we live under political leaders and we must pray for them. But, also, you know, we get what we ask for, and boy, you know, we're getting a big dose of it right now in this country. And I'm very concerned about these next years coming up and there's no certainty that anything is going to change anytime in our lifetime. But then I think, "Thank You Jesus; ultimately, You are our King, and You will overrule any ruler on Earth."

And so then we look the next passage and God is going to say, “Okay, here's the problem. You've got these evil, wicked shepherds. But let Me tell You what I'm going to do.” **Ezekiel 34:11-22 11** “For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. 16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. 17 “As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. 18 Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? 19 And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet? 20 “Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21 Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, **22** I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep.

Again you can hear the echoes here of that famous passage in **Matthew 25** where God says, “I will separate the sheep from the goats.” And so again, we've got a lot of Ezekiel behind our Lord's explicit teaching. So Christ gave the Word of God to Ezekiel, and then Jesus builds upon that in His ministry later on.

God will pursue His sheep and first He will examine their physical condition for healing. That's one of the reasons why we're trying here at St John more and more to offer prayers of healing which include physical healing. He will rescue the flock in the clutches of the enemy. And, he will bring the flock out of the places of exile. He'll gather them back to Israel. So He is the Good Shepherd, the antithesis of the earlier evil shepherds; and, as I said earlier, John chapter 10, where Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd,” without question that's built on Ezekiel 34. So when Jesus says, “I'm the Good Shepherd in John 10, He is not making something new. Oh, wow, never thought about that. Yahweh, Messiah, The Good Shepherd. No, Jesus is affirming what's already been announced.

And then secondly, God is also going to deliver them from the internal threats. In verses 17 through 22, which we've just read. And you can see that God is going to judge the individuals at the top of the butting order. That's what sheep do; the bigger sheep butt with their side and shoulder the weaker sheep. In other words they're bullies, and God's going to intervene and rescue the weak from the strong, and He is going to stand with those who have been so oppressed.

And so all of this rescue of the Good Shepherd is going to result in **Yahweh's covenant of peace** in **Ezekiel 34:23-31** to end of the chapter. **23** And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. **24** And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken. **25** "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. **26** And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. **27** And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. **28** They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. **29** And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. **30** And they shall know that I am the Lord their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord God. **31** And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God."

*Great wonderful Words of God's prophecy; i.e., the appointment of the king in the line of David as the under shepherd, Yahweh's flock, the covenant of peace. So this is one of the reasons why we say chapter 34 is a great Messianic chapter in the Book of Ezekiel.*

*God announces that this ruler will be chosen by Yahweh. He is the Messiah, the Son of God, for Israel's a theocracy; God's in charge. Secondly, it will be one shepherd, not a bunch of different kings one after another. Third, it will be from the line of David. And forth, the shepherd will be a servant of Yahweh. And fifth, the shepherd will not just rule over them, but rule from among them.*

*And so when you put all those characteristics of the one true shepherd of Israel, who else can it be except Jesus The Messiah. All those marks are embodied in Jesus clearly. He is a Servant Shepherd. He's the One King. He doesn't Lord it over us but comes among us and He washes our feet. He saves us from the inside out. And He's from the line of David. And so when we're talking to people about Jesus and about prophecies of the coming of Jesus, Ezekiel 34 is another one of the great places to turn, along with a number of other places, but certainly this is a foundational chapter to the whole hope of Jesus as the Messiah.*

*And then the nature of the peace there in verses 25 through 31. He will establish a covenant of peace for Israel.*

*And this peace, results in security by three divine actions. God will restore security by eliminating predatory animals to the land. He will restore security by blessing the land with great fruitfulness. He will restore security to Israel by removing the oppression of foreign enemies. And then there's going to be the announcement of a new covenant with God. And it's reflected in other places of the Old Testament as well. So, it is a great and beautiful chapter where God says, "I am the true Shepherd; I am the true King. You have been abused by your leaders, but I am going to rescue you and restore you physically and spiritually as my people. And all this points to Jesus Christ.*

*When we hear about this covenant of peace for Israel. The word "peace," as you know, is a huge important word in Hebrew and Biblical theology. "Shalom peace" does not mean just the absence of war; peace means "well being, healing, forgiveness." And when we hear the Apostle Paul speak in the letter to the **Philippians 4:7** where Paul famously says, "In the peace of God which passeth all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Where does Paul get that peace of God that will do all this? Once again, the apostle is not making things up, but he's building upon Ezekiel chapter 34.*

*If we took time to tease out all the teaching of our Lord and the apostles from Matthew through Revelation, we would probably be just blown away by how many references explicitly and implicitly we would find in The Book of Ezekiel.*

**Theological Implications** and then love to hear some of your remarks.

God is going to restore all things by His grace. It is going to be fulfilled in the Messiah, the King and Shepherd of God's people. And, and we know that it is Jesus who is The Good Shepherd, who is the Servant of His Father from the house of David. So, all the ministers of God's people, lay and ordained, anybody in leadership in the Church; all of us are under shepherds of The Shepherd. So, I am not the shepherd of the flock of St. John Lutheran Church. I am the under shepherd to The Shepherd. Yes, I am held accountable by the church council. I'm held accountable by the bishop. But more than any of those by far, I'm held accountable by The Good Shepherd Jesus.

This has been an important chapter in my own understanding of what it means to be a leader in the Church. Ezekiel 34 very famously provides an Old Testament paradigm of what ministry is in the New Testament. So, if you want to know what it looks like to be a leader in the Church today, you can go to a lot of places; Paul's letters to Timothy, but you can never not go to Ezekiel 34. It's foundational.

So let me stop questions comments insights about chapter 34.

**Linda Handy:** Once again, it's a great blessing to race from **John 9** to Ezekiel. And it's all about the Christ being sent by God as our Savior; that we are then sent by The Sender to the nations, to live our lives in such a way that we will minister to other senders, who become other senders and, therefore, The Word is spread. I mean, the networking and the connectivity of the two books is just amazing.

**Mark:** That's great to hear. When you think about The Gospel of John, it probably picks up as much or more themes from Ezekiel than any other gospel so that's great to hear the connections that you're seeing. Yes, we want to study each tree of the Bible, but it's really important to look at the whole forest and see how all that really works together which is what you're doing.

**Linda:** We were concerned about the man who was blind from birth, who had done nothing ever in His life but beg, as an outcast, for whatever he could get in The Temple. And then at the end, his eyes are opened and he goes forth in the land and we said, "Well, what will happen to him?" And he said, "Well, The Lord will provide." And then I come here to this study and indeed in chapter 34, there it says, "I will provide for My sheep." So that man who had no life skills whatsoever because all he'd done is beg because he was blind and an outcast, is now under the tutelage of the Good Shepherd. So thanks be to God. It just all connects; and it gives us hope as we are increasingly attacked. And on the outside, we're becoming increasingly exiles of the society, not the movers and shakers.

**Mark:** Amen. That's a great application; thank you so much. So we see there in John 9 with the healing of the blind man that the physical healing that we see in Ezekiel 34, for spiritual healing but the healing to bring you back into real community as John 9 is the practical application of what's promised in Ezekiel 34. Great. Other questions or comments, insights, anything else?

**Elaine Thompson:** Pastor Mark, I'm a little nervous to bring this up, but I've wondered about it for so long I might as well. I know that we don't speak about politics all that much, but when I came to St John and when the presidential election was underway, I realized that probably 95% or so of the Church was very much in favor of Trump, and I just can't figure it out. Because, if you put aside all the fake news and forget about what you've been told about in the press, it's quite obvious that Trump is not a Christian and Biden is. And so I was much in favor of Biden simply because he is a Christian, and he believes in a lot of the things we believe in. But Trump's master is money. That is his idol, I believe. And he makes fun of crippled people. He treats women terribly and says horrible things about them. And, I said that to a friend one time and the friend said, "Oh, Elaine, you know all men are like that." And I said, "No, they're not. Not all men speak of women, or treat them in that way." So, the only thing I could understand is that people were afraid of socialism, and they were afraid that the United States would lose their leadership, and perhaps go broke or whatever. But why is it that most people ignore the fact that Biden is a Christian and Trump is not. I really don't understand.

**Mark:** Elaine, I'm glad you brought these points up. This is a good place to do it. We're talking about leaders; true leaders and false leaders and political leaders. So certainly your question, Elaine, is very much appropriate for this context. Well, I'm sure that at this point, we would all have things to weigh in and say. It may be that this is a good time for each of us to do that out of respect and love for you, Elaine, and your questions.

You know, I think, just some initial things, Elaine. Number one, only God knows the heart of anybody, right? Jesus does say in Matthew 7 that we must judge words and actions, but no one can judge another human being's heart. So whether Donald Trump or Joe Biden are Christian, truly only God knows the answer to that. It's easy for us to misunderstand that one way or the other.

And, another second initial response, Elaine, that doesn't answer all your questions, by any stretch, is that it gets back to, every human leader is going to ultimately not be the leader we need. Only God Himself can be that. So as I have looked at the landscape the past year, politically, we know that we have, on one hand Donald Trump, who, personally, we all can think of the many red flags and the many acts of sin, if you will, in his life that you knew and bring some of them. And we can add other things to that, right? So, personally, he leaves a lot to be desired. I mean, we've had a lot in Ezekiel about pride. And if there's anything that we've seen in Ezekiel that God judges, is when a leader has too much pride, that leader is going to fall to God's judgment. So, we know that just judging his actions, his words, is an issue that Donald Trump deals with. But at the same time, a lot of his policies and his actions as a leader, from my view, fell really in line with a lot of what I would want to see from a leader, in terms of Israel and the Supreme Court, and some of these out of line LGBTQ diversity stuff that's just taken over. For me the challenges are that yes, we've got a person, that I would say as a person, leaves a lot to be desired. As a president, I can say that I can be very supportive and even pleased with a lot of his actions.

And then you have Donald Trump side by side with Joe Biden, who as you said, Elaine, from all indications, has been a family man, faithful father, husband who says he's a Catholic and believes in God; that's really important to him. And yet a lot of Catholics, a lot of bishops won't even give Joe Biden communion because he says he is strong Catholic but he disagrees with a lot of the core Catholic Christian teachings, such as sanctity of life, sexuality, transgenderism, I mean you name it. And then, you know, he has also been accused of inappropriate behavior toward women. And so He's not completely without blemish in that and other issues. So we have on the other hand, this man who comes across as a much nicer man who, you know, you could get along with and even like. But some of his policies as president, right off the bat, have been pretty alarming. So it is a real mixed bag. And, I think as Christians, we all really need to pray and give time and attention to The Holy Spirit for these things.

How about somebody else? Anybody, in truth and love, want to respond in agreement or a different point of view to Elaine?

**Linda Handy** My first thought, Pastor Mark, was exactly what you said. I cannot judge the condition of another person's heart. I cannot do that, It's not my job. It's not my power. It's not my place to do that.

But segue on what you said, I can see how that person lives their life. And so when you were just saying that Biden's support of transgender, transsexual, homosexuality; sanctity of marriage has been suspect, I think you look and you say that maybe you didn't like the former president as a person; maybe you found him abrasive and brash. But, what he did was much more in line with commonly held Christian values than what is currently being upheld.

**David Leamon:** I would just say, "I agree with you, Mark."

**Mark:** Well, what this has done more than anything else, Elaine, it has put me on my knees to say, "Thank you Jesus that You are my King," because you know we're at a point where I don't know; I mean, it's going to be a mixed bag; and the policies coming out of Washington right now and out of Richmond in our Commonwealth. I know some people who are so upset about what's coming out of Richmond. Because, on the one hand, you've got politicians who have ended the death penalty in Virginia. Now, a lot of Christians support that; I get that. On the other hand, those politicians want to do away with all restrictions to abortion. So the innocent are murdered and the guilty are free. So, what's that all about? I mean, the whole thing is crazy, right? And then, there's Donald Trump with all this baggage and so all of it is, just "Thank you Jesus that ultimately I am under Your authority." And so as a Christian, I'm not a registered Democrat; I'm not a registered Republican. I try to vote for the individual in each office by saying, "Lord, does this person seem to support the general Biblical rule of what good order and God's will is, and I try to vote for that.

But, Elaine, in terms of how many people at St. John; are there 95% of the people who are pro Trump? I don't know that, and I would not want to put a percentage on that. I think it is true, though, that this is a congregation where most of our members really give time and attention to this. So it's true that, in terms of political conversation and wrestling with these matters, I think we rightly, most of our members really give time and attention. So we may not come out on the same place, but I think we're all giving honest, just like you have obviously, Elaine, and really wrestle with this yourself. It's really important to you, and I'm very proud of you that you spoke up today because you're probably wondering, "What kind of reception will I get if I say this, even to a small Bible study class?" So this is the place to do it. If we can't talk politics within the Church, then we've made it an idol that we can't talk about. So, this should be the place where fellow believers wrestle with these big issues. Elaine, what do you say in response to what you've heard?

**Elaine:** Well, I agree with certainly that we are not to judge another person's heart. However, I think that it's fairly easy to see by their actions what side they're really on. But I don't know; it's hard because, obviously, President Biden is weak, and he



probably is not going to give us the kind of strong leadership we want. But I still think that if you line up Trump vs. Biden and they're just both standing there and you think about the things that you know they've done, as a matter of conscience, could not vote for Trump because I seriously think that money is his idol; money and pride. And that's pretty much all that he cares about. But I do understand everybody else's side of it. And yeah, it was kind of hard to bring it up because I was at Friday's Bible study and I made that point, and people just kind of, their mouths dropped open, and they looked at me like, "Are you crazy?" But I was trying to get that response and I was hoping that somebody would say, "You know, I understand your point." But anyway, it's all right because I agree totally with everybody's right to look at what they want and decide to choose that person. I was just so surprised when I found that I mean, seriously, I think 95% of the Church would vote the other way. Thank you for your comments, and I appreciate nobody's saying, "Are you crazy?" (Elaine stepped away for a few seconds to close her door to the mowers.)

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I was going to say, I think that as a Church, I look at St John as being a Church that supports traditional conservative theology. I mean if we're Orthodox we..I'm trying to figure out how to say this. The Church that I attended before was what you would call a progressive christian church today. And theologically, I did not agree with many things that they supported, which is why we sought out a Church that was more traditional and Orthodox and that's why we came to St. John. And to me, if your theological beliefs are conservative, it makes sense to politically support those candidates that support those types of values. Does that make sense? And so to me there's no (*alternative*). I mean, it's hard for me to understand how someone could attend a Church and say that they believe all the things that we believe at St. John and then turn around and support a political platform that is opposed to so many of those things. No matter who, I mean, and yeah maybe sometimes we need to hold our nose when we pull that lever, because of who that person is who's representing that platform. But I think, if we want those sorts of moral issues to come out the way we want them to and be dominant in this country, I don't see how we can vote any other way. That's just my opinion.

**Mark:** As I mentioned earlier, Matthew chapter seven, Jesus says "beware of wolves in sheep's clothing." You must judge their actions, their words and actions. You can't judge their heart. But you must judge what they do. And, that will give you the clue. And so, as I think politically, like you, Vickie, I try to prayerfully think about any person running for elected office and what really are the actions that person stands for and what will be the outcome of that person being in office and that's where I have to cast my ballot. If they're in concert with what I know from the Word of God is right, I vote that direction. And when their actions, I believe, go against The Word of God and the good for, for His people then, you know, that determines who I'm going to vote for.

**David:** May I drop in one other comment? Early on when Donald Trump was running for president, he was quoted as saying that he had never done anything that he needed to ask God's forgiveness for. I think there's evidence that he was confronted by believers or a believer in particular, or maybe multiple ones, and that he addressed that

issue and asked forgiveness for things that we are aware of that were, you know, particularly in the moral area, were way off base earlier in His life. So I think The Lord has definitely done some work in His life, whether where he stands; like you say, Mark only The Lord knows. But I think the Lord has done significant work in His life from where he was in earlier years in His life.

**Mark:** That's a great point that I hope all of us can say, I am different today. I am more a person of God today than I was 10 years ago. We're hoping for sanctification for all of us, and pray and hope that's true for (former) president Trump. I think there were changes that we saw in his life when he was in the White House. And, you know, for that same reason, I'm hoping for President Biden that his heart will be more captured for Christ as he goes on. I just pray the Holy Spirit gets his ear versus the spirit of the age and the spirit of very liberal politics. And so I'm hoping that President Biden's spine and backbone will get bolder and stronger in the next four years versus weaker. So that's why we've got to pray, whoever's in the White House regardless of whether we voted for them or not, we need to pray for them, because only God's help can win the day, that's for sure.

This has been a good conversation. I think it underscores the fact that we cannot study the Bible in a vacuum. And that we study the Bible in the context of what's going on right now today, and we see a lot of applicability. So why don't we end here and pick up next week at the beginning of a new section called "The Herald of Good News" and move forward from there.

**Closing Prayer:** So, Lord, thank you for this conversation. Guide us Lord as citizens who belong to Your kingdom, even as we are citizens, Lord, in the world but not of the world. So may we all, Lord, seek Your Leadership and Your Kingship over our lives, our Church, our nation, our world. In the name of Messiah Jesus we pray. Amen.

All right, by God's grace, see you next week.

**Class #29 April 20, 2021 Handout & Zoom Recording “The Herald of Good News”**  
Ezekiel 6:8-10; 11:14-21; 16:59-63; 28:24-26; 35:1-15; 36:1-15; 36:16-38; 37:1-14

I am coming to you remotely from beautiful downtown Greenville, South Carolina. We took a couple of days and went down to see our family in Atlanta. And, we're on our way back tomorrow and stopped over in Greenville just to enjoy this nice little city. So, am coming to you from the beautiful Homewood Suites somewhere in Greenville.

**Opening Prayer:** Lord, we give You thanks for this beautiful day and for Your creation. We thank You that through the technology of Zoom, we are able to be together today in different places around the country but together in Your Holy Spirit. So, we do pray, Lord, for our study today even as we also ask for Linda's beloved daughter, Stacie, with this move and responsibilities and stresses that a move entails. We thank You Lord for Your hand upon her. We thank You that Ryan is doing well and we pray that will continue. We also remember the Giannieis with their putting their house back on the market; that a buyer would come soon and very soon for their plans. And, of course, Lord, we lift up all those on our Church prayer list. Especially, Father, we pray for our dear friend Ken Cabay and for the healing of his hand and continuing sustaining power upon Ken and Lisa and their family. We pray all these things in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Short sections of Good News in the midst of a lot of judgment and tough language and tough situations that we've seen throughout our study, we now get these bursts of Good News of hope; of restoration; of promise. And, that certainly resonates with us in the midst all the stuff that is going on in our lives. We need to hear that Good News that breaks through at least for a moment. **Ezekiel 6:8-10 8** “Yet I will leave some of you alive.

*So that get's at the remnant, right? Ironically, the remnant is a big Biblical theme. “Remnant” means a limited number of people, but it's a huge theme in Scripture; that there will always be a remnant that will always be saved. We hope the remnant will be as large as possible, but a remnant. Remember Jesus' parable of the seed falling on the four types of ground. There, the farmer by grace, scatters his seed lavishly, gracefully, free, “Hear, hear, hear, here is my Word,” and He puts it all over the earth. And, 25 percent comes to sustaining growth and life. And so, what does that parable teach? It is a stark parable about the remnant. We see these biblical themes woven throughout Ezekiel, and they become large uber Scriptural themes as well.*

When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, 9 then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols. And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. **10** And they shall know that I am the Lord. I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them.”

*It's Good News for the remnant to the exiles, but they're going to have to have a Spiritual rebirth, and birth is painful. I mean, who am I to say that? For all of you who have borne children physically, you know that birth involves pain, and Spiritual rebirth is going to be a painful experience because, it means we're going to have to die to ourselves and we are going to have to see our sins; repent of them, and then the Lord will restore us. Repentance is far from an easy thing. It means that we have to die to our pride; we have to die to our own selfishness; and we have to go through the painful process of surrendering all to God.*

*The spiritual rebirth of the survivors of the exiles of the destruction of Jerusalem and national calamity will occur on three levels: They will remember Yahweh; that He is Israel's Redeemer and Husband. So you see the references then to adultery and sexual immorality. The word "whoring" appears twice in this short section. So, again, a huge Biblical theme as God is the Husband of Israel. But then that will cause the survivors to see their sins and then to understand that they must repent and come back to God. It is going to be hope; God's with them, but they are going to have to face their sin and idolatry. So that's the first short verse of Good News.*

*Classically, Lutherans talk about the Bible being the balance between Law and Gospel. And here in just in these few verses we see that, "Yes, there is Gospel, The Good News, but there's also the Law that sin is sin, and we must repent of it; and then, from that, will come the restoration. The world wants to skip repentance and go straight to the grace. God will never allow us to do that.*

**Ezekiel 11:14-21 Israel's New Heart and Spirit 14** And the word of the Lord came to me: 15 "Son of man, your brothers, even your brothers, your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Go far from the Lord; to us this land is given for a possession.' 16 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.' 17 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.' 18 And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. 19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. 21 But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord God."

*This is a remarkable section in Ezekiel with some of the rich, amazing themes of The Word of God that the Lord Jesus will pick up in The Gospels and really run with it. Every week we say that while the Book of Ezekiel is not quoted explicitly in the New Testament, it is implicitly foundational to everything we read in the New Testament.*

*So there is the preamble and the thesis in **verses 14 and 15**. The exiles are the central concern here, and they are Ezekiel's brothers and "the men of the redemption." Now that phrase in verse 14 in the ESV is translated "your kinsmen." Those kinsmen are the Israelites who are the Judeans back home in Jerusalem, and God is saying they should have been Ezekiel's kinsmen. Now, you will know that Word from another Book in the Bible with a huge theme of "The Kinsman Redeemer." That is in the Book of Ruth and foundational to that powerful beautiful book in the Old Testament where Boaz becomes Ruth's Kinsman Redeemer where she is able to come into Israel through Boaz; and then through Boaz and Ruth come the whole line of David and eventually The Messiah Jesus. The people back home in Jerusalem should have been the exiles' kinsmen redeemers to say, "Come home and we will welcome you because we are your brothers and sisters in Yahweh." But, that's not what was happening back home. The people back in Jerusalem who had been left were laughing at the exiles. They thought the exiles were the ones who weren't being punished. They were not following God so the Lord's going to have a rebuttal to those in Jerusalem who think they are in the driver's seat because the exiles must have been the ones who were the great sinners or they would not have been exiles. So verse 16 is a remarkable sentence, perhaps, one of the most remarkable in all the Old Testament. And this is one of the things I love about the Bible. We're reading and reading and we come to this sentence; and it's so easy to gloss over this. But I want us to really pay attention to verse **16**, Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, (Ezekiel and the exiles) yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.'*

*Now, this is a game changer for the Old Testament theology. Because, really for the first time in the first two-thirds of the Bible, we remember the Old Testament is about 70 percent of the Bible. So, for the first time in the first testament of Scripture, there's the understanding that God is with His people apart from the land. The Land is still, obviously, in play to this very day, so I don't want to overlook the importance of the land. But, the point is while they are in exile God is providing a sanctuary for them Himself. Apart from The Temple in Jerusalem; apart from the Land of Israel of Judea, God is their sanctuary. Now, that is unparalleled in the Old Testament. And, what I hear in that is **John 4 when Jesus meets the woman at the well from Samaria. 7** A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." **8** (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) **9** The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) **10** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." **11** The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." **13** Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a*

spring of water welling up to eternal life.” **15** The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” .....**19** *The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.* **20** *Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”* **21** *Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.* **22** *You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.* **23** *But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.* **24** *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”* **25** *The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”* **26** *Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.””*

*So where does the Lord get that? We say all along that Jesus doesn't make up new things in the New Testament. He builds on His Word from Genesis fulfilling it. So, I would say that **John 4 is a fulfillment or a building upon Ezekiel 11:16** and so we see these connections where we begin to understand that it's not going to be the physical Temple where only legitimate worship can happen, but it's going to be wherever the Lord is, we worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. So, this will eventually get us to the New Testament understanding where Jesus says,*

**John 2:19-21** *19 Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body.”*

*Now we are worshipping the risen Lord. How can we say that the people in Ethiopia are worshipping just as much as we are; those secret Christians in Saudi Arabia; or wherever it may be. It is because wherever we are in the Holy Spirit in the Truth where Christ is, there is true worship. So, it's a huge understanding now of the grace of God.*

*The land is still promised. They are going to come back to the land after this period of exile is over and we hear about that in verses 17-21. These verses announce fundamental changes in Israel's relationship with their land and their God: There's going to be a new Exodus to a new land. The land is going to be new because it's going to be holy. The detestable things, the abominations, are going to be cast out. The exiles must restore it to holiness.*

*And, again, another huge, huge Word of God theme they are going to be given a new heart; and we see that in the prophet Jeremiah. We see that throughout now the fulfillment of The Messiah Jesus. The new covenant, the new heart– the restitution of Yahweh's covenant with his people; this renewal is described as a heart-transplant. So,*

*at that point ,we will finally realize His benefits and not take His grace for granted. At the end, the people and the LORD will be one together in covenant.*

*So, there's going to be a restoration, but it's going to come with a new heart, a new spirit, a new holiness and only God can do that.*

### **Theological implications**

- Those who are arrogant, especially those in authority, will face God's wrath.
- The true Israel is recognizable not by external marks such as circumcision, the possession of the Law, or the Temple in Jerusalem, but by a willing obedience to the grace and covenant of God.
- Again, where does the Apostle Paul get his teaching in Romans 9, 10, 11 about "what therefore about Israel." Paul says that not every Israelite is a true Israelite. And, what does Paul mean by that in the letter of Romans? He means that the true Israelite is the Israelite who is finally the one who is faithful to the Redeemer of the Covenant, Jesus Christ.
- Spiritual renewal is achieved not by human effort but by God's act alone.
- God is always, always faithful.

Again, a short section; a short burst of Good News that's chocked full of amazing theological importance that has ramifications for eternity.

Questions, comments, concerns about that section?

**Linda Handy:** If we gather as penitent people of faith, what does that say about the people who say, "I don't need to go to Church on Sunday; I will worship in the cathedral of nature where one or two are gathered together so on a camping trip where Steve and Terrie and Walter and I are together, is that a Covenant Church?"

**Mark:** I thought where you were going with that is, what about the people who say, "I don't need church; I've got that out in nature." Then, all of the sudden you and Walter and the Laird's are on a camping trip which sounded really fun, but a camping trip is a short-term trip so I am assuming you and the Lairds are going to come back to your Church family after that. So, that's different.

The first part of that for those who say, "Well, that just gives me legitimacy to say that I don't need to be with other people; look, there's Ezekiel. God's with me wherever I am." That's called "eisegesis."

Exegesis is when you take Scripture to interpret it in its full context appropriately. That is called "exegesis."

"Eisegesis" is where you take one little passage and isolate it from everything else and say, "There it is, you see!"

You can't isolate this passage away from the fullness of the Scripture which says that we must be together. So remember in this passage God does bring them back together to The Temple in Jerusalem as a people; even, as for a period, they are in exile. Exile was never intended to be the final word.

There can be times when you and I can't be in worship. We're on a camping trip; we're recovering from surgery; we're traveling; we're away from our Church for 3 weeks, 6 weeks, couple of months; but then there is always the call to come back. That can never be the final legitimate place where we are.

Now, that we are beginning slowly to come out of the pandemic and people are coming back out and doing things, the huge question Spiritually is, "Will they come back to the Church community?" St. John members haven't been back yet. Their faith, hopefully, is strong and my hope, of course, is they will come back. We won't know that for awhile yet. But, the period of exile always ends in Scripture with a renewal and a coming back together. And, I pray that our period of exile will also come to an end when the time is right for folks to come back. It's still soon for some folks. I get that, but the longer it goes the more concern, of course, I have about that.

Anything else about that?

**Linda,** We have lived out of the nation; out of the country of America, which at one time was a Christian nation. If you spend an extended period of time away from our nation that was founded on faith and, for the most part for a long time, lived in faith. I think if we came back now from a foreign nation, we would not recognize ourselves. But, it was, for us, like coming home. We had lived away from the faith and then were able to come back to the faith, and it was a very joyous thing. And, it will be that way when we don't have all of us have said at Church on Sunday we've got our little ribbons separating the pews and I think we should have a great, glorious, arising and stripping of the ribbons and saying, "Sit with your brothers and sisters; and give 'em a hug." To me, that's going to be coming home, and we look for the day.

**Mark:** Right.

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, do you have any numbers, like what percentage of people have returned to Church at St. John and how many are still worshiping at home or are just not here?

**Mark:** I don't have a hard number for you. I was away Sunday, but I talked to Steve yesterday, and I think we had 270 in worship among the four worship services. Pre-pandemic we were around 400 on a Sunday with two services. So, if you just take those two data points, we're still down over a third, noticeably, significantly. It is up, though, from when we first started back this past summer, a long time, we were around 180 and so now we're around 270. Over the past year since we started in-person worship, the last Sunday of May, we are coming up now to a year. We've come back, but we still have a significant number of folks who have not returned yet. And, we we



understand that we still have to be careful, and I think for some people it's a matter of concern about the virus and being with a large number of people over a period of space and time in a confined space. And, for others, it's just a frustration of not wanting to worship sitting apart with a mask on. So, my guess is when the Governor lifts some of these restrictions that we're still under, that will hopefully be another surge of people; that when we can say, "Listen, we can come back together," and that hopefully will spark another wave.

One of the encouraging things about the Book of Ezekiel and about studying the history of Israel is that the exiles were sent away from Jerusalem in waves. They returned to Jerusalem in waves. It wasn't like 70 years later that they all just picked up from Babylon and came back in masse. No, the return to Jerusalem after post exile was about 100 year period. They come back around 530-536 BC, but we don't get Nehemiah and Ezra until much later. We see, then, that people come back in shifts. And so, I think the parallel for us; that in our small little miniature exile, they were gone for 70 years; we've been gone for a little over a year now, I would anticipate that folks will come back in waves. So, this is a miniature period of Babylonian captivity. And so, if it parallels, it probably means that folks will come back over the next six to twelve months in different waves.

That's encouraging. I just love you all, and I love the Church so much, it does kind of make me anxious, "Lord, where are these wonderful brothers and sisters? I love them so much I hope they come back." But then, "Okay, okay, I trust that the waves will come. We've seen that happening and we pray that it continues." But, it does also underscore how difficult Israel had it. Look how we've struggled with about a 13-14 month exile. They were gone 70 years; and a lot of them didn't come back. You know, after 70 years in Babylon, by the time the third generation comes along, they're pretty well established. And, because they're God's people, they did well. After 70 years a lot of them put down roots in Babylon, and they were a kind of middle class backbone. They were the professionals, teachers, merchants, medical people. And, a lot of them did not come back. So we'll see.

Another short section, another burst of Good News, **Ezekiel 16:59-63 *The Lord's Everlasting Covenant*** 59 "For thus says the Lord God: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, 60 yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. 61 Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. 62 I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, 63 that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord God."

*The announcement of grace is prefaced in verse 59 with God's judgment on Jerusalem because the people in Jerusalem have displayed contempt for God's covenant curses. The Lord really has been absolved. He does not need to establish the covenant, but He*

*is. He's going to look beyond the judgment to renew His covenant. However, the LORD now looks beyond the judgment to a day when he will take Jerusalem back and renew his covenant with her (v 60).*

- *First, he will remember his covenant that he made with her when she was young.*
- *Second, he will establish an eternal covenant with Jerusalem. The future of Jerusalem rests on the past covenant to which Yahweh remains eternally committed, in spite of the judgment and in spite of all appearances to the contrary.*
- *Behind this teaching is the Torah, Leviticus 26, where God lays out Covenant blessings and curses; that if we remain faithful to the covenant, here are our blessings.*
- *If we curse and break the covenant, here are the curses.*

*So they had no excuse and God says the same thing through Jeremiah (**Jer. 32:31-34**). The Lord is so full of grace. Even while we are yet sinners, Jesus died for us. He is just an amazing God that we serve.*

*In **verses 61-63**, the effects of God renewing the covenant are spelled out.*

- *First, Jerusalem's memory will be quickened.*
- *Second, Yahweh's new expressions of grace will evoke an intense sense of shame in her; again, sparking shame and repentance.*
- *Third, Jerusalem now will finally acknowledge God.*

*Yahweh, therefore, affirms Jerusalem's need for a fundamental spiritual renewal, the elimination of her sins, which only He can affect. No ritual acts on their part can accomplish this purging. It can occur only through the gracious intervention of God Himself. Clearly, we can hear the Promise of The Redeemer Christ that ultimately the only way that God could and has saved us from our sins is by sending His own Son to us to die for us.*

*So, here in this short section of Ezekiel is a Biblical foundation to the whole idea for **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Where does John 3:16 come from? How does our Lord say that? Well, you can hear John 3:16 built upon this little passage in the Book of Ezekiel.*

### **Theological Implications**

- The sentence of death hangs over everyone from the outset (**Rom 3:23**). Only by God's grace through our faith in Him can our sins be cleansed and our eternal life assured.
- God is faithful to us, even when we are unfaithful to Him.
- We recall our Lord's first public message recorded in the **Gospel of Mark 1:15**, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

These are rich little passages that beg us to really pray and think about them more than we have time to do during this allotted class time, but I hope we will all do so later.

Questions, comments?

**Vickie Smith:** I have a question, Mark. I have a friend who is actually Catholic, but he's very anti-Israel, very pro-Palestinian and anti-what Israel's doing now. He is a strong believer in replacement theology; i.e., Christians replace Jews. He says that when Christ came, God's covenant with the Jews was eliminated and Christ made a new covenant with Christians. And, reading this verse 60, "yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant." I thought the original covenant with Abraham was an everlasting covenant. It almost sounds here like, "Well, maybe God's covenants don't always last." And I understand it's because it takes two sides to take part in a covenant with both sides agreeing what they need to do for the covenant to go. I almost feel that verse almost justifies his argument. I mean we've argued and argued about it; and we don't talk about it any more because we don't get anywhere.

**Mark:** Your friend is wrong and he's really wrong. He is an advocate of replacement theology; i.e., the church has replaced Israel. It's also called supersessionism, the church has superseded Israel and Israel is no longer a part of God's Promises. It is a gross misreading of Scripture. In the Book of Romans, clearly there in Romans 9, 10, 11, Paul says that we've been grafted in to Israel; that Gentiles are the wild branch of the wild Olive chutes that have been grated in to the main vine which is Israel. So, he says, "Don't you dare, Gentiles, despise Israel, the vine, because you are the wild chutes, you've been grafted in. If it wasn't for Israel you would be out. It's only because of Israel that you've been grafted in to the one covenant." In Jesus at the Last Supper when The Passover becomes Holy Communion. 1 Corinthians 11 says, "new covenant," but in the Gospels it's the covenant, reaffirming. So it's the one covenant that gets affirmed and reaffirmed and reaffirmed.

That's what's happening in Ezekiel. He's not starting a new covenant. The language there in English is a little misleading, as you identify. What this means is that he is reaffirming that this covenant is going to be an eternal none. It's not a new one. It's always been the promise that God is going to fulfill the one covenant by His own actions and finally it will be The Redeemer Jesus.

I would love for your friend to read Gerry McDermott's Book, "Israel Matters." That's a book that can be read in just a few hours, a couple hundred pages, written for the general church reading person, like your friend. And, I would love for your friend to read that. And, if he will read that book, I would love then to sit down with him and discuss it. And, it sounds like he's a man of deep passion, conviction, opinion; holds those opinions very tightly and believes in them and is willing to argue for them. So, if he truly has an open mind about this, my guess is that he's never read a book like, "Israel Matters," that he has been fed this mis-theology of replacement theology, and he has just not had an opportunity to examine it carefully in Biblical light.

**Vickie:** I think some of it is personal because his ex-wife is a Palestinian and his child is half Palestinian and I think he's heard a lot of negative stuff about the way Israel treats the Palestinians and that sort of thing. It is almost like he is justifying his sincere dislike for the country of Israel. I think part of it comes from a personal place too.

**Mark:** Well, I think the resource would be, "Israel Matters,"

**Vickie:** I've actually suggested that book to him, but then he has four that he wants me to read, so I don't want to read them so we kind of came to a stalemate. **45:01**

**Mark:** In our trips over to Israel, I've had the occasion to interact with about half a dozen Palestinian Christians, Arab Christians, who live in Israel as Israeli citizens; but they're Arab Palestinian Christians living in Israel. You know, it's interesting that they are the ones, those I have spoken to, are the ones who are often most appreciative for Israel. Because they say, "Look at all these other Arab Palestinian countries, Muslim countries. You know, I couldn't practice my faith in those countries. I would be ostracized, jailed, killed, whatever. But, in Israel, yes, it's not perfect, but I have so much more freedom in Israel than I would in any other country in the Middle East."

Israel's not perfect, never has been, but the land of Israel is still in play in God's covenant; and eventually it's going to be the New Jerusalem, the New Earth, the New Heaven that comes down.

**Linda Handy:** I was thinking, Mark, of all of the Muslim and Arab villages we saw within the country of Israel with minarets and calls to prayer; Bethlehem is a Muslim city and they were all over. And, that was the first trip we took there and was one of the eye openers; that they are members of the Israeli defense force; live free. They practice Muslim theology within the nation of Israel and live with the benefits of having the nation to protect them. It's not just Arab Christians. Arab Muslims also live better (safer) within the nation of Israel than they do across the border to Jordan and it only takes a minute to see it. They are people; they're not perfect.

**Mark:** That's absolutely right. Obviously, there are a lot of stresses and imperfections. But, at the end of the day, I don't see how anybody can read the Bible and say that Israel no longer matters. And, Paul will say in the Book of Ephesians that we are members of the commonwealth of Israel. That's a huge statement. So, Israel is the vine that we've been grafted in to.

**Ezekiel 28:24-26 24** "And for the house of Israel there shall be no more a brier to prick or a thorn to hurt them among all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the Lord God. ***Israel Gathered in Security*** 25 "Thus says the Lord God: When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and manifest my holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they shall dwell in their own land that I gave to my servant Jacob. **26** And

they shall dwell securely in it, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards. They shall dwell securely, when I execute judgments upon all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.”

*Again, God reaffirms His recommitment to Israel and to her well being and restoration. And so, we can understand how this would be Gospel to the exiles; that they have endured so much pain and insult from their enemies, but that God is going to restore them back home with holiness so that His name and His people's name will be remembered in holiness. “and they shall build houses and plant vineyards. They shall dwell securely,” and God did all of this. By the time we get to Nehemiah and Ezra in the middle of the 1st Century BC around 470-460 BC all that has happened. Again, this Good News of restoration of hope for the future.*

### **Theological Implications**

- No nation stands outside of God's sovereignty.
- When the Lord intervenes in a nation's affairs, He does so to manifest His own glory and holiness. (Remember the Lord's Prayer.) “Hallowed” Holy be thy name. Holiness is one of the great Truths of Scripture that has probably been forgotten and attacked as much or more than any other revelation of God's Word. We are called to be a Holy people because God is Holy. So, unholiness always needs to be confessed and we ask for God's forgiveness again.
- God keeps his covenant. God is a covenant keeper. He's not capricious. He doesn't make promises with His fingers crossed behind His back. He's our God who keeps His Word.

**Mark:** Getting back to your friend's comment, Vickie, it's hard to imagine God making these promises of restoration in the land if eventually it didn't make any difference and God was going to just wipe it out. God doesn't do that. So, if your friend wanted to read the Book of Ezekiel we can talk about that too.

Comments or questions about any of that?

**Alan Denekas:** Gerry McDermott says that we can take comfort in the fact that knowing that God keeps His covenant with Israel, He will also keep His covenant with us, and we will be eternally saved.

**Mark:** Absolutely, great point. It would cause us to wonder about our salvation if, in fact, God has rejected Israel. If the church has replaced Israel and Israel's been rejected, then how can we ever be assured of our eternal security. Why and what would then cause God not to do the same to us that He did to Israel. That does underscore another essential reason why this is such an important teaching. For eternal security, we have to just look to Israel and say, “Okay, (God) You did not break Your covenant with them, even with their terrible unfaithfulness, I trust in my security in Jesus.”

These next sections **Ezekiel 35:1-15 and 36:1-15** are the two sides of one single concern and that's the restoration of The Land of Israel. The first half of this one concern in Ezekiel 35 focuses on the cause of the Land's desolation and the removal of those who stand in the way of the restoration. **Ezekiel 36:1-15** focuses on the other side of how the land will be restored. This is a beautiful theological, as well as literary, example of how The Holy Spirit worked through Ezekiel to put together this book in a perfect way that just bursts with amazing theology.

### **Ezekiel 35:1-15**, the prerequisite to the restoration: the judgment of Seir (Edom)

Edomites are the descendants of Esau;

- God commands Ezekiel to set his face against Mount Seir. This is a synonym for Edom, and it occurs 38 times in the OT. Mt Seir is part of the mountain region given by God to the descendants of Esau (Gen 33:14, 16). It's an alternate name for Edom.
- This nation of Edom that had gloated over the devastation of the land of Israel will suffer the same fate. Then they will acknowledge Yahweh.
- The formal indictment of Mt Seir begins (v 5) with a charge of "long-standing enmity. From the womb of Rebekah, Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) were rivals. But Edom's hatred of Israel intensified as the years went by. When the Babylonians razed Jerusalem, the Edomites clapped their hands with glee.
- Some of the Edomites participated in that razing and even sought out and slaughter fugitives from Jerusalem (v 6). They are guilty of murder—bloodguilt.
- God will bring destruction to Mt Seir, but the ultimate goal of Edom destruction is to force Edom to recognize that the patron defender of Israel is also the Lord of their own history (vv 7-9).
- God's second charge against Edom was their desire and plan to take over Judah now that the population had been wiped out by the Babylonians. We have some archeological evidence indicating Edomite presence in the land of Israel following the Babylonian siege.
- But the Edomites failed to see Yahweh's continued presence in the land (v 10). They've assumed that a land whose population had been deported and whose cities lay in ruins must have been abandoned by its god. God will bring his full fury against Edom for this assumption (vv 11-12a).
- Yahweh has heard the taunts of these enemies of his people (vv 12b-13). Now not only Mt Seir but the entire land of Edom will become a wasteland just like the mountains of Israel (vv 14-15). Yahweh remains the rightful owner of the land of Israel. Any encroachment on the land by another nation is a direct challenge to him.

**Ezekiel 35:1-15 and 36:1-15 Prophecy Against Mount Seir** 1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, 3 and say to it, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. 4 I will lay your cities waste, and you shall become a desolation, and you shall know that I am the Lord. 5 Because you cherished perpetual enmity and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment, 6 therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, I will prepare you for blood,

and blood shall pursue you; because you did not hate bloodshed, therefore blood shall pursue you. 7 I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation, and I will cut off from it all who come and go. 8 And I will fill its mountains with the slain. On your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain with the sword shall fall. 9 I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities shall not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the Lord. 10 “Because you said, ‘These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them’—although the Lord was there— 11 therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, I will deal with you according to the anger and envy that you showed because of your hatred against them. And I will make myself known among them, when I judge you. 12 And you shall know that I am the Lord. “I have heard all the reviling that you uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, ‘They are laid desolate; they are given us to devour.’ 13 And you magnified yourselves against me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against me; I heard it. 14 Thus says the Lord God: While the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate. 15 As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you; you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

*This is very deep Biblical history; goes back to the enmity of Jacob and his brother Esau. And we know about that; Esau sold his birthright; there was jealousy and finally restoration between the two brothers, but it led then to perpetual envy and rivalry between the nations, Edom from Esau, Israel from Jacob. And so, we go back to Genesis to understand the background; they were always rivals. And so, there are two charges against the Edomites. They first reacted with glee when Israel with Judah was attacked. Even some of the Edomites participated in the razing of Jerusalem. They are guilty of murder; they have blood guilt, but they will then understand that, with their destruction, that God is the patron God of Israel.*

*The second charge against Edom was their desire to take over Judah; that they thought they were just going to move in. In fact, just in the last 25 years we have archeological evidence that Edomites did come into Judah and try to set up shop. We have Edomite artifacts from that same period when they tried to come in and take over the land after it had been ruined by the Babylonians. But, God is the rightful owner of The Land of Israel. To challenge the land of Israel is to challenge God Himself; and the Edomites will suffer for that.*

**The second half in the next 15 verses in Ezekiel 36** is the transformation of the land.

**Ezekiel 36:1-15 Prophecy to the Mountains of Israel 1** “And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord. 2 Thus says the Lord God: Because the enemy said of you, ‘Aha!’ and, ‘The ancient heights have become our possession,’ 3 therefore prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord God: Precisely because they made you desolate and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the talk and evil gossip of the people, 4 therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God: Thus says the Lord God to the mountains and the hills, the ravines and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted cities, which have

become a prey and derision to the rest of the nations all around, 5 therefore thus says the Lord God: Surely I have spoken in my hot jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave my land to themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, that they might make its pasturelands a prey. 6 Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I have spoken in my jealous wrath, because you have suffered the reproach of the nations. 7 Therefore thus says the Lord God: I swear that the nations that are all around you shall themselves suffer reproach. 8 “But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people Israel, for they will soon come home. 9 For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. 10 And I will multiply people on you, the whole house of Israel, all of it. The cities shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt. 11 And I will multiply on you man and beast, and they shall multiply and be fruitful. And I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before. Then you will know that I am the Lord. 12 I will let people walk on you, even my people Israel. And they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance, and you shall no longer bereave them of children. 13 Thus says the Lord God: Because they say to you, ‘You devour people, and you bereave your nation of children,’ 14 therefore you shall no longer devour people and no longer bereave your nation of children, declares the Lord God. **15** And I will not let you hear anymore the reproach of the nations, and you shall no longer bear the disgrace of the peoples and no longer cause your nation to stumble, declares the Lord God.”

***Ezekiel 36:1-15, the restoration and transformation of the land***

*Do you hear how God is speaking to the Land itself? Again, God is prophesying to the mountains themselves, the ravines, the very land itself is all of God. God will have the last Word.*

*Edom could be identified by a single mountain, but Ezekiel now addresses “the mountains of Israel.” This oracle concerns primarily the land, not the people, of Israel, and the LORD is the one, true owner of it (vv 1-3).*

*Edom represents all the nations that have seized Israelite land for themselves (v 5). This seizure of the land was an insult to Yahweh. Plus, they took the land gleefully. God’s anger has been inflamed by actions and attitudes.*

*God sentences the nations in vv 6-7. First, he announces His presence. He’s ready to defend His land. Second, He speaks. He will have the last word. Third, He declares that the nations will get a taste of their own medicine.*

- *God now promises a new day for the land of Israel (vv 8-11).*
- *The covenant relationship between God and His people will be reestablished. (2)*
- *The nation of Israel will have returned from exile.*
- *God will bring a repopulation to the land through the house of Israel (v 10).*
- *Even the beasts will be blessed. The land will be like Paradise itself (v 11).*



- *The promise of a new day for the people is announced (vv 12-15). Land, people, and Yahweh will be forever united.*
- *Land, people and Yahweh will be forever united.*

**Vickie**, if your friend were just to read this one section. We just cannot come away from this with any other impression except that the land of Israel belongs to God and it's one with Him and this sets us up for the Book of Revelation. Jesus gives a vision to the future to the Apostle John—the New Jerusalem, The New Earth, The New Heaven come down to restore. That's a fulfillment of **Ezekiel 36:1-15, beautiful symmetry in Scripture.**

### **Theological Implications**

- The promises of God are sure. He has not forgotten his promises to his people and the land he has given them.
- The exiles have a new future, thanks only to God's grace.
- Those who position themselves in opposition to the people of Yahweh render themselves his enemies. Taunts against the kingdom of God are taunts against the LORD. He promises that the gates of hell—and the gates of Edom – will not prevail against his people and their inheritance.
- The land functions in a sacramental way: God's promises are tangible, real, and embodied.

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Lord, we give You thanks for our time and we pray now that Your promises of eternal security will be made complete for our dear sister Linda Angove. Thank You, Lord, for her faithfulness in You; and her trust in You, Lord. She lived faithfully and, Lord, we give You a special thanks that she died faithfully in Your arms, and we trust You Jesus for her eternal life. We pray for her husband David, for her sons, James and Matthew, and for the whole family. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you and God bless you all.

**Class #30 April 27 remainder of April 20, 2021 Handout for “The Herald of Good News” on April 27 Zoom Recording Ezekiel 36:16-38; 37:1-14**

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to You Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ and your Holy Spirit. We pray that You would make a way for us to enter into Your Word because, Lord, we know that it is Your Word that saves us; guides us; directs us. We pray Your Word would fill us now, both in our minds that we may understand; our hearts that we may believe; and in our bodies that we may live out our faith for Your glory. So as we turn to Ezekiel, Lord, we pray for all those in our hearts today; all the people in our Church and community; around the world in special need. Lord, as You are with us; we trust that You will be with them as well. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

All right, so it's good to see a few folks back who were not able to be with us here recently; and it's good to be with all of you. So we are going to finish today this section we call “The Herald of Good News.” And so as we have been glad to note the last couple of weeks we have had better news in Ezekiel than we have had in previous Tuesdays. But the Word of God is always true; it's always transparent; it never skims or compromises. We hear a lot of judgment; and we hear a lot of restoration. So, it's all God's Word, and we need to hear It.

This is Class #30, **Ezekiel 36:16-38**. The whole section is about the restoration of God's honor, Yahweh, the Lord, God the Father Son Holy Spirit. It's about His honor. I love the fact that Ezekiel keeps us radically focused on The Lord.

Part of our definition of sin is to turn away from God and back to ourselves. Ezekiel forces us to keep our vision on God and God alone. And so, The Lord is going to restore Israel; and that will be a great blessing to Israel. But the main reason He's going to restore Israel is to restore and vindicate His own Name and honor.

Brothers and sisters, we will also see that so much rides on the glory of God; on how we bear His name in the world. To be a “Christian,” the Word literally means “little Christ.” And so, we are always witnessing to God, to Christ, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and whether our witness is positive or negative. We can't help but bear His name. If we are quiet, and we don't speak up for Him, that is a type of witness. When we sin, that is a type of witness. Those are obviously witnesses that disparage the honor and glory of God. But to be faithful; to worship Him; to love in Truth; to reach out to others; this is the way that we can and must honor God's name and His reputation.

**Verse 20 of this section is probably the key verse.** Let me just read that, initially, **Ezekiel 36:20** But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land.’

*It is a great confusion to the nations as they watch God having to punish Israel, because to punish Israel, in some way, tarnished God's own glory because they were so intertwined.*

So let's look at this section. Let me read Ezekiel **36:16-21** **The Lord's Concern for His Holy Name** **16** The word of the Lord came to me: **17** "Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity. **18** So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. **19** I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. **20** But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land.' **21** But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.

*So it's all about the honor and the Name of the Lord as we see what the crisis involved. The Lord Yahweh speaks to Ezekiel as a friend. We see that previously; God had a relationship with Abraham; God had a relationship with Moses that was intimate, friendly, where they conversed as close friends would. And it reminds me that later, The Messiah will say, "I call you My friends. And so The Lord is once again giving us permission to come to Him as dear friends would come to one another. And so it's a beautiful relationship that God makes possible for us. But the way it has been defiled by the House of Israel. The land was given to Israel as a gift; they have defiled the land. Again, Scripture makes this point so many times. We cannot separate God from the land or the land from God. The land is a sacramental type of a very real presence of God with His people. To say that the land of Israel is no longer important in the scheme of salvation doesn't make sense Biblically. To separate the land and God is to lose all things. The land has been defiled by Israel's own moral defilement. And when Scripture speaks about "defilement," that's a technical word in the Hebrew that means "a moral defilement." Usually that large category includes three subcategories. Defilement includes murder; sexual abomination, and adultery. And so, "defilement," to defile the land, is a catch all word.*

*And I would then argue that those three defilements; i.e., murder, sexual abomination, idolatry, are just as much, if not more, in this land as they were in the 6th Century BC, in the land of Israel. And, we can think of all the examples.*

*On the one hand, it is breathtaking and almost overwhelming to think that even now after all these years of Scriptural revelation, after the death and resurrection of The Messiah, we are in the same place that Israel was in the 6th Century BC; even more so.*

*We think of murder; the first thing I think about, of course, is elective abortions. But, you can extrapolate from that all the murders that happen. And, good grief, we can spend all day talking about sexual abominations and idolatry. We have said before that the main idol today is "the self," the worship of oneself. Examples: We don't want to have*

*to follow God; we (act as if) are god; and we will determine what is right and wrong for us and determine who we are.*

*So, it is breathtaking to know that this pollution of defilement fills our land. And, it is only by the grace of God that He hasn't wiped us out already. But judgment is coming, and we are closer today than we were yesterday to the second coming when all things will be put right and all sin will be judged. But, we see this continuing need to repent of the same sins that Israel was called to repent of.*

*And so, then God brings His divine fury against Israel for this. You see the reference to the uncleanness of a woman and her menstrual impurity. We could spend a long time talking about blood and the importance of blood and ritual purity with blood. We would have to go back to the holiness code in the Book of Leviticus that cover these bases. It all works together. Ezekiel builds upon the Torah; and the New Testament builds upon Ezekiel as all the Scriptures fit together beautifully.*

*And so, among the foreign nations, the removal of Israel from their land led to disturbing conclusion about Yahweh Himself. The nations understood that Israel and the land were one unit before God. And so for Israel to be put into exile from the land left a big question about God Himself to the foreign nations, who would assume the Lord would be obligated to defend His land and His people.*

*The separation of the land and Israel left these foreign nations to conclude that either Yahweh had abandoned His people, or that He was incapable of defending them against the God of Babylon who had destroyed Judah. So in either case, you see, God's reputation; His Holy Name has been defiled and that must be vindicated. These are, obviously, very serious matters, and it all kind of fits together.*

*You know, with the land as the sacramental sign, God always works through His creation. The sacraments are physical signs of His Spiritual reality. The land functions like that. Later in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul will give his very important teaching on the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Paul says that before you take the body and blood of your Lord, examine yourself. And, you need to take it correctly because the sacrament and the Lord are one given unit. We see how these physical signs of the Spiritual presence with God are consistent throughout Scripture. And that's why we have to be careful how we live in the land and careful how we take Holy Communion; these things are the real presence of God, and they're not to be defiled.*

**The recovery of Yahweh's honor begins in Ezekiel 36:20-32, *I Will Put My Spirit Within You*** 22 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. 23 And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their

eyes. 24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. 29 And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. 30 I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. 31 Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. 32 It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

- *A remarkable section, not just in Ezekiel but in the whole of Scriptures divided into three subsections.*
- *The Declaration of God's motive in restoring Israel;*
- *actions He will do for them;*
- *and how Israel is to respond.*
  
- *In verses 22 and 23, Yahweh has the goal of sanctifying His Name.*
- *It is the vindication of His name and His own reputation and glory that are paramount.*
  
- *Verses 24 through 30 are the most detailed amazing summaries of God's restorative action in all of Scripture; it is so detailed:*
- *He's going to cleanse His regathered people; wholesale cleansing from sin.*
- *Secondly, He will remove their fossilized hard heart;*
- *and will give them a new heart, plus a new Spirit within them.*
- *He will then cause His people to be obedient to Himself,*
- *and He will renew His covenant with His people.*
  
- *And so with all the judgment and the heaviness of Ezekiel, we find these very detailed glorious, glorious promises of how God is going to restore His people;*
- *and how then, we must also say, "Lord please for us; these promises are for us too."*
- *We believe that The Lord is going to forgive our sins;*
- *He's going to give us a new heart and a new Spirit.*
- *The Lord is going to put in us a desire to obey Him.*
- *He's going to re-covenant Himself with us.*
- *We must read these promises made to Israel as God's promises through Christ made to us today.*
- *With the people restored, the land will be restored. There will be abundance from the land so all of His creation will show forth His glory in a new way.*

- **Verse 32**, it is not for Israel's sake, nor for our sake that God will act. We must understand that God is saying that He is not doing this because they are good people who have proven themselves enough that He's going to restore them.
- This is done by God only, entirely by His grace. Once He acts on grace, then the people will say, "Wow, we really have sinned. Lord; we cry out to You and ask Your forgiveness; we thank You for giving us a second chance."

This reminds me of the five great sola's of the Reformation. Sola means "only."

- by grace alone (grace)
- through faith alone (faith)
- in Christ alone (Christ)
- according to Scripture alone (Scripture)
- for the sake of the glory of God alone (Glory)
- The theological Biblical foundation of the five Sola's

**Ezekiel 36:33-38** tells us how Yahweh's honor will be vindicated **33** "Thus says the Lord God: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. 34 And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. 35 And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.' 36 Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the Lord; I have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it. 37 "Thus says the Lord God: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock. **38** Like the flock for sacrifices,[b] like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

- So another amazing section of Gospel of good news.
- We learned that through God's saving actions, all nations will come to understand and to acknowledge that God does have a special relationship with His people in the land of Israel.

Last week Vickie shared that she had argued with her friend who is convinced that the Church has replaced Israel, and Israel is no longer important but is also against the ways of God.

- Ezekiel shows us that our God and Israel and the land are intertwined in a kind of a trinity relationship.
- We've seen that now in Israel. In our own lifetime we've seen the restoration of Israel.
- We've seen the flowering of Israel; we've seen people returning to Israel.
- **We are living in the days of the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36; and we must not overlook this amazing fulfillment.**

*We wonder if the Lord will act; will He really act anymore? And then we read Ezekiel 36; and we look at Israel today in our lifetime and see that God is always true to His Word; there's the fulfillment, right there. God's Holy name will be vindicated in Israel; His flock will come to honor Him.*

**Theological Implications:**

The world is watching.

The world is watching Israel.

The world is watching the Church.

What is our witness like?

Are we bearing witness that gives God glory.

Are we or are we not a people who lets others know of His Holy presence?

God's actions are always driven for His purposes and for the sanctity of His reputation.

When the Church is faithful to God, His reputation grows.

When the church capitulates and becomes just like the world and advocates for all the issues the world loves, the glory of God is greatly diminished.

God acts by grace and that no political or economic or social program can ever change the human condition.

The world tries to make humanity better by instilling certain educational, political, economic and social programs and mandates, but God alone is the answer; Christ alone is the answer.

And when we, when we try to find our answer in any other theory or philosophy or program, we are ultimately committing idolatry, because we are thinking, "We, I, we can solve our problems; we can make ourselves a good and better people. And that ultimately foundationally is idolatry. It's only when we repent by the grace of God that we can get a new heart and a new Spirit.

And then finally the future of Israel rests in the eternal immutable, which means unchanging, unbroken promises of God. As we said last week, it's a good thing that God does not break His promises to Israel, because I think it was Alan who said this. If God breaks His promises to Israel, then what's going to keep him from breaking His promises to us. And so there's a continuous unbroken promise which should give us eternal security that nothing, nothing, Paul says in Romans 8, can ever take us away from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. So that was a lot of talking on my part, let me stop for comments, thoughts, questions, concerns?

**Alan Denekas:** Just one thought, Mark. The atheist Richard Dawkins talks about God as being self-centered and bragging and out for His own glory. But I think what this passage reminds us is that it shows that He is out for His own glory; but also to show that He is the only answer, like you just said. It's not a matter of drawing attention to Himself for His own selfish reasons but to point to Himself as the only answer to mankind's problems; much in contrast to all the political and social programs that we're now trying to come up with to better all the human race.

**Mark:** Thank you. Amen!

**Alan Denekas:** I think nowadays, since we're separated from God, people have the idea that we're so scientific and so technological that if we just do the science right and get the technology right, then we'll be able to solve all mankind's problems. But, we're quickly finding out that's not going to work.

One hundred years ago in 1922-1923, there was a great debate in the church between a man named **J. Gresham Machen** and a guy named Fosdick. And, in fact, I think I'll say something about that in Sunday's sermon. **J. Gresham Machen was a great orthodox Presbyterian professor at Princeton** and saw that modernity and science versus scripture were infiltrating Princeton seminary, so much so, that people were questioning Scripture; i.e., the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection and everything you can imagine. Machen ends up leading a big battle that ends up with his leaving Princeton seminary and starting a new seminary. Basically he was battling **Harry Emerson Fosdick**, who, at the time, was the most famous minister in America. He was on the Time Magazine cover a couple times. And Fosdick, was the one who wrote a very famous letter called,

- "Will the Fundamentals Win?"
  - Fosdick was advocating that Christians must not think that doctrine is really true;
  - that you have to be modern;
  - that you have to "get with the program;"
  - that you don't have to believe in the virgin birth;
  - that you don't have to believe in the actual resurrection;
  - that you know those things don't really happen;
  - that they're all metaphors of how we all need to love each other.
- And so this was in 1922-23, about 100 years ago.
  - And that really was the foundation of what we're battling today and even more so.
  - This was in Europe 100 years before it came to America.
  - And so it comes to America between Machen and Fosdick;
  - And 100 years later, we're right back at it.
  - And so, the spiritual battle continues from generation to generation in many of the same ways.

**Linda Handy:** So there's nothing new under the sun. Our fantasy that we are somehow in charge of the universe is exactly that, "fantasy." It is not Truth, and if we deny the Truth, the Truth is not in us.

**Mark:** And we are not free. That's true.

**Linda:** I was, I was struck by our personal responsibility, that "My people who are called by My Name." When I was little, even when I was older, didn't make any difference how old I was; from the time I was little up until today, my parents always said to me, as I left the house to do anything, go to school or do anything. "You carry



our name and by carrying our name you carry the responsibility of carrying the honor and standing of our name.” And like, my parents were not somebodies, but what they were talking about is the same thing we're talking about here. We carry the Lord's name. I carried my family's name; I would not have disgraced it. We carry the Lord's name, and we need to be constantly on guard that we don't let our goatness slip out and deny His name because we are His people; we are His sheep.

**Mark:** Amen. So I find this strangely encouraging. Sometimes I can think, “Oh Lord, how can we battle these great things; we've got so many issues and so many sins. The spiritual battle is almost overwhelming Lord help us.” And then, we read Ezekiel. “Oh, wait a minute, same issues were then and people could stand fast by the grace of God. Oh, wait a minute, in 1922 the same issues; that people by the grace of God...” So, it encourages me; I hope it encourages each of us to say, “What an honor and blessing that we get to be the latest generation to stand faithfully on God's Truth just as every previous generation has had to do.” And, we ask God's grace to help us.

So you're right, Linda. Nothing new under the sun. And I find that strangely encouraging; that we're not battling something new and unexpected and unheard of; it's the ancient spiritual battle between God and satan and God and man and “Who is God?”

**Linda:** Between Truth and the lie; between the light and the dark.

**Mark:** Right, all those ancient Biblical ways to express it. Absolutely.

**Mark:** Good. Anything else about this section? Thank you Linda and Alan.

**Linda:** One more quick thing. As part of His people and the sheep of His pastures, we've got to make sure we are out there and not hiding our light under a bushel (basket). If we hide our light, the world will not see it. We have to be willing to take the slings and arrows of someone telling us, “Well, you're not progressive. You are really stuck in another time and another place.” And we've got to be willing to say, “Thanks be to God. Yes I am, in another time and another place.”

**Mark:** Right.

**Alan Denekas:** That's very well put. And I think also one of the things I would like to touch on in the Sunday school class this summer is how precious The Word and Truth of God are and in this time when we're denying the very reality of the bodies that we're made in; that we're denying objective reality completely; and even challenging the foundations of Truth itself. It just highlights how precious and unique The truth of God is and how we need to hang onto it by our teeth, our fingernails and wrap our arms and legs around it. It is a precious, precious thing that hopefully will be more and more highlighted by the darkness of the world around us. But it's a precious thing (God's Truth) that we have to cling to with (everything in us) all we've got.

**Mark:** Amen! All right, let's go to the next section, **Ezekiel 37:1-14**. Except for the opening chapter with that amazing throne and the chariot of God, this is the most well known passage in Ezekiel by even casual Bible readers, "**The Valley of Dry Bones.**"

This morning Terrie and Steve kindly sent the YouTube song of "Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones." We all know that spiritual; a great song that really captures the essence of what this message in Ezekiel is all about.

Delta Rhythm Boys "Dem Bones Dem Bones Dem Dry Bones"  
<https://youtu.be/pYb8Wm6-QfA>

So let's look at **Ezekiel 37**. Let me read the first two verses, and then we'll move through it. **The Valley of Dry Bones 1** The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. **2** And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry.

And so, this great prophetic utterance comes upon Ezekiel through The Spirit of the Lord, The Holy Spirit. Sometimes people ask if The Holy Spirit will only come when Jesus breathed it out in **Acts 2 and John 14**. Of course, The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Word of God, has been active since creation. **Genesis 1:1-2** "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

So, the Holy Spirit is throughout the whole salvation history. And we see that clearly here in **Ezekiel 37**. **Notice three things about the high number of bones.**

- This is not a small pile of bones; there are many, many bones on the surface,
  - which means they had not been buried properly. That's another key.
  - Lack of proper burial means a great disrespect and unholiness, if you will,
  - and they were extremely dry.
- 
- So these are a multiplicity of bones.
  - They have not been buried.
  - And they've been around a long long time because they've been,
  - on the surface, long enough to become very dry.
- 
- This, brothers and sisters, is the way The Word of God describes utter despair.
  - "This Valley is the epitome of utter death, utter despair, utter hopelessness; thousands of unburied, bleached out dry bones. There is no hope here, except of course, when God comes.

**The bones will live.** Let's look at **Ezekiel 37:3-10** **3** And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know." **4** Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. **5** Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. **6** And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord." **7** So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. **8** And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. **9** Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." **10** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

*So God asked, "Can these bones live?" and Ezekiel throws it back to Him. "Well, Lord, You know, I'm kind of afraid to answer that." So, this is an extremely important passage that lays (out), what will become the whole Biblical foundation of the resurrection of the body. This is going to be a passage that's foundational for the New Testament.*

- *For example, remember in the Gospel of Matthew after Jesus dies and is raised.*
- *The graves open and people walk around Jerusalem.*
- *And remember when Christ is raised from the the dead; He comes back and He has a body with the scars to prove it.*
- *And then Paul's great chapter in in 1 Corinthians 15.*
- *All these, in some part, draw upon this section of Ezekiel 37.*

*So, resurrection of the body already has its beginning in Scriptural revelation. In **Daniel 12:1-2**, Daniel is a contemporary of Ezekiel and fellow exile and who is mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel. **Daniel 12 1** "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. **2** And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."*

*And then in Job, which is really old and, if chronologically, goes kind of in the time of Genesis. **Job** will say, "After my flesh has thus been destroyed. I will stand before The Lord."*

*And so, The Lord, in His revelation, is giving to His people this beautiful ongoing developing revelation about the resurrection of the body, not just of a spirit like Plato taught; the immortality of the soul, that's platonic. The Biblical Jewish Christian proclamation is the resurrection of the body.*

*And so, Ezekiel prophesies to these bones. And, of course, the only way that the body and the soul can live forever is through The Holy Spirit. And so, The Breath of Life, The Holy Spirit Himself, breathes into these bones where flesh and skin and sinew are coming upon them. And it's just this amazing vision in this Valley.*

*These are slain corpses. These are the dead from a battle. Why haven't they been buried? Because they've broken the covenant. This is the dead of Israel, and we're going to see that it's the whole House of Israel, both Israel and Judah. It's all those who have died who now need resurrection.*

*But, we see the breathing of The Holy Spirit to bring life back into these bones. This reminds us, of course, of the initial creation of the first man Adam in Genesis 2:7. God takes a lump of clay of soil and God The Holy Spirit breathes life into that body. And suddenly He has created a living creature, body and soul. Paul will say that we are raised with a new perfect body for Heaven. Ezekiel 37 becomes foundational to the whole vision of the resurrection of the dead, through Jesus Christ. It is an amazing prophetic vision.*

*And then **the interpretation**, just to make sure that we understand what's happening, comes then in **Ezekiel 37:11-14 11** Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' 12 Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. 14 And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord."*

*This gets fulfilled in **Revelation 19, 20, 21** when Jesus gives a vision to the apostle John of the New Jerusalem the New Earth and the New Heaven coming down. There is the resurrection of the dead of the body; and we are restored to the everlasting Land of Israel in Jerusalem forever and ever. So you can see how Christ's vision to the apostle at the end of the Bible is built upon Jesus' vision to Ezekiel in the middle of the Bible. It all fits together.*

*In **Ezekiel 37:11** we indeed learn that these bones represent the whole house of Israel, not just those killed by the Babylonians, but also those killed by the Assyrians two hundred years before that.*

*And so these are very old; very, very dry bones. But then, the Lord is able to do what no person can do. He's able to bring life, even from dry bones. So He first promises to open Israel's graves. He then declares He will raise Israel from the graves and promises to bring them into the land of Israel. And then they will be, once again, His raised,*

*resurrected Holy people. He has said it; He is always true to His Word. Israel's hope rests in God alone.*

### **Theological Implications:**

- **Ezekiel 37** offers real hope of real resurrection of real life.
- We see how this passage holds out hope, not just for Israel, but for all who trust in and except by faith the grace of God and Messiah Jesus. Paul's second chapter to the Ephesians is built right upon this I believe.
- God's Word is sure and certain.
- This chapter is so important to what we get now and the fullness of the resurrection revelation in the New Testament.
- While the Book of Ezekiel is not quoted explicitly in The New Testament, it is implicitly foundational to almost everything we read in the New Testament.
- And that's why I'm so appreciative that you all are taking this time to work your way through it.

So, we have a few minutes. In fact, we've got about 15 minutes. We don't have to take the whole hour.

Next week, **Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39**, an amazing section of "God, of the land of Magog." And boy, have people run with this and have had all sorts of interesting interpretations. Before we begin that, anything more about Ezekiel 37?

**Alan Denekas:** Mark, would it be going too far to say that this prophecy is actually involving three levels: (1) Israel's immediate return to Israel after the Babylonian captivity; (2) the return of Israel in 1948 and (3) the general resurrection of God's whole people through the church, as you said,

**Mark:** Well, that makes sense to me, Alan, as you say that. I think it's good to see how prophecy works on, not only one but several different levels and ways. Yes.

Other comments or questions about The Valley of the Dry Bones?

**Linda Handy:** I've got a comment about dry bones. It occurs to me. I'm going to get real esoteric here, so stay with me. It occurs to me that we can have dry bones while we're still alive; that our bones are not just physical bones with sinew and flesh on them now, but just like a hardened heart; i.e., a calcified heart. We can have really dry bones, with none of the Spirit of God in us, with none of the spirit of faith, without The Word. We're dead already, "The Walking Dead." Those who do not see, do not hear, do not accept are already spiritually dead, but they're still here. So we are at once dead, yet alive. I see that a lot in COVID, no offense to anybody, but I see a lot of fear and a lot of running from things that.....(family example) point being that we can separate ourselves from God and be likewise, dead.

**Mark:**....As we are still coming out of the COVID pandemic, a lot of folks are feeling very spiritually dry these days, causing a lot of wondering; a lot of questioning. I'm very concerned about when all shakes out who all will be back. And who will get so dry in despair spiritually that they'll wander in other places or stay away. I think that metaphor of "dead men walking," we see that today as much or more than we've ever been able to see it. So there is a sense that we want to pray, "Holy Spirit come upon, not just the dead bones, but the bones that are really dry...."

Gerry McDermott often loves to say, "We have the Holy Spirit, but we always must pray for more of Him. "Holy Spirit thank You that You live within me. Please Holy Spirit give me more of You; I want more Holy Spirit, I want more joy." So, there is a sense then that even believers who have The Holy Spirit can be very dry.

Other comments, questions, observations?

**Vickie Smith:** Mark, I have a two-part question. It sounds to me from this passage, like all of Israel will be saved eventually. I mean, it says these bones are the whole house of Israel.

And the other thing I was going to ask you when you were talking about prophecy being; I mean, we're actually witnessing prophecy being fulfilled right now. The one part that doesn't seem to have occurred is where God says, like in **Ezekiel 36:31** "Then you will remember your evil ways and deeds and you will loathe yourselves and you will be ashamed and confounded for your ways.." and it almost seems to me like we've witnessed God doing what He said He was going to do, but it doesn't look like..I mean we've talked before about how the vast majority of Israel is secular and aren't believers and..but then over here in **Ezekiel 37:11** it says, "these bones are the whole house of Israel." So I'm wondering is there going to come a point when Israel really understands. I mean I've heard that the Book of Revelation is more about; the Tribulation is more about bringing Israel back to God than it is about those of us who are already believers, and I don't know if maybe that has something to do with this.

**Mark:** Well, Vickie, you have a real gift of asking very deep, complex questions which is great.

- So, in terms of the whole house of Israel,
- the Scripture does say and we heard that in **Daniel 12** that all people are going to be raised;
- everybody has eternal life,
- but some for judgment and to eternal punishment;
- and some into salvation for eternal joy.
- And so, even as early as Daniel, we see that every human being is raised
- and so when we put all this together. Yes.

- How could any part of the house of Israel not be raised since all people will be raised to eternal life.
- But then there will come the final judgment,
- and Jews and Gentiles will be judged in that final judgment
- Paul says in Romans, that not every Israelite is a true Israelite
- and then finally it is a matter of trusting in The Messiah, Jew and Gentile, into the one way of salvation.
  
- In terms of Israel today, repentance and revival in Israel in God's timing.
- Slowly, we are seeing Jews coming to The Messiah Jesus by faith. In the final days, I think there will be an outpouring of many more Jews calling upon The Lord,
- and then He will come back,
- Paul seems to say that in **Romans 9,10 and 11**.
- So, it says here in **Ezekiel 36:30** I will make the fruit, the tree and increase the field abundant, you may never get up for the disgrace of family nominations. And then in **verse 31** Then you remember your evil ways,
- Well, it doesn't necessarily mean you'll remember and repent right away. So, there could be a long span of time between what God is going to do.
- And then, hopefully, as many as possible will repent and believe in Him.
- And so The Lord is full of grace;
- He's giving more time than deserved for as many to come to Him as possible.
- So, I think your question, Vickie, really begs us to read Ezekiel in the context of all of what Scripture says, which is of course what we need to do with any Scripture passage if that helps.

God bless you all. By God's grace, we will enter our last month together; our last set of three, possibly four Tuesdays. I'm thinking we may be able to finish up by May 18th. So we'll have about three more Tuesdays together. And we're going to be looking at **Ezekiel 38-48**.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, thank You for Your Word. We pray that as You have come to us by grace, You might find us, Lord, by faith and repentance, calling upon You. Lord, for Israel, we pray for every Jew and for every Gentile to pray, "Please Holy Jesus save us." We ask this in Your Holy name. Amen.

**Class #31 May 4, 2021 Handout and Zoom Recording Ezekiel 38 and 39**

The last date is going to be May 18th so we have two more Tuesdays. I appreciate your faithfulness and know it's not always easy getting here on Tuesdays, but I do appreciate that and hopefully you will say you've been glad to spend this time in Ezekiel. I certainly have learned a lot, and I hope you have as well.

Today, we are going to look at **Ezekiel 38 and 39**; and the next two Tuesdays, we will finish up with **Ezekiel 40-48**. The last two Tuesdays will be all about this amazing vision of the perfected, fulfilled Temple and how The Holy Spirit's going to flow out of this and flood the whole earth. God has given Ezekiel these amazing visions, and we're going to end on a very strong note the next two Tuesdays.

Before we get started on Ezekiel 38:1, a couple of things. First, in our prayers, let's pray for Terrie Laird's Father Norbert. He's 90 years old and failing fast, so I don't think the Lairds are going to be with us today. I am sure their time and focus today are on Terrie's father's failing health.

Just to remind you that you can find a transcribed script of each of the Ezekiel classes at the St. John website under "Resources/Ezekiel Study," along with each of the 150 Psalter Psalms devotionals at the same Resources link. We all learn in different ways, and I know that one of the ways I learn best is to have a hard written copy in front of me. I know the world is going digital, but I like that piece of paper to read it, underline it, make notes and think about it. And so if that would be a helpful way for you I just wanted to remind you that the transcriptions are on our Church website.

**Opening Prayer:** Lord, we give You thanks for this day and we pray Your Holy Spirit will illuminate once again Your Holy Word that we may have knowledge of Your heart and mind, Jesus, and a desire to follow You more obediently through our work and study of Your Word through the prophet Ezekiel. We come to You, Lord, with our prayers. We pray, Lord, for Terrie's father Norbert. We pray Your Holy Spirit would be gracious and peaceful and surround him with Your love, Lord, as well as Terrie and Steve and their family. And we thank You Lord for our sister Joyce's work with all the transcribing of the Psalms and of our classes in Ezekiel. I thank You Lord for all the ways that your servants here in this class serve You in many, many ways. May it all be to Your Glory. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

I think it's pretty obvious that **Ezekiel 38 and 39** are always to be read and studied together as a set piece. In some ways, it's almost like a sermon has been inserted into the rest of the book to prepare us.

**Ezekiel 38 and 39:** The Battle of Gog and Magog for the penultimate battle; the battle before the final end when Christ will come back and bring the New Jerusalem and the New Earth and the New Heaven. And there will be the great fulfillment.



In **Ezekiel 40-48** we have this glorious scene of eternity.

So when we say that The Holy Spirit has inspired every book in the Bible, we mean both content and presentation. In every way shape or form, The Word of God is inerrant, beautiful and perfect. And so, I love the way that we're moving now to this great crescendo at the end of the Book of Ezekiel.

I want to point out how the last look of the Bible (Revelation) really draws upon these chapters in Ezekiel. I think all of us will be aware that in the **Book of Revelation**, Gog, and Magog show up. A lot of references to these chapters are incorporated into the vision that Jesus gives to the Apostle John in **Revelation 19 and 20**. I don't think I put that in the notes, but certainly hope we'll have time to make those connections.

I know its redundant and I say this every time that even though Ezekiel is not quoted directly in the New Testament, it's so foundational to the New Testament. And so I really want to impress upon us that to get to know the Book and The Word of God in Ezekiel is to get to know the whole plan of God's salvation. If there is any one book of the 66 books in the Scriptures where we find the whole plan of God's salvation through The Messiah Jesus with The Father and The Holy Spirit, it would be the Book of Ezekiel. And I'm sorry that a lot of Christians don't know the book very well, a Book of the Bible that I believe a lot of people just avoid because it is so different and has so much mystery. Ezekiel is so odd. But, to get to know the Book of Ezekiel is to get to know God.

**Ezekiel 38** is this wonderful vision that God is going to protect Israel and all those grafted into Israel. And, this recurring theme, "Why is Israel still important? Because, without Israel there is no salvation; and the Gentiles are grafted into Israel." The Church, the Gentiles, do not replace Israel. We are grafted into Israel and as God protects Israel, He protects all those grafted into the perfect Israelite Jesus Christ.

Please note in your handout, there are two typos 2a and 2a1 that should be Gog. **Ezekiel 38:1 through to 2a** and **point a**, God directs Ezekiel to proclaim the Lord's divine message towards Gog, the land of Magog. And then the point below that, "There's no consensus about Gog's identity. We do have consensus about God.

So let's look at at the **preamble to Ezekiel 38:1-2a 1** The word of the Lord came to me: **2** "Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him.

Right off the bat, we have to wonder, who is Gog of the land of Magog? At the end of the day, it's still, appropriately, somewhat of a mystery; appropriate because I think Gog and Magog represent the arch enemies of The Lord and of God's people; and they appear in the Bible in different places; ending in the form of a confederacy against God; the whole world in battle against Israel and The Lord of Israel.

The preamble sets us up for the final showdown between God and Satan. We know who wins. The battle; i.e., the war has already been won even as the battle continues; and the whole Bible moves us to this final showdown.

Some of us on our trips to Israel have stopped at the Plain of Megiddo, this huge amazingly beautiful breathtaking valley where, the Book of Revelation, the last Book of the Bible, paints as Armageddon, the final battle between God and Gog.

And, I don't think it's strange to say that when World War III breaks out, it will be over Israel and will probably be over The Temple, side stories that we don't have time to get into, but all history is moving towards Israel. All of history is moving toward a final showdown in Israel. The whole Bible says this; and finally, the New Israel, the New Jerusalem, The New Heaven, The New Earth will come. But everything is moving toward that. And so again, in our lifetime, the fact that Israel's been reconstituted as a state since 1948, we just cannot overestimate the importance of that and how we can hear the ticking of the final clock, maybe even speeding up a little bit.

So Gog comes against The Lord from the Land of Magog. In the Book of Revelation, Gog and Magog will both be persons; but here it's Gog of the Land of Magog, persons here too represented as adversaries of God. Anything before we get into the text? (No response)

**Ezekiel 38:2-23 3** and say, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. 4 And I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armor, a great host, all of them with buckler and shield, wielding swords. 5 Persia, Cush, and Put are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; 6 Gomer and all his hordes; Beth-togarmah from the uttermost parts of the north with all his hordes—many peoples are with you.

*Basically, what we see is a picture of how every nation is circling Israel to attack Israel and to attack the Lord of Israel.*

7 “Be ready and keep ready, you and all your hosts that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. 8 After many days you will be mustered. In the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war, the land whose people were gathered from many peoples upon the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste. Its people were brought out from the peoples and now dwell securely, all of them. 9 You will advance, coming on like a storm. You will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your hordes, and many peoples with you.

*The image is that the exiles have returned, good news to Ezekiel's fellow exiles in Babylon. This is the scene after the return to the land of the mountains of Israel and all the nations will be around them.*

10 “Thus says the Lord God: On that day, thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil scheme

*But, notice how Yahweh’s in charge. The Lord is directing Gog against Israel for His ultimate purposes so at no point does the Lord ever lose His sovereignty.*

11 and say, ‘I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. I will fall upon the quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates,’ 12 to seize spoil and carry off plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and the people who were gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell at the center of the earth.

*Notice in verse 12. What is the center of the earth? It’s Jerusalem; and it’s going to be explicitly Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation that picks up on this. Now, just try to understand that The Word of God says that the center of the earth is Jerusalem. That by itself puts everything about the future together.*

13 Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all its leaders will say to you, ‘Have you come to seize spoil? Have you assembled your hosts to carry off plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to seize great spoil?’ 14 “Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say to Gog, Thus says the Lord God: On that day when my people Israel are dwelling securely, will you not know it? 15 You will come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great host, a mighty army. 16 You will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

*Notice that, Yahweh says, “I will bring you against my land.” Yahweh’s in charge. Ultimately, this final battle is to reveal to believer and unbeliever who God is. That’s amazing. The final battle, Armageddon, is going to finally reveal the Lord and His holiness before every eye. Paul will say, “Every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess,” forced by the reality to confess that Christ is Lord.*

17 “Thus says the Lord God: Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who in those days prophesied for years that I would bring you against them? 18 But on that day, the day that Gog shall come against the land of Israel, declares the Lord God, my wrath will be roused in my anger. 19 For in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath I declare, On that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. 20 The fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field and all creeping things that creep and hailstones, fire and sulfur. **23** So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

*So we see the final end is a battle where fire and sulfur come into play. And obviously, we remember the promise of God to Noah that He would never flood the earth again*

*with water, but then at the end, the final battle will be about being consumed by the great fire and sulfur that rain down on the war. The final battle is awful, as they say and as we say, "War is hell." And because it brings the elements of hell into play and death and destruction and torment. But ultimately, The Lord is the victor over sin, death, and the devil. He's the victor over this battle, even as the battle is great and awful.*

*Yahweh is going to battle against Gog for Israel and for His Holy name. Seven nations are identified in this final battle against Israel, and they represent, symbolically, all the nations to the north and, symbolically, all the nations to the south around Israel. And so, seven in the Bible is the number of completeness, wholeness, perfection. It is the combination of the number three, which is the number for God and four, the number of creation. And together, then seven is the perfect number. And so this represents the whole world coming to battle against The Lord and against the Lord's people Israel. But, The Lord has total control. He's going to put hooks in their jaws of the people of Gog. He's going to take them out. He's orchestrating the attack. It's calculated so that finally from this battle, who God is and His holiness will be revealed. And The Lord is in total control.*

*In **verses 17-23** his strategy is revealed. Yahweh opens by asking Gog whether he considers himself to be the fulfillment of earlier prophecies. Israel's prophets have indeed prophesied in the past about the coming of a foe from the north. Gog is brought down by Yahweh to serve as His agent of judgment, that the holiness of Yahweh might be displayed to all nations. But the LORD will vent His wrath upon Gog for invading Israel.*

*Reading this makes me think about both the 1967 war and the 1972 war against Israel where all those nations in the Middle East coalesced against Israel. And it was a microcosm of the macrocosm of this final battle. Of course, little tiny Israel defeated all the collective nations that came around her. That, in a small way, points us to this ultimate battle.*

*I love the way God works because if you study the 1967 War, it could only be explained by a miracle, a supernatural work of God; that Israel, not only held her own, but she vanquished, absolutely overwhelmed all her enemies. And they had enormous armament, tens of thousands of troops. Israel had hardly no air force at that point. Now she has one of the best in the world. And they (enemies) had all this air power; and yet, Israel just overran them and they scattered. That's a very important historical battle to study and to remember. And I think it does paint a picture of God's steadfast love for Israel and a real hope that we have.*

*Gog is not explicitly identified, but Gog is the one that all the prophets pointed to that from the North would come the great enemy of God. And so, collectively, God points to all the enemies; and finally, this is a vision of the last battle. And we'll see that even more explicitly in Ezekiel 39. Questions, comments, observations about **Ezekiel 38**.*

**Linda Handy:** I was reading from an Israeli scholar about the very thing you're talking about, Mark. And he was talking about the dome of protection from the anti-aircraft batteries that are now positioned all around the nation of Israel. For those of us who have been blessed to go there, you can see the anti-rocket rockets that are set up, and he was talking about that. But he, more specifically, said that it is not those rockets that are protecting Israel. It is the hand of God. There was a cartoon, if you will. I just put on the chat for everyone, a military cartoon that shows the nations and powers of the world fighting against; and it happens to have Netanyahu. And they're doing a tug of war, and God's finger is behind Netanyahu on the rope. And that's kind of been what's going on. But the Israeli scholar who was talking about the anti-aircraft dome said that it's the hand of God and they had an actual picture of the nation of Israel with the hand of God acting as that dome of protection over Israel. I think it's an undeniable fact that it is only God that has enabled them to survive.

And the giant air force base in the middle of the Valley of Armageddon right above where Elijah defeated the prophets of bale. I find that an interesting side note. If you were on the edge of that mountain on the edge of The Valley of the Jezreel you can see, on occasion, the jets flying out of that base. The ground opens and they come out like hornets. Absolutely amazing.

**Mark:** Right, so thank you. On my first trip to Israel, we were on the observation platform in the beautiful Valley of Armageddon. And all of a sudden, we saw these Israeli jet planes just zipping up out of the ground; just like hornets will build their nest in the ground. So they have built an underground Air Force post. The planes land and come onto the runway on one hole in the ground; land and go right under the ground. When they take off from the runway under the ground, all of a sudden, they just pop up out of the ground. And I got to see, what I believe to be a squadron (12), pop up; and I've never seen anything like it. They were popping out of that place and making a beeline as hornets do. It's an amazing thing; not perfect; state of Israel and any nation are not perfect, but the state protects the land. Therefore, we need to pray for and support the State of Israel because it protects the land of Israel; it all works together.

About six months ago a brilliant young widely respected rabbinic ultra orthodox Jewish scholar, a Rabbi, in secret for now, put his life and trust in Yeshua the Jewish Messiah. He believes The Lord is calling him to reach out and evangelize the ultra orthodox Jews in Israel. The collective long history and wisdom of those who know this young man all verify his integrity and true genuine faith in Jesus say that we may be looking at a new Apostle Paul. This group of people who know him and are supporting him quietly believe this could be a fulfillment, the beginning of a final push of evangelism in Israel, and this could be the young man called to lead it.

So, we know about Jews coming to believe in Jesus, both in Israel and America, and in our own congregation, praise God. But we do not see many ultra orthodox Jews believing in The Messiah Jesus. That still is a very rare thing. And for a young man of his scholarship and credentials to put his whole heart and life into The Lord Jesus Christ is pretty amazing. We will be discussing how can we, here at St. John, can

support him quietly. Do begin to pray for this young Jewish ultra orthodox scholar who is now a Messianic Jew and all God will do in and through his life.

As C.S. Lewis said in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, “Aslan is on the move.” “Jesus is on the move,” as we begin **Ezekiel 39**, the slaughter and the defeat of Gog. **1** “And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. **2** And I will turn you about and drive you forward, and bring you up from the uttermost parts of the north, and lead you against the mountains of Israel. **3** Then I will strike your bow from your left hand, and will make your arrows drop out of your right hand. **4** You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your hordes and the peoples who are with you. I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured **5** You shall fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Lord God. **6** I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands, and they shall know that I am the Lord. **7** “And my holy name I will make known in the midst of my people Israel, and I will not let my holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel **8** Behold, it is coming and it will be brought about, declares the Lord God. That is the day of which I have spoken.

*So Yahweh outlines a strategy against Gog; and all nations will then see both the person and the character of The Lord.*

**9** “Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and make fires of the weapons and burn them, shields and bucklers, bow and arrows, clubs and spears; and they will make fires of them for seven years,

*Notice that “seven” the perfect number; the perfect fire.*

**10** so that they will not need to take wood out of the field or cut down any out of the forests, for they will make their fires of the weapons. They will seize the spoil of those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them, declares the Lord God.

*Now, the plunders have become the plundered, the mopping up after God wins the great battle.*

And then the burial of Gog in verses 11 through 16, **11** “On that day I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel, the Valley of the Travelers, east of the sea. It will block the travelers, for there Gog and all his multitude will be buried. It will be called the Valley of Hamon-gog.

*“Hamon-gog” means “multitude.” Later the name gets tweaked and that becomes the Valley of Hinnom which becomes Gehenna. In the New Testament, when Jesus says, “You will be thrown into the fire that never ends,” and that is a euphemism for hell. And, He is using this valley to point to the ultimate eternal reality of hell.*

12 For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. 13 All the people of the land will bury them, and it will bring them renown on the day that I show my glory, declares the Lord God. 14 They will set apart men to travel through the land regularly and bury those travelers remaining on the face of the land, so as to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make their search. 15 And when these travel through the land and anyone sees a human bone, then he shall set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon-gog **16** (Hamonah is also the name of the city.) Thus shall they cleanse the land.

*All these corpses present a problem; cannot have unburied corpses on top of the land so they are going to bury them in a mass grave called The Valley of Hinnom. This is the same valley, that in the prophet Jeremiah who we recall was a contemporary of Ezekiel, is believed that the god molech, this evil false terrible idol, required/demanded that babies and infants be brought to The Valley of Hinnom to be slaughtered upon his altars. So that's where they brought their child sacrifices required by molech, and this is the destruction. This then becomes the very place of hell. Gehenna is hell; that word gets worked out later.*

A hard passage to read and certainly would have shocked Ezekiel. **17** “As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God: Speak to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field: ‘Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. 18 You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth—of rams, of lambs, and of he-goats, of bulls, all of them fat beasts of Bashan. 19 And you shall eat fat till you are filled, and drink blood till you are drunk, at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you. **20** And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors,’ declares the Lord God.

*And so the battlefield has been transformed into a sacrificial victory feast, a sacrificial table. And they end up eating the remains of both men and beast. And so, it's an amazing thing, but it points us to the ultimate defeat and destruction of the enemies of God in Israel. We'll talk more about that in just a moment.*

And then the final word in Ezekiel 39: 21-29 **21** “And I will set my glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid on them. 22 The house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God, from that day forward. 23 And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. 24 I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them. 25 “Therefore thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name. 26 They shall forget their shame and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid, 27 when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them

from their enemies' lands, and through them have vindicated my holiness in the sight of many nations. 28 Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore. **29** And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord God.”

*And so the final battle has been won, and now the great Book of Ezekiel ends on this crescendo of the vision of the new Temple beginning in the next chapter. So Israel and all nations will know who God is; His Grace will cover their shame; He is going to reassemble them into the land; The Spirit is going to be sent out. And all of that really becomes foundational to the revelation of Christ in the New Testament.*

*Remember how Paul will talk about The Holy Spirit as our guarantee, our downpayment for eternal life when we receive The Holy Spirit? Right here in **Ezekiel 39:29** The Lord is going to pour out His Spirit upon The House of Israel, their guarantee that they will be His people forever.*

*Gehenna, the vision of hell, this Valley of Hinnom, which was near Jerusalem gets incorporated into our Lord's teaching. So a lot of these things really get put together. And finally in the **Book of Revelation 21** the New Jerusalem, the New Earth, the New Heaven come down, finding its center here in **Ezekiel 38 and 39**.*

**Theological Implications** are just common sense:

God's in charge.

God is faithful.

God has the victory.

God will take care of us.

We can trust in God.

Even as the battles continue, the war's been fought and finished.

God is The Victor.

And we will be restored in Him.

Let me just point out a couple things from the **Book of Revelation**. Anything you want to say at this point before we turn to Revelation?

**Alan Denekas:** On that series “Against All Odds,” there's a guy describing being up on a hillside with a small band of Israeli soldiers of about ten guys and three bullets between them and a whole big platoon of Arabs was coming up against them. And then all of a sudden, the Arabs dropped their weapons and they were pointing up at the sky above the Israelis and saying, “Abraham, Abraham.” So apparently there was an actual vision of Abraham in the sky; and they just turned around and dropped their weapons and ran. So God IS supernaturally guarding Israel.

**Mark:** Wow; had not heard that, thanks for sharing.



**Linda:** And thanks be to God for that because it's our hope that He is also guarding us, His "graftees" (grafted into Israel).

**Mark:** Amen.

So, the way the Bible works then is that once you take four or five big giant steps back you see the whole forest for the trees. You see how it fits together beautifully. And so, it is The Messiah Jesus through The Holy Spirit who gives this vision to Ezekiel in the 6th Century BC. And then it is Jesus, of course, who gives the final vision of Scripture to the Apostle John that we now know is The Revelation of Jesus to the Apostle John, the last book in the Bible. And we can see how, in particular, the vision in Ezekiel and the vision in Revelation really fit together to perfection. So the two places in **Revelation** where these chapters find their most prominence is in **Revelation 19**. If you want to look with me there for just a moment beginning with **verse 11** Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

*The heavens open and there's a white horse and the rider on the white horse is called, "The Word of God." Now obviously, this is Jesus, right? So this is a Messianic vision, Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords coming.*

*And then in **Revelation 19:17**, we read this **17** Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, 18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. 20 And the beast was captured,*

*Now, the beast here is almost certainly weird to think of Gog.*

and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire

*See "the lake of fire? That's Gehenna; that's from Ezekiel.*

that burns with sulfur. 21 And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

*Now you can see obviously how that vision builds upon the previous one. I mean, we see that clearly, right? And so what you end up having now in **Revelation 19**, earlier in the chapter, is the preparation for The Marriage Supper of the Lamb. And so we're*

*going to feast upon the body and the blood of the Lamb of God. And we say, "Thank You, Jesus." We do that every Sunday; The Eucharist; The Great Thanksgiving, Holy Communion. Now contrast that with devouring the ones who have been vanquished in this other feast of the enemies themselves. And so in **Revelation 19** we see this side by ultimate consumption, The Victory Feast, with the Feast of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. In contrast, you have the ultimate defeat of all the enemies of God; and nothing could exemplify ultimate defeat more so than feasting on their carcasses. Ultimate victory and ultimate defeat in these two sacrificial feasts side by side in the Book of Revelation to fulfill what is written in Ezekiel, the Lamb, the Rider on the White Horse, The Word of God is the ultimate victory.*

*And then in **Revelation 20:7-10**, we have another direct correlation to what we just read in Ezekiel. **7** And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison **8** and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. **9** And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city,*

*"beloved city" which is Jerusalem*

*but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, **10** and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

*And so again, you see how the last vision of Scripture fulfills and completes this one in Ezekiel. And, there is a direct correspondence between The Holy Trinity of God the Father Son Holy Spirit and the unholy trinity of satan and the beast and either the dragon or the false prophet. So in the Book of Revelation where we see this point and counterpoint; i.e., the Holy and the unholy. And much of it is built upon the Book of Ezekiel.*

*And finally, **Revelation 21** builds upon Ezekiel; the New Heaven and New Earth and New Jerusalem come down.*

Let me stop for feedback, concerns or questions.

**Vickie:** So the Battle of Gog and Magog is also the battle of Armageddon, are they two separate battles?

**Mark:** I would say that by the time you get to the Book Revelation, that is definitely the same battle. And so, the way it's placed in Ezekiel is the final battle before the vision in the New Testament of the new Temple. So that is the final battle. Magog and Gog are representative of the whole world; finally taking up their arms against Israel and God; and this is the final showdown in their attempt to destroy Israel and God.

**Vickie:** So that would occur after the tribulation period right?

**Mark:** You open a can of worms as only you can. Love it, love it! (Here are a couple of examples, Vickie.)

Very devout believers have had different chronologies. On the one hand, there are those who say that we're living in this period right now where Satan and his minions, Gog and Magog are coming together for the ultimate battle, and there'll be The Second Coming. And they'll say, "We've already died and been raised with Christ." In Revelation, there's the first step and first resurrection and the second death and the last judgment. And so the very devout believers say that when we look at the whole Bible, every believer has already died and been raised; and that we're living in the age now where this is coming to pass. And then Christ will come again; one final Second Coming; judging the living and the dead; to Heaven; to hell; it will cumulate.

Others will say that there will be a tribulation of seven years; Christ will come; a thousand years there will be a millennium of peace followed by the final judgment.

I can't say for sure. I would not want to impose an exact chronology upon this. Believers can read Scripture; all of it happens; there are different perspectives on (how and when) how it happens and the timing of it.

**David Leamon:** Let me comment along those lines. It's been said and I think well said, that the prophetic Scriptures are put there, not so that we can try to figure out how it's going to happen or when it's going to happen, but so we will recognize it when it does. And that's really all we need to know.

*(In the meantime, Jesus' being about His Father's business can be and should be our example to emulate as we seek His guidance and will to do what He has called us to do.)*

**Mark:** Thank you David, and I would definitely agree with that. **Matthew 24, I believe, is the best Chapter to see the whole picture.** I realize and understand that this is confusing, and I know that devout believers can really disagree on when it's all going to happen and how it's going to happen and how it all fits together. A close reading of Matthew 24 is where The Lord summarizes all these visions and the timing of them.

And so, Vickie, I would encourage you and all of us to read and study what The Lord says in that amazing chapter. We are living at a time when Satan has been loosed and evil is coming against The Lord and The Lord's people. There's going to be tribulation and suffering; and according to Jesus, as The Lord's, He needs us to stand strong in the face of persecution and in our suffering for the Lord. Jesus warns us that we are not going to escape it. He will come back; everything will be put right; His judgment will be eternal. The Lord cautions us in Matthew 24 about trying to figure it out

chronologically. logically. To me, that Scripture is so important to keep in mind as I read both Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation.

**Vickie:** But, Jesus tells us to be prepared. He gives us signs and He says that when you see these things happening.

**Mark:** Right?

**Vickie:** And I don't mean to put you on the spot, but in the last several months, I have read about some surveys that have been done of pastors where a large number of pastors who really feel like with what is going on in the world today, we are really close, like maybe within our lifetimes. And, I just have this sense among Christian friends that I have that everybody just kind of feels like something is happening; something very different is going on right now. And, I was just wondering how you feel about that and if you'll tell us personally what you think,

**Mark:** Well, certainly we are closer to the second coming today than we were yesterday. I don't mean that facetiously, I mean that truly. I do sense that while there's always been persecution against God's people, of Israel, then of those grafted-in Christians. And while there's always been pushback against God's Law and Commandments from the beginning, the Garden of Eden. It is different today.

I was talking with Bob Benne. You know he's a little bit older than I am; in his mid 80's and has seen a little bit more; lived through the 60's. In fact he was on the radical left; University of Chicago. He marched with Martin Luther King, although he said king would not agree with what's going on today. From the inside, Bob saw just how terrible the left was and how anti-God they were; and he did a complete 180. But Bob said, back in the 60s, there was a lot of upheaval, including the sexual revolution, all that we see now. But the difference is that now it has infiltrated corporations. The corporate world used to say they were apolitical. But now, if corporations don't become woke, there's this huge backlash and threat of being boycotted. A recent example of this is moving baseball's All Star Game from Atlanta to Denver, which is crazy. Bob's a very sober minded, level headed guy; and he says, "You know it is different. It has gotten much worse than even the 60's which were really bad."

Marnie and Josh sent a video by text to me last night which I really appreciate. Dr. Steve Turley has very encouraging videos, and so I think there is beginning to be a backlash against what the far radical left is proposing; and that's very encouraging.

I am one who says, "I sense the Second Coming, approaching faster." And if it comes within even my lifetime, and I'm 64, I would not be surprised. At the same time, I love what supposedly Luther said, "If I knew that Jesus was coming back tomorrow, I would plant an apple tree today." We live by hope; we live each day fully; we don't give up; we don't quit planting trees; having babies; quit our jobs; we keep living fully. But I am one of those who say that I think it is happening fast. Do you agree with that Vickie?

**Vickie:** Yes I think so. I just feel this underlying sense of expectation that something is going to happen. And every day I feel that way.

**Mark:** We look at what's happening in marriage. And, good grief, when I started as a pastor, I did not have to deal with any of these things. Yes, sexuality, homosexuality were (are) certainly topics of debate. But, the critical push to destroy marriage and everything that comes along with the loss of marriage, I mean, is just breathtaking what is happening in our lifetime. And the fact that Israel is back in our lifetime. That is just another big piece of the puzzle.

**Vickie:** The other thing I constantly feel is that when you look around and you see that what's happening is so bizarre that it feels like it just has to be supernatural. I don't believe that people could really believe these things on their own if it weren't supernatural; if something supernatural weren't taking place. That's one of the things that makes me feel the most strongly that something's happening because it just doesn't make sense otherwise,

**Mark:** Right, as always. Amen.

**Josh Shreeman:** Deception as always.

**Mark:** Amen. Deception is the key tactic that satan uses. There's a lot of confusion, and every Biblical doctrine is being undermined; i.e., creation; male/female; right and wrong; it's across the board. And yet there's always been an attack against God and His Word, but today we see it more sharply fought than we've ever seen it before.

**Closing Prayer:** So, Lord. Thank You for this faithful group, but most of all, Lord, thank You that You are the great and faithful God to us, that through every up and down; through every joy and concern, You are The Lord, and all things are being directed by Your hand. So, we are so confident in You, Jesus. We are so confident that all things, all things are working according to Your plans, Your purposes, and Your timing. Into your hands, once again, we commend our lives. Keep us faithful to You, God, as You are always faithful to us. In Your Holy name we pray, Amen.

Two more Tuesdays; God bless you; God willing, see you next week.

**Class #32 May 11, 2021 Handout and Zoom Recording**

So we're going to be in The Temple today and next week. These last eight chapters of Ezekiel give this amazing vision of the Third Temple, which we'll talk about in just a moment. So, let's pray.

**Opening Prayer:** We pray to you Father through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in the power and the love of Your Holy Spirit, that You would cause us to come alongside Ezekiel, that we too can see Your Holiness; can come to a richer love and appreciation for worship. But most of all, to point us from this vision to You Jesus for the sacrifice that You've made for us; that You are the one whose sacrifice has satisfied all sin, once and for all. For that we are so grateful, eternally, so thankful. To You be the honor and the glory, Jesus, now and forever. **Amen.**

It's God's providential timing that we're now in the last chapter of Ezekiel talking about the vision of The New Temple. As those who keep up with the current news, you are aware of what's going on in Jerusalem right now, today, even as we are gathered for this study. Over the past week, escalating last night into today, the violence, the conflict between Hamas, radical Palestinian outfit in Gaza, now shooting rockets into Jerusalem. Two Israelis were killed last night in Ashqelon where we visited about two or three Israel pilgrimages ago. The last time that rockets were being shot into Israel from Gaza, Ashqelon was also targeted. Last time, no Israeli deaths were recorded. Sadly, last night two women were killed and many injured. And of course, Palestinians have been killed by Israel's retaliation in Gaza. But what you hear in the Western media is primarily kind of a slant against Israel. So if you read the headlines and read most of the media, you're going to get a sense that Israel is a huge bully. And once again they're picking on the poor beleaguered Palestinians in Gaza. But if you go to The Jerusalem Post website, that's a pretty trustworthy newspaper. It's published in English and it's free online. The Jerusalem Post is where you'll get an insider's perspective and see that the reality is that Hamas has triggered this; they were the provocateurs; they fired the first rockets.

It's important to understand that there's a lot of turmoil at The Temple. Many of us have been to The Temple Mount where God enabled Solomon to build the first Temple and Herod's reconstruction of the first Temple became The Second Temple. And now that is a hugely contested area. You may have seen in the news just a couple days ago, the Palestinians set off firecrackers on The Temple Mount that caught a tree on fire. There are two mosques on the Temple Mount. One is the golden dome, Dome of the Rock, the iconic mosque that you've seen pictures of every time you see pictures of Jerusalem. And right across from it is the Mosque of al-Aqsa, which is not as beautiful, but it's an important mosque that the Muslims have built. There was a beautiful tree next to this mosque. The Palestinians set the beautiful tree on fire. But if you look at media, you will think that Israel set this tree on fire and that's not the case. But then, as the tree is burning, down below at the Western Wall there are Jews dancing. And so again, the caption is, "Look, these Jews are dancing because there's a fire up on the Temple Mount. Isn't that awful." Well they're dancing because it was the date of the

1967 victory in their war, and that's remembered every year in Israel and commemorated as a day the Lord saved them from their collective enemies. So they were not dancing because the tree was on fire, through Palestinian firecrackers. So the whole thing gets skewed, but what's both sad and alarming is now that the conflict is coming, not just from the coast on Gaza into Israel, but centered in Jerusalem, and not just anywhere in Jerusalem, at The Temple Mount. The Temple Mount is the most contested contentious real estate in the world. It goes back to King David in 1000 BC, when he purchased a threshing floor that became the basis of The Temple. Then, the Muslims captured Jerusalem in the Middle Ages and claimed it, and then Israel got it back. So it's very contested.

In Israel today, there is what's called a "Third Temple movement," of very keyed up Jews and Christians who believe that God will bring an actual physical Third Temple that Ezekiel envisions, so here we get to Ezekiel. They believe that the vision in **Ezekiel 40-48** will actually materialize into the Third Temple to be built on the Temple Mount. If that happens, I think that will then trigger World War III. But there's a growing movement in Israel for the construction of a Third Temple. And the last time we were in Israel, we had a speaker and after he spoke I talked with him, over coffee. He was in his mid 40's at the time and a quiet proponent of this (*Third Temple Movement*); i.e., he believes that in his lifetime there will be a Third Temple. All this Biblical vision of prophecy has important ramifications in reality today in history.

The First Temple (Solomon built). The Second Temple is Herod's expansion of the First Temple. And Jesus was born, during what is called "The Second Temple era." The Third Temple studied here in Ezekiel is his vision of an enormous Temple of what will be (what is to come). But I believe this vision in Ezekiel points us to The Fourth Temple, Jesus Himself, in that, in the Book of Revelation, The Lord Himself is the Holy Temple. And so, the Bible builds on itself.

From the Logos Bible website, you'll see Ezekiel's Temple (Google Images).

[https://www.google.com/search?](https://www.google.com/search?safe=active&sxsrf=ALeKk03hTzm2RpczgytZYtJTg_skmRSE3A:1621009455041&source=univ&tbm=isch&q=logos+Bible+Ezekiel%27s+Temple&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwipivrlsynwAhW5EVkFHbxHBawQjJkEegQIBBAB&biw=1056&bih=633)

[safe=active&sxsrf=ALeKk03hTzm2RpczgytZYtJTg\\_skmRSE3A:1621009455041&source=univ&tbm=isch&q=logos+Bible+Ezekiel%27s+Temple&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwipivrlsynwAhW5EVkFHbxHBawQjJkEegQIBBAB&biw=1056&bih=633](https://www.google.com/search?safe=active&sxsrf=ALeKk03hTzm2RpczgytZYtJTg_skmRSE3A:1621009455041&source=univ&tbm=isch&q=logos+Bible+Ezekiel%27s+Temple&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwipivrlsynwAhW5EVkFHbxHBawQjJkEegQIBBAB&biw=1056&bih=633)

About 500 by 500 cubits, which compares to The First Temple built by Solomon and an American football field; Herod's expansion of the First Temple. Ezekiel's Temple is four or five times as big as Herod expansion that could hold 300,000 people for an event like The Day of Pentecost. If on this expansion Temple's platform, hundreds of thousands of people can occupy that platform, think how many would be able to come into Ezekiel's Temple (vision). So, when we read this in Ezekiel, sometimes our eyes can glass over because it's very repetitious, with all the measurements and a way to quantify the size and meaning. So, ultimately, it means that the worship of God is the most important calling and function and purpose of our lives. I mean if you don't get anything else out of this vision of the Temple (*internet connection froze at 13:29 and reconnected at 15:55*)

Perhaps, your Bibles have a diagram of a Temple. If they don't, here's a very quick overview of Ezekiel's Temple: It's 500 by 500 cubits; depends on how you measure the cubit because it's a cubit plus a handbreadth. So some people will measure it is 750 by 750 feet. Other people will say it's 825 but 825 feet. So, you can get different measurements, but it's really large.

In Ezekiel's vision, he enters at the East Gate, The Gate of the Messiah, where on Palm Sunday, Jesus comes into Jerusalem by way of the East Gate. When The Lord comes back in the Second Coming, He's coming back in The East Gate. So that East Gate today is in the Muslim Quarter.

So in the vision, Ezekiel comes in through the East Gate, and then He's going to tour. Inside is The Holy of Holies, The Altar of Sacrifice. And, there is this very large unknown mysterious building without even a description as to its details or purpose; therefore, there is no West Gate because of where the building is situated. Remaining on the tour are the North and the South Gates. As Ezekiel continues his tour he goes by 30 chambers for meeting places, meals, and a variety of purposes. Inside The Temple Ezekiel goes by two huge rooms for preparing the animals for sacrifice and then the vision continues toward and to The Holy of Holies. Twelve large tables in each room, represent the Twelve tribes of Israel. And there the animals are prepared for sacrifice upon The Altar.

This vision of The Temple is to impress upon us worship and holiness and the hope that God has come back to His Temple. Ezekiel receives this vision about 14 years after the destruction of Jerusalem. We can only imagine the hope this generates in the exiles who feel rejected and that God has given up on them. The Temple of the Lord has been destroyed and yet the vision message to them is that God is in control and will restore His Temple and bring His people home.

**John 2:19-21** **19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." **20** The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" **21** But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Ultimately, brothers and sisters, The Temple (Book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem, New Earth, New Heaven), is The Lord Himself pointing us to Jesus and His fulfillment.

Questions or comments about The Temple; anything preliminarily before we get into the text?

**David Leamon:** Mark, I have heard it suggested in the past that this portion of Ezekiel is as much as Ezekiel could see, not knowing about Jesus as The Temple, etc. and there really won't be such a Temple; but this really points to Jesus in a symbolic way. Comments?



**Mark:** That's a good comment. I think two things, David.

- One is that the visions, I think, always work on two realities.
- What does this mean for us now in the historic context?
- What does this mean in the eschaton (final event in God's plan); in the final things of God's fulfillment?
- And so I think we need to see this on both,
- Because when the exiles are hearing this for the first time, I think God wants them to understand that number one:
- He will come back to Jerusalem.
- The Temple is still the Holy place.
- At the same time, The Temple is so enormous, so beautiful, so magnificently big that It can only point to a Heavenly reality.
- There's just not enough land on the Temple Mount to build this physical Temple.
- Attempting or doing so would overwhelm the whole city of Jerusalem.
- So I think, ultimately, it points us to Jesus, as every Word in the Bible does.
- And, it also gives hope in the present.
- Just like when we come to worship, The Lord is in His Holy Temple.
- And yet we know there is so much more to be fulfilled and completed in The Lord in Heaven.

So, I would not want to say "either/or" so do hope this answered your question.

**David:** That makes good sense.

**Terrie Laird:** "the stream of water," I didn't remember the river or the water being there when we were there. Is it (the water) still there?

**Mark:** No, but we'll get to that next week, Terrie. There is not a river running out of the Temple now. That is a part of this vision; the water runs out of the Temple and floods the whole world. Think about that, and I want to talk about this more next week but (*on second thought*) let's talk about it for just a moment right now.

**John 7: 37-39** 37 On the last day of the feast (*The Passover coming to the climax*), the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

*When Jesus talks about "rivers of living water," I believe, that is an echoing of the river coming out of The Temple in Ezekiel's vision. That's why I think it's so important for us, as students of The Scriptures, to know Ezekiel. Because, once we know Ezekiel, we will hear echoes of Ezekiel in everything in the New Testament. The vision of the river points us to The Holy Spirit Who is going to come out of the very Heart of God Himself to come and flood all. And, "Who is The Holy Spirit? He's the River of Life. He is the River*

*of Truth; He is the River of Salvation.” There never has been a river coming out of The Temple. This is part of the New Temple of the pointing to the Heavenly realities.*

Well, join me in prayer for Jerusalem as we continue to pray for Israel and the news currently surrounding Jerusalem today. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; and pray especially for what's happening now on the Temple Mount. I don't know if things will continue to escalate and get beyond what it is today, but it could. There are those in Jerusalem who see this as more than previous conflict. I am told, "There's a heaviness in the air and a real concern for what's going on." *The Temple is the center of the most important city of the world.*

**Ezekiel 40 1** In the twenty-fifth year of our exile,

*April 28, 573 BC. I love this about the Book of Ezekiel. We know exactly when the vision comes. Imagine that; just a little bit more than 1,448 years ago, this vision came to Ezekiel about three weeks ago (on our current calendar), which is just amazing.*

at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down, on that very day, the hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me to the city. 2 In visions of God he brought me to the land of Israel, and set me down on a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city to the south. 3 When he brought me there, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand. And he was standing in the gateway. 4 And the man said to me, "Son of man, look with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your heart upon all that I shall show you, for you were brought here in order that I might show it to you. Declare all that you see to the house of Israel."

In this vision, Ezekiel is lifted from the Chebar canal in Babylon, and he goes 500 miles back to Jerusalem and he stands on the mountain. And I think we're supposed to understand that it is Mount Sinai, if you will. It's the new Moses; it's the New Temple as God is giving a vision to Ezekiel just as He gave the blueprint of the First Temple Tabernacle to Moses. Everything we are reading and visualizing in our own minds during this part of our study of the Book of Ezekiel is about holiness. For example, The Temple is a perfect square; everything is orderly; the design of The Temple is to emphasize orderly Holy worship.

*I am thankful here at St John that we are a liturgical Church, not that The Liturgy is the only way to worship, but that it's an orderly way of worshipping. So when I study this I am thankful for Godliness and order God brings to our worship through Liturgy as it binds us together. So I do believe that God wants an orderly Holy worship to His Holy name. And then, we have in the measurements multiples of 10. In the ancient world, 10 was a number of orderliness, a completeness. We also have 7 steps that go up to the Holy of Holies; and the number 7 is the perfect fulfills number. We see the number 7 emphasized in the Book of Revelation in that vision Jesus gives the Apostle John. Seven is the perfect number because it's the combination of three, which is number of God, and four, which is the number of creation. So, these numbers, these*

*measurements are not just throwaway abstract details. They all point to holiness, to good order and to sacredness. If you look at the measurements closely that wall around The Temple is 10 feet thick and 10 feet high, an enormously thick wall around it in order to separate it from the rest of the world. The word "Holy" means "to separate, to set apart." And so, The Temple is in the world, but the wall protects it and separates it from the world.*

*Our Lord prays in **John 17:11-26*** **11** And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. **12** While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. **13** But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. **14** I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **15** I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. **16** They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **17** Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. **18** As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. **19** And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. **20** "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, **21** that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, **23** I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. **24** Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. **25** O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. **26** I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

*You know that's kind of what The Temple is doing. God is here, but God is separate. God is Holy and God's people must come into a Holy place to worship Him.*

*And then, we are never told who this man is who leads Ezekiel on the tour. But, I would conjecture. Is this Jesus Himself, the ultimate Son of Man who leads Ezekiel, son of man, on this tour? I have always interpreted this man to be The Lord Himself who was taking Ezekiel on the tour, but we're never told that. That's just my own thought, but others have other thoughts about this.*

**Ezekiel 40:5-26** *Ezekiel is going to come into The Temple at the East Gate; tour around and through the inside and likely exit the East Gate, the Gate of the Messiah, where God always is to enter into His court.*

5 And behold, there was a wall all around the outside of the temple area, and the length of the measuring reed in the man's hand was six long cubits, each being a cubit and a handbreadth in length.

*A cubit is around 18 inches.*

So he measured the thickness of the wall, one reed; and the height, one reed. 6 Then he went into the gateway facing east, going up its steps, and measured the threshold of the gate, one reed deep. 7 And the side rooms, one reed long and one reed broad; and the space between the side rooms, five cubits; and the threshold of the gate by the vestibule of the gate at the inner end, one reed.

*And we get this amazing measuring and go, "Lord, what does this mean?" It means that this is Holy space; it means this is designated space; it means that God finds worship really, really important. And so, everything about The Temple is laid out exactly according to God's instructions in this vision.*

*It won't surprise you that my biggest concern for the Church today, coming out of the pandemic, is worship. My heart is very full for those who have not returned; for those who may not return and how, whatever else the side effects over the COVID-19 have been on God's people, I think satan has used it primarily as a way to try to separate God's people from the worship of God. And, I don't mean that those who have not returned are not still following the Lord; and I hope they will return. It's still a little soon for some people. I get that. But at some point, I just pray that they are going to come back because as we can see in the vision of Ezekiel and in God's Word, there is nothing more important than God's people coming together and worshiping Him in holiness.*

8 Then he measured the vestibule of the gateway, on the inside, one reed. 9 Then he measured the vestibule of the gateway, eight cubits; and its jambs, two cubits; and the vestibule of the gate was at the inner end. 10 And there were three side rooms on either side of the east gate. The three were of the same size, and the jambs on either side were of the same size. 11 Then he measured the width of the opening of the gateway, ten cubits; and the length of the gateway, thirteen cubits. 12 There was a barrier before the side rooms, one cubit on either side. And the side rooms were six cubits on either side. 13 Then he measured the gate from the ceiling of the one side room to the ceiling of the other, a breadth of twenty-five cubits; the openings faced each other. 14 He measured also the vestibule, sixty cubits. And around the vestibule of the gateway was the court. 15 From the front of the gate at the entrance to the front of the inner vestibule of the gate was fifty cubits. 16 And the gateway had windows all around, narrowing inwards toward the side rooms and toward their jambs, and likewise the vestibule had windows all around inside, and on the jambs were palm trees.

*There are 30 chambers where people could meet for meals and fellowship; expansive free space to the area where the priests would change, prepare the altars, prepare the sacrifices. Inside The Temple Itself is the Holy of Holies the inside point where the Dome of the Rock, the iconic golden dome mosque in Jerusalem. That is where the*

*Rock of Moriah is and the threshing floor, real estate that David bought to set aside and where his son, Solomon, built The First Temple. The Book of Ezekiel has enormous implications for us today.*

**The Outer Gate is detailed in Ezekiel 40:6-16** We understand that there are Levite guards at each gate. The tribe of Levi is the only tribe with no land distributed among the other eleven tribes. When the golden calf was made when Moses was up getting The Ten Commandments that the only people who did not worship the golden calf were the Levites; and the ones who end up killing those who did. So the Levites were called to be the worship leaders and guards and protectors. And from the Tribe of Levi will come the priests. Not every Levite was a Priest, but every Priest was a Levite.

Outer court described in **Ezekiel 40:17-19** **17** Then he brought me into the outer court.

*The outer court is just as you can imagine with 30 chambers and pavement.*

And behold, there were chambers and a pavement, all around the court. Thirty chambers faced the pavement. **18** And the pavement ran along the side of the gates, corresponding to the length of the gates. This was the lower pavement. **19** Then he measured the distance from the inner front of the lower gate to the outer front of the inner court, a hundred cubits on the east side and on the north side.

**Ezekiel 40:20-23** **20** As for the gate that faced toward the north, belonging to the outer court, he measured its length and its breadth. **21** Its side rooms, three on either side, and its jambs and its vestibule were of the same size as those of the first gate. Its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth twenty-five cubits. **22** And its windows, its vestibule, and its palm trees were of the same size as those of the gate that faced toward the east. And by seven steps people would go up to it, and find its vestibule before them. **23** And opposite the gate on the north, as on the east, was a gate to the inner court. And he measured from gate to gate, a hundred cubits.

*Ezekiel goes to the North Gate with seven steps leading up to the gate. And so again the number "seven" for holiness.*

**Ezekiel 40:24-27** **24** And he led me toward the south, and behold, there was a gate on the south. And he measured its jambs and its vestibule; they had the same size as the others. **25** Both it and its vestibule had windows all around, like the windows of the others. Its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth twenty-five cubits. **26** And there were seven steps leading up to it, and its vestibule was before them, and it had palm trees on its jambs, one on either side. **27** And there was a gate on the south of the inner court. And he measured from gate to gate toward the south, a hundred cubits

*Outer South Gate described (above). Again, these gates are duplicates of each other.*

**Ezekiel 40:28-46** Then he brought me to the inner court through the south gate, and he measured the south gate. It was of the same size as the others.

*Ezekiel moves into the Inner Court of The Temple compound; and each time he does it, there is an ascension up to holiness. There are chambers, vestibules for washing the animals prior to slaughtering. There are tables for the offerings. There are priestly chambers where the priests would have service guards in addition to the priestly services.*

Its side rooms, its jambs, and its vestibule were of the same size as the others, and both it and its vestibule had windows all around. Its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth twenty-five cubits. 30 And there were vestibules all around, twenty-five cubits long and five cubits broad. 31 Its vestibule faced the outer court, and palm trees were on its jambs, and its stairway had eight steps. 32 Then he brought me to the inner court on the east side, and he measured the gate. It was of the same size as the others. 33 Its side rooms, its jambs, and its vestibule were of the same size as the others, and both it and its vestibule had windows all around. Its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth twenty-five cubits. 34 Its vestibule faced the outer court, and it had palm trees on its jambs, on either side, and its stairway had eight steps. 35 Then he brought me to the north gate, and he measured it. It had the same size as the others. 36 Its side rooms, its jambs, and its vestibule were of the same size as the others, and it had windows all around. Its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth twenty-five cubits. 37 Its vestibule faced the outer court, and it had palm trees on its jambs, on either side, and its stairway had eight steps. 38 There was a chamber with its door in the vestibule of the gate, where the burnt offering was to be washed. 39 And in the vestibule of the gate were two tables on either side, on which the burnt offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering were to be slaughtered. 40 And off to the side, on the outside as one goes up to the entrance of the north gate, were two tables; and off to the other side of the vestibule of the gate were two tables. 41 Four tables were on either side of the gate, eight tables, on which to slaughter. 42 And there were four tables of hewn stone for the burnt offering, a cubit and a half long, and a cubit and a half broad, and one cubit high, on which the instruments were to be laid with which the burnt offerings and the sacrifices were slaughtered. 43 And hooks, a handbreadth long, were fastened all around within. And on the tables the flesh of the offering was to be laid. 44 On the outside of the inner gateway there were two chambers in the inner court, one at the side of the north gate facing south, the other at the side of the south gate facing north. 45 And he said to me, "This chamber that faces south is for the priests who have charge of the temple, **46** and the chamber that faces north is for the priests who have charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who alone among the sons of Levi may come near to the Lord to minister to him."

**Ezekiel 40:47-49** And he measured the court, a hundred cubits long and a hundred cubits broad, a square. And the altar was in front of the temple. 48 Then he brought me to the vestibule of the temple and measured the jambs of the vestibule, five cubits on either side. And the breadth of the gate was fourteen cubits, and the sidewalls of the gate were three cubits on either side. **49** The length of the vestibule was twenty cubits,

and the breadth twelve cubits, and people would go up to it by ten steps. And there were pillars beside the jambs, one on either side.

*We see the dimensions of a sacred space, and **the dimensions continue until the end of Ezekiel 42.** In many ways this Temple resembles The Temple The LORD enabled Solomon to build except this one in Ezekiel is extraordinarily larger.*

**Ezekiel 41:1-26** Then he brought me to the nave and measured the jambs. On each side six cubits was the breadth of the jambs. 2 And the breadth of the entrance was ten cubits, and the sidewalls of the entrance were five cubits on either side. And he measured the length of the nave, forty cubits, and its breadth, twenty cubits. 3 Then he went into the inner room and measured the jambs of the entrance, two cubits; and the entrance, six cubits; and the sidewalls on either side of the entrance, seven cubits. 4 And he measured the length of the room, twenty cubits, and its breadth, twenty cubits, across the nave. And he said to me, "This is the Most Holy Place." 5 Then he measured the wall of the temple, six cubits thick, and the breadth of the side chambers, four cubits, all around the temple. 6 And the side chambers were in three stories, one over another, thirty in each story. There were offsets all around the wall of the temple to serve as supports for the side chambers, so that they should not be supported by the wall of the temple. 7 And it became broader as it wound upward to the side chambers, because the temple was enclosed upward all around the temple. Thus the temple had a broad area upward, and so one went up from the lowest story to the top story through the middle story. 8 I saw also that the temple had a raised platform all around; the foundations of the side chambers measured a full reed of six long cubits. 9 The thickness of the outer wall of the side chambers was five cubits. The free space between the side chambers of the temple and the 10 other chambers was a breadth of twenty cubits all around the temple on every side. 11 And the doors of the side chambers opened on the free space, one door toward the north, and another door toward the south. And the breadth of the free space was five cubits all around. **12** The building that was facing the separate yard on the west side was seventy cubits broad, and the wall of the building was five cubits thick all around, and its length ninety cubits.

*Now here in **Ezekiel 41:12** (above), there is this building ("Binyan" Hebrew for "building"); enormously large western building just sitting there. Its enormous dimensions may represent an intentional reaction to the excesses of the Judean Monarch whose claims for space tended to encroach upon the sacred Temple territory. Scholars say that building represents the excess of the monarchy who wanted their palaces to be bigger than The Temple. Why is there a Western Building? This is one of those mysterious things that we do not know.*

13 Then he measured the temple, a hundred cubits long; and the yard and the building with its walls, a hundred cubits long; 14 also the breadth of the east front of the temple and the yard, a hundred cubits. 15 Then he measured the length of the building facing the yard that was at the back and its galleries on either side, a hundred cubits. The inside of the nave and the vestibules of the court, 16 the thresholds and the narrow

windows and the galleries all around the three of them, opposite the threshold, were paneled with wood all around, from the floor up to the windows (now the windows were covered), 17 to the space above the door, even to the inner room, and on the outside. And on all the walls all around, inside and outside, was a measured pattern. 18 It was carved of cherubim and palm trees, a palm tree between cherub and cherub. Every cherub had two faces: 19 a human face toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side. They were carved on the whole temple all around. 20 From the floor to above the door, cherubim and palm trees were carved; similarly the wall of the nave. 21 The doorposts of the nave were squared, and in front of the Holy Place was something resembling 22 an altar of wood, three cubits high, two cubits long, and two cubits broad. Its corners, its base, and its walls were of wood. He said to me, "This is the table that is before the Lord." 23 The nave and the Holy Place had each a double door. 24 The double doors had two leaves apiece, two swinging leaves for each door. 25 And on the doors of the nave were carved cherubim and palm trees, such as were carved on the walls. And there was a canopy of wood in front of the vestibule outside. 26 And there were narrow windows and palm trees on either side, on the sidewalls of the vestibule, the side chambers of the temple, and the canopies.

**Ezekiel 42:1-20** 1 Then he led me out into the outer court, toward the north, and he brought me to the chambers that were opposite the separate yard and opposite the building on the north. 2 The length of the building whose door faced north was a hundred cubits, and the breadth fifty cubits. 3 Facing the twenty cubits that belonged to the inner court, and facing the pavement that belonged to the outer court, was gallery against gallery in three stories. 4 And before the chambers was a passage inward, ten cubits wide and a hundred cubits long, and their doors were on the north. 5 Now the upper chambers were narrower, for the galleries took more away from them than from the lower and middle chambers of the building. 6 For they were in three stories, and they had no pillars like the pillars of the courts. Thus the upper chambers were set back from the ground more than the lower and the middle ones. 7 And there was a wall outside parallel to the chambers, toward the outer court, opposite the chambers, fifty cubits long. 8 For the chambers on the outer court were fifty cubits long, while those opposite the nave were a hundred cubits long. 9 Below these chambers was an entrance on the east side, as one enters them from the outer court. 10 In the thickness of the wall of the court, on the south also, opposite the yard and opposite the building, there were chambers 11 with a passage in front of them. They were similar to the chambers on the north, of the same length and breadth, with the same exits and arrangements and doors, 12 as were the entrances of the chambers on the south. There was an entrance at the beginning of the passage, the passage before the corresponding wall on the east as one enters them. 13 Then he said to me, "The north chambers and the south chambers opposite the yard are the holy chambers, where the priests who approach the Lord shall eat the most holy offerings. There they shall put the most holy offerings—the grain offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering—for the place is holy. 14 When the priests enter the Holy Place, they shall not go out of it into the outer court without laying there the garments in which they minister, for these are holy. They shall put on other garments before they go near to that which is



for the people.” 15 Now when he had finished measuring the interior of the temple area, he led me out by the gate that faced east, and measured the temple area all around. 16 He measured the east side with the measuring reed, 500 cubits by the measuring reed all around. 17 He measured the north side, 500 cubits by the measuring reed all around. 18 He measured the south side, 500 cubits by the measuring reed. 19 Then he turned to the west side and measured, 500 cubits by the measuring reed. **20** He measured it on the four sides. It had a wall around it, 500 cubits long and 500 cubits broad, to make a separation between the holy and the common.

*And so, again, this idea that to be Holy is to be separate, is to be set apart; to protect the sanctity of the sacred space.*

*So that's a very quick run through The Temple. (I will try to get this diagram posted for you for next week. But, if you have a good study Bible, every study Bible should have a diagram of The Temple.)*

*The tour ends. Ezekiel is now waiting for The Lord to return. And, we see then that the whole purpose of The Temple points to holiness; that God is going to prepare His seat to return to His House on Earth.*

Questions, comments? We did that very quickly. Anything you want to go back and talk about particularly? (*none*)

**Ezekiel 43:1-12** will bring us to our final reflections for today. **1** Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. **2** And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. **3** And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal.

*So remember that amazing vision of the Chariot of God and the Throne of God in that opening chapter of Ezekiel.*

And I fell on my face.

*I love that about Ezekiel! To “fall on my face” means “he worships.” So 14 years after The Temple has been destroyed Ezekiel has not lost his obedience.*

4 As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east,

*Which is just how Jesus will come back in Jerusalem when He returns.*

5 the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

*Ezekiel is going to be coming into this very place, the inner court/Holy of Holies, where he is going to see God.*

6 While the man was standing beside me, I heard one speaking to me out of the temple, 7 and he said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoring and by the dead bodies of their kings at their high places, 8 by setting their threshold by my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them. They have defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed, so I have consumed them in my anger. 9 Now let them put away their whoring and the dead bodies of their kings far from me, and I will dwell in their midst forever. 10 "As for you, son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and they shall measure the plan. 11 And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple, its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, that is, its whole design; and make known to them as well all its statutes and its whole design and all its laws, and write it down in their sight, so that they may observe all its laws and all its statutes and carry them out. **12** This is the law of the temple:

*This is The Torah, The Teaching, the instruction of The Temple.*

the whole territory on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy.

*This is the Temple Mount.*

Behold, this is the law of the temple.

*This is The Torah of The Temple. You may remember the word "Torah," unfortunately as we see here, is most often translated "the law." I find that a very inefficient, a less than satisfactory translation. It should be The Teaching, the instruction. This is the Holy Teaching of God to keep His people safe.*

*The East Gate is where Yahweh is going to return. He is going to reestablish His residence in The Temple. Who is the man who guides them? Well, as I mentioned earlier, It could well be Jesus.*

*But then, God the Father speaks from The Holy of Holies; He's The Divine King who says to put away sins; repent; be restored to Holy worship and to follow Him in holiness. And finally (I love this!), The Torah is coming back to The Temple.*

*So by the time we get to this part of the **Ezekiel 43**, what do we have in worship in the Temple? Word and Sacrament; sacrifice of all these animals; The Torah, The Word of God in His Temple. And God says to obey The Law, The Torah of The Temple.*

*What does Jesus say in John 15? 15* “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. *If you love me, you will keep My Torah, My Commandments, My Teaching.*

*What does Jesus say the end of Matthew 28? Matthew 28:19-20 19* Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” *Baptizing, and then Teaching us to obey The Torah, “My Word that I have told you.”*

*So what does God want for His people? He wants us to be in Holy worship, centered around The Word of God and the sacrifice of The Son of God on The Cross for the forgiveness of our sins. We mark that every week with The Word, The Teaching of God's Word, The Preaching and, of course, The Eucharist which is the once and for all sacrifice of the Lamb of God for us. So if we know Ezekiel, it changes our perspective and deepens it for worship.*

*When we come to the Lord's House each Lord's Day, these last eight chapters of Ezekiel will really help us understand that we are participating in a small way, in this amazing vision, so we can see as we worship the very vision of holiness.*

### **Theological Implications**

- *The vision proclaims the ineffable, the inexplicable, the mysterious, the wondrous Holiness of God.*
- *The vision proclaims the glorious mercy of God. He's coming back even though they (we) are still sinners, He's got to forgive them (us) and return.*
- *The vision exposes the sinfulness of human beings.*
- *And finally The Teaching of the Word of God within His Holy House must be according to Truth and Holiness.*

If there's anything that we've collectively lost in the American Church, It's Truth and holiness. Just yesterday, it was reported that the former denomination that we left 11 years ago, the “Evangelical Lutheran Church of America,” ELCA has the dubious claim now for electing and ordaining the first transgender Bishop of any (Christian) church in the world.

“On May 8, 2021, Rohrer was elected bishop of the Sierra Pacific Synod, becoming the first openly trans person to serve as bishop of a major U.S. Christian denomination.” So the ELCA on Saturday, what is called the Sierra Pacific Synod which is out in San Francisco, northern California; a little bit of Nevada. About 200 churches now have an elected ordained bishop, a woman who purports to be a man, and this is being celebrated.

It just makes me heart sick that this is what's happening in God's house. And so, suddenly the ELCA, which was working hard for years to keep up with the Episcopal

Church, in all their dubious unholiness, now has leaped ahead of any denomination in the world and is celebrating this immoral, anything goes, attack on the Truth of God.

So just when you think, "Oh Lord, can things get any worse?" they do. Then I read Ezekiel, and first it puts me on my knees to say, "Lord, forgive my sins." "If I'm just pointing my finger at that church, at that person, then I have missed the point. Lord, cleanse the sanctuary my heart that I may worship and serve You. Protect this congregation, Lord. Put a thick wall around us, so that we would never be tempted into ways that just blaspheme your Holy name." I mean, there's no other thing to say but it's just blasphemous.

I looked on the internet yesterday and got the transcript of a big segment on NPR yesterday about this. NPR was just really glad about this. And there are a lot of quotes and they were interviewing this new bishop, and this bishop was using third person pronouns for himself, herself. When you talk about an individual person in the third person. But, then this bishop was talking about God; about oh how appreciative he or she is ("He's really a man). So they were saying how great this is for God. And in reference to God, the bishop said that "they are very glad about this;" instead of "He is very glad," making God, who was the imposition of the language upon God. And so the whole thing is just....I didn't mean to get too far down the road on that, but just that the holiness of this vision needs to put us on our knees.

And, just pray because the temptation to unholiness is great, and people I know and love who were amazing wonderful members of this congregation. You know, I just saw one example after another of being lured away by the world and tempted to accept and believe things that are just dark to the eyes of God. So, anyway, questions, comments, feedback in the few minutes that we have left?

**Jacque:** I don't understand how many Temples we are talking about. We have the first one, the second one and is the one in Ezekiel's vision the third? When I was in Israel our archaeologist guide said that the next temple that will be built will be right beside the Dome of the Rock, so I don't know.

**Mark:** I mentioned that at the beginning before we really got started.

1st Solomon

2nd Herod (temple expansion)

3rd Ezekiel's Heavenly vision of The Temple

4th and ultimate Jesus Himself as Revelation tells us in the last vision given in the Bible. If there is going to be a physical Third Temple built, it will be on the same site. It will not be beside it. I've never heard anybody say that a potential third temple will be built beside this one. I've always heard explained that if there's going to be a Third Temple, it will be on the Temple Mount because that is the only place that a Jew would worship. It would be untenable to think that there could be a Holy of Holies anywhere except the Holy of Holies on the Rock of Mariah. And so for the Third Temple to be built the Dome of the Rock would have to be taken down, destroyed, and the Holy Holies would be built over that.

So you can imagine what the Muslim world would do if the Dome of the Rock was destroyed and replaced with with a holy Jewish worship site. So, it's contentious, the most contentious real estate, for sure.

**Jacque:** So the Third Temple movement of the physical Temple that they're talking about right now and that you mentioned earlier, they're going to wipe out the Dome of the Rock.

**Mark:** Yes, because it is built right over the Holy of Holies. That's why some Ultra Orthodox or some Orthodox Jews will not go on the Temple Mount, because they are afraid that they will step on a place of the Holy of Holies; that perhaps the Dome of the Rock doesn't cover all of the Holy of Holies, maybe there's some still exposed pavement, and they know if they step on that, then they would be destroyed because only the high priest..once a year, so, there are all sorts of difficult spiritual and emotional thoughts and threads running through this thing.

Next week we'll get to the appointments, the furniture into The Temple; to where the prince is coming; the feasts; the offerings. So there's a lot of Biblical material. Then in **Ezekiel 47** we will get to the reference we talked about with Terry a short time ago about the water, **the river flowing from The Temple**. So there's a lot of Scripture left but I will try to summarize sections of this. I will hope that each of us will take time to read it word for word on our own.

I really have appreciated your time and attention. And may the Lord be with us. And if it's His will, we'll be back together unless He comes again or something else happens. God willing, we'll try it one more time next Tuesday.

**Linda Handy:** Mark, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I think it's really really important to know that all is not dark; that even if it is dark, the light will come; that, yes, there's great apostasy; yes, the denomination we left has now gone deep to the dark side. But, thanks be to God that we did not; that we stood on the Word of God, and stepped out and faced a lot of censure and a lot of negative comments about St John and the other congregations who left. So thanks be to God, we stood on on the faith. That's all I had to say. All is not dark. There is a remnant; there will always be a remnant.

**David:** I would like to add that I admired St. John and First Presbyterian, who left the Presbyterian church for Evangelical Presbyterian. I admired from a distance and that's one of the reasons I am at St. John.

**Mark:** Well, it's good to have you, brother. Well, that's true; those are good words. Thank You. Yes, yes, I needed to hear that; it was good. All right.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord thank You for this day and for these brothers and sisters, and for the forgiveness of our sins, Lord. We lay them before the throne of Your cross in great Thanksgiving, that You are The Lord of Lords and The King of Kings. And we pray, Lord, that we can be in the world, for your sake and glory; that we can share the Good News with those who do not yet believe. But Lord protect us from being tempted to embrace the world. May we live in that very narrow road that very narrow way of being in but not of the world so that You will receive all the glory. And we know that we will receive the ultimate eternal blessing. In the name of God the Father Son and Holy Spirit, we pray now and forever. **Amen.** All right. God bless you. See you next week God willing.

**Class #33 May 18, 2021 Handout and Zoom Recording (Last Class)**

**Opening Prayer:** We give You thanks, Lord, that You have made a way for us yet again to come together to study Your Holy Word on this Tuesday. We know, Lord, that every day and every breath we take is a gift from You. So let us not take this opportunity for granted. Let us seize this gift that You have given to us, that we might come closer to You through your Holy Word. We thank You, Lord, that many years ago, centuries ago, You called Ezekiel to be a prophet to Israel, to the exiles, to us. So Lord, we thank You for the work then and Your ongoing work through Your Holy Spirit today. To You be the honor and glory now and forever. And we also lift up to You, Lord, in thanksgiving for the healing of Bailey. We give you praise that Nancy's granddaughter is doing better. We also ask, Lord, Your favor, Your healing upon our brothers, Andy and Bob. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

This is **Class 33, and, today, May 18 is our last class.** We are finishing up this last section of Ezekiel 43, midway through the end of of the book, **Ezekiel 48.** There's too much material to be able to read and work toward all of this, but I do encourage you to go back and finish up your reading all of Ezekiel through every chapter and verse.

**Today we will begin in Ezekiel 43:13** after ending last week with Yahweh, The Lord, returning to His Holy Temple in Jerusalem. So now that God is back, He is conveying all the instructions of what it means for God's people to continue to be with Him in worship, faithfulness and obedience. So the first thing that The Lord says to Ezekiel and to us, is the importance of the centrality of worship. It has often been said; and I agree with it, that the architecture of a church often reflects the theology of a church.

For example when you walk into a Christian sanctuary in the Lutheran tradition, you should find (if you don't, you should ask the pastor why is this different). The central focus point of that sanctuary is the cross of Christ, and then underneath the cross, you should find the altar for remembering the sacrifice of the Savior for the forgiveness of our sins. There will be a pulpit or lectern or podium of some sort where The Word of God is proclaimed; and somewhere in the sanctuary there should be a baptismal, either a baptistry or a font. The cross and the altar and The Word of God all form the the central focus for the whole of the life of faith.

And so, in Ezekiel we see this magnificent vision of The New Temple. In the middle of The Temple is a huge altar. The central purpose of our redeemed lives is to worship and glorify God. Yes, we make disciples; yes, we go on mission trips; yes, we teach classes; yes, we minister to each other. We do all those things. But the central act of a redeemed person is to worship and glorify our Triune God. We see that without question in the Book of Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 43:13-17 13** This is the first thing Yahweh says when He's back in His Temple. "These are the measurements of the altar by cubits (the cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth): its base shall be one cubit high and one cubit broad, with a rim of one

span around its edge. And this shall be the height of the altar: 14 from the base on the ground to the lower ledge, two cubits, with a breadth of one cubit; and from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge, four cubits, with a breadth of one cubit; 15 and the altar hearth, four cubits; and from the altar hearth projecting upward, four horns. 16 The altar hearth shall be square, twelve cubits long by twelve broad. **17** The ledge also shall be square, fourteen cubits long by fourteen broad, with a rim around it half a cubit broad, and its base one cubit all around. The steps of the altar shall face east.”

*So, in the exact center of this 500 square cubit Temple sits the altar. Now, if we were to do the math, we would see that the footprint for the altar area is about the size of a small house, 1156 square feet; that the altar platform is 576 square feet, a huge altar in the vision that God gives Ezekiel. This altar is so much bigger than the altar that was physically present in the Temple of Solomon back in Jerusalem. This exaggerated altar size shows us, theologically and spiritually the exaggerated central place that worship must have in the life of believers.*

*In our sanctuary here at St John, we walk into “the Nave, Latin for “ship,” “Navy,” where the people sit and look forward to the altar area. The altar is placed on a platform with a rail around it. That platform is called the chancel area that is set apart from the Nave. Within the chancel is the altar. That is a very, very faint echo of what we find here in **Ezekiel 43**, with the altar platform 1156 square feet. That corresponds to the very small little chancel that we have at St John. And then the altar is on top of that, which corresponds to the altar in our chancel here at St. John. But then, unlike our altar, this altar in God’s vision to Ezekiel had to have gutters to hold all the blood.*

*Our blood is on the altar, the real presence of our Lord's body and blood. The one and final sacrifice that has been given to us, but until Christ died on the cross, it was necessary for God's people to make animal sacrifice, because without blood, there is no forgiveness of sin, the Scripture says.*

*The gutters around the altar would hold almost 4,000 gallons of blood at any one time. The idea is that the priest would be sacrificing animals six days a week from sunup to sundown; 72 hours a week. Hundreds of animals would be sacrificed upon this altar for the forgiveness of sin and all the different sacrifices that we find within the Books of Leviticus and Ezekiel. We are told that in Jerusalem, in the era of the Second Temple (Herod’s expansion of the First Temple where The Lord and the apostles were) that there was so much blood that flowed through a drain pipe under the altar into the ground beneath The Temple complex in Jerusalem, that at one point, it actually compromised the water table of Jerusalem and affected the clean water flow into the city. It is impossible for me to imagine how many animals were really being sacrificed.*

*In comparison, our Church today is clean and quiet. We occasionally have a little pet dog that will come in with a member, but our Church is pretty pristine. Whereas, The Temple in Jerusalem with all the blood sacrificing was not. Yet, The Holy of Holies was kept pristine. I mean that you have to imagine a livestock auction around the Temple; huge fenced in pens of oxen and sheep and huge cages with pigeons and doves and all*



*sorts of other animals, including lambs, of course. I mean, it was like the Chicago stock yard next to The Temple.*

*Around that was all the commerce, with people selling trinkets to the pilgrims who would be coming to worship; food vendors, hawkers and all the money changers. It is mind boggling to think about all that went on in The Temple, but here in Ezekiel, God wants His Temple set apart and He's very particular about that.*

After the description of the altar, we have the consecration of the altar **Ezekiel 43:18-19 18** And he said to me, “Son of man, thus says the Lord God: These are the ordinances for the altar: On the day when it is erected for offering burnt offerings upon it and for throwing blood against it, **19** you shall give to the Levitical priests of the family of Zadok, who draw near to me to minister to me, declares the Lord God, a bull from the herd for a sin offering.

And so the altar area was made Holy; i.e., consecrated by the officials overseeing the process and, particularly, the priests who God commanded to do the actual sacrifice, were the descendants of Zadok. Not just any Levitical priest could do this; only Levitical priests from the clan of Zadok.

If we had time, we could go back; Zadok was a descendant of Eleazar, who was a descendant of Aaron. During the reign of David, the high priest named Zadok supported David while the other priests went against David and with Absalom and the attempted coup. So Zadok was the high priest who was faithful. Therefore, David appointed Zadok and his descendants to oversee the sacrifices at The Temple. Zadok had stayed with David faithfully before God. It was Zadok who ordained Solomon after David's death. Zadok and his descendants were from the Tribe of Levi, the best of the best, the most faithful of the faithful in their lineage who did not fall into paganism and false worship as many other priests did. There's a long seven day ritual for consecrating this Holy place and you can read that in **Ezekiel 43:18-27**.

### **Theological Implications:**

- The altar shows the delight The Lord finds in the worship of this people.
- When we come together on the Lord's Day in the sanctuary or the Great Room to worship, God is delighted as the worship of His children gives Him great joy.
- Yahweh provides a way to acceptable worship so we're not trying to make it up or the kind of worship individuals want.
- Instead we are trying to follow the kind of worship that The Lord desires, by asking, “What do You want Lord?” and let us honor that.
- The altar must be kept sacred in the presence of God.
- Notice that we try not to put things on top of the altar that shouldn't belong there. If I have my Yeti in my hand in worship because I need to keep hydrated, I would never just casually put that Yeti down on the altar. So there are things like that we just want to keep in mind.

In light of the Messiah Jesus, we can rejoice that we have a mediator, superior to Moses and Ezekiel from **Hebrews 3, 4, 7 and 9**. Jesus is our sacrifice once and for all.

We can make the argument, and it needs to be made, that primarily the Letter to the Hebrews, in particular Hebrews 40 through 48, is a fulfillment of the Book of the Ezekiel. If we had time, it would be a great study to put on one side of the page Ezekiel 40 through 48 and on the other side of the page The Letter of the Hebrews. It is amazing how Hebrews fulfills, completes, perfects the vision that God gives to Ezekiel. That is why every Tuesday we say that while the Book of Ezekiel is not explicitly quoted in The New Testament, it is implicitly foundational to everything in it. That's why the Book of Ezekiel is a very important book for God's people to grapple with, to give God thanks for, and to study. Now, let me stop briefly for questions or comments.

**Annette:** What do the Jews do today regarding sacrifice?

**Mark:** Annette, that's a great question. They do not sacrifice. When The Temple was destroyed by the Romans and 70 AD, all sacrifice stopped. During the period of the exile, which is Ezekiel's period, is when the synagogue system was developed. Because the exiles were removed from Jerusalem and they could not sacrifice in Babylon, they developed the synagogues, which became places of study, prayer, singing, and worship without sacrifice. When The Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the Jewish leaders said, "We will be as we were in exile," and when the synagogue as an institution really began taking off. Because they say, "until The Temple is restored, there is no other place on earth where we can sacrifice." Sacrifice stopped.

Believers in Jesus, both Jew and Gentile, will say, "The One final Sacrifice was given on the cross." The Jews, who do not believe in Jesus, will say, "There must be sacrifice yet to come." But that can only come when The Temple is restored. Therefore, since 70 AD no non-Messianic Jew has ever made a sacrifice. That's why The Temple is so important and why The Third Temple movement in Israel that we talked about last week is so telling. Zealous Jews are tired of not being able to sacrifice. And so there's a growing underground movement of those who would like to come and reclaim the Temple Mount, rebuild The Temple, which would be The Third Temple, and begin to sacrifice again.

Now you can imagine, the implications of that if that ever happened. I have mentioned this but have not said much about this, but that's why it is so important for Jews and Gentiles to really study the Book of Hebrews, a crucial book for those who follow Jesus. The Book of Hebrews fulfills everything in Ezekiel. At some point, I would love for all of us to be in a study of the Book of Hebrews.

Then turning to **Ezekiel 44**, we see the regulations for the outer gate coming into The altar area of The Temple; and it's the east gate, let me read **Ezekiel 44:1-3 1** Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east. And it was shut. 2 And the Lord said to me, "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened,

and no one shall enter by it, for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it. Therefore it shall remain shut. **3** Only **the prince** may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord. He shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate, and shall go out by the same way.”

*I believe “the prince” is Jesus.*

*This is the same gate in Jerusalem that Jesus entered Palm Sunday. This is the same gate that Jesus will enter at His second coming.*

*The Muslims know this; the east gate of Jerusalem is now in the Muslim quarter of the city and they have blocked it up with brick and mortar and installed a cemetery in front of it. The Muslims know that this is the gate The Messiah is going to use, but believe The Messiah will not want to make Himself unholy or impure by stepping on a cemetery as if this is going to keep Jesus away. Therefore, we must believe in a Second Coming at least as much as the Muslims do. Spiritually and physically, the Muslims believe they will keep Jesus away forever. We know differently. That's why the east gate is so important.*

*And the new prince comes onto the scene. He alone is the one authorized to eat in Yahweh's presence. And the purpose of the prince is to promote worship; to bring God's people into communion with Yahweh; to praise God for His victory over the curse of sin. This is a terribly important figure now in this vision that God gives Ezekiel, and I think we see as we go through these chapters that this is to point us to Jesus The Messiah Himself.*

Then we get into a long section in Ezekiel 44 regarding the regulations of The Temple service. So Ezekiel kind of functions as a new Moses to make sure that worship is going properly in The Temple. **Ezekiel 44:4-8** **4** Then he brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple, and I looked, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple of the Lord. And I fell on my face. **5** And the Lord said to me, “Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I shall tell you concerning all the statutes of the temple of the Lord and all its laws. And mark well the entrance to the temple and all the exits from the sanctuary. **6** And say to the rebellious house, to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: O house of Israel, enough of all your abominations, **7** in admitting foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, to be in my sanctuary, profaning my temple, when you offer to me my food, the fat and the blood. You have broken my covenant, in addition to all your abominations. **8** And you have not kept charge of my holy things, but you have set others to keep my charge for you in my sanctuary.

*Here God says to Ezekiel that foreigners who are physically and spiritually uncircumcised must not enter The Temple and eat the Holy food; otherwise it will be desecrated. Later we will see that if foreigners are circumcised, they and their families are welcomed. Basically that those today who are unrepentant, spiritually uncircumcised, unbaptized, who do not confess Christ would be akin to the foreigners*

*in God's vision to Ezekiel. And so, when we have Holy Communion the invitation is extended to all baptized believers in Jesus Christ.*

**The Apostle Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11** on those who can come to Holy Communion echo Ezekiel. Just as foreigners who are physically and spiritually uncircumcised cannot enter. Paul says that those whose hearts are spiritually uncircumcised must not take Holy Communion and doing so would be one's own damnation. So there's been a real "radical hospitality movement" among liberal Protestant churches this has taken hold in those liberal Protestant churches. The idea is that when you have communion, the pastor/minister invites all to come no matter what their beliefs; no matter who you are; whether you're baptized or unbaptized; whether you're Christian or atheist, that defines "radical hospitality." Extending radical hospitality means those churches' leadership are presenting this invitation to Holy Communion in a way that it appears that by inviting all, regardless, each is being shown just how much that church leadership and membership love those receiving radical hospitality without repenting and confessing Jesus Christ.

*The Word of God says that when that is practiced, something horribly unloving toward that person is being presented and allowed. Instead of saying, "Come partake no matter what you believe," meaning "that makes no difference here at this church. God's Word is calling each person, including those being extended radical hospitality, to repent and believe in Jesus in order to partake of "The Body and Blood of Christ." Not by our own merits, but to the altar by the blood of Christ.*

*So when a church practices radical hospitality and does not call people to repent and believe, they are damning that person to hell. So there's a lot here to unpack that has enormous ramifications for us in the 21st century.*

**Ezekiel 44:9-14**, God speaks in the vision about the role of the Levites who were the tribe set aside to make sure worship is done properly. **9** "Thus says the Lord God: No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the people of Israel, shall enter my sanctuary. **10** But the Levites who went far from me, going astray from me after their idols when Israel went astray, shall bear their punishment. **11** They shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the temple and ministering in the temple. They shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before the people, to minister to them. **12** Because they ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn concerning them, declares the Lord God, and they shall bear their punishment. **13** They shall not come near to me, to serve me as priest, nor come near any of my holy things and the things that are most holy, but they shall bear their shame and the abominations that they have committed. **14** Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the temple, to do all its service and all that is to be done in it.

**Ezekiel 44:15-16** outlines the specific role of the Zadokites. **15** “But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me, shall come near to me to minister to me. And they shall stand before me to offer me the fat and the blood, declares the Lord God. **16** They shall enter my sanctuary, and they shall approach my table, to minister to me, and they shall keep my charge.

**Ezekiel 44:17-31** explains the new order of the Zedekite priesthood is explained; i.e., rules about what they wear; their hair; what they drink; their marriage; their public roles; their responsibilities toward the dead; their prescription on unclean foods. basically Zadokites are to model a life of holiness and obedience to God for all of God's people, their wives, their children, their families. What does that sound like to you? To me it sounds like Paul's description of a bishop and a deacon in the pastoral epistles; the qualifications for an overseer, a bishop, a deacon. In large part, Paul is remembering the order of the Zadokites in Ezekiel. And for those who serve God's house around the areas, especially of worship; not that they're better than; not that they're loved more by God; not that they're even closer to God, but that their entire lifestyle is to reflect their particular worship responsibilities (roles/positions). We might immediately recall the thousands of examples of ministers of The Lord, priests in the Catholic church, ministers in the Protestant church, evangelists, great apologists, those who have garnered huge public followings, who have fallen hard on unholy, disobedient and immoral actions. I would argue that this section of Ezekiel has a lot of application today. **17** When they enter the gates of the inner court, they shall wear linen garments. They shall have nothing of wool on them, while they minister at the gates of the inner court, and within. **18** They shall have linen turbans on their heads, and linen undergarments around their waists. They shall not bind themselves with anything that causes sweat. **19** And when they go out into the outer court to the people, they shall put off the garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers. And they shall put on other garments, lest they transmit holiness to the people with their garments. **20** They shall not shave their heads or let their locks grow long; they shall surely trim the hair of their heads. **21** No priest shall drink wine when he enters the inner court. **22** They shall not marry a widow or a divorced woman, but only virgins of the offspring of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest. **23** They shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the common, and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean. **24** In a dispute, they shall act as judges, and they shall judge it according to my judgments. They shall keep my laws and my statutes in all my appointed feasts, and they shall keep my Sabbaths holy. **25** They shall not defile themselves by going near to a dead person. However, for father or mother, for son or daughter, for brother or unmarried sister they may defile themselves. **26** After he has become clean, they shall count seven days for him. **27** And on the day that he goes into the Holy Place, into the inner court, to minister in the Holy Place, he shall offer his sin offering, declares the Lord God.

There's a special status, the Zadokites are given in **Ezekiel 44:28-31** **28** "This shall be their inheritance: I am their inheritance: and you shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession. **29** They shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering, and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs. **30** And the first of all the firstfruits of all kinds, and every offering of all kinds from all your offerings, shall belong to the priests. You shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, that a blessing may rest on your house. **31** The priests shall not eat of anything, whether bird or beast, that has died of itself or is torn by wild animals.

### **Theological Implications:**

- The call to spiritual leadership comes from God,
- and it's rendered in obedience to Him;
- The privilege of ministry carries with it significant responsibilities.
- Every baptized believer is a priest before God,
- Remarkable that in 1 Peter all of us as believers are priests before God.
- Therefore, all of us must be Holy and obedient before The Lord.
- Now within the priests of all believers, certain priests have certain responsibilities,
- and others do not. But we are all priests before God,
- because ultimately, Christ is our model for priestly service.

Personally, as a pastor in a moment of reflection, obviously, I am not completely holy; obviously, I have not been perfectly obedient, not even today, not even ten minutes ago. I get that. But I am always totally aware that what I do and what I say have implications, either for the glory of God or to profane the name of God. So, I'm terribly aware of these things, even more so, as I confess my sins before The Lord. Questions or comments?

We don't talk much about holiness anymore. The Scripture talks about holiness a lot which speaks to us about God's Words, "to be set apart," which means "to be separate," which means "to be obedient," which means that we serve God first and not the world.

**Ezekiel 45** regulations regarding priestly and princely lands. As we know the land is so important. **1** "When you allot the land as an inheritance, you shall set apart

*Set apart is to make sacred which means to make Holy.*

for the Lord a portion of the land as a holy district, 25,000 cubits long and 20,000 cubits broad. It shall be holy throughout its whole extent."

- *The gift of land is to be handed back to God in gratitude.*
- *God loans the land to the people for sacred service, but it all belongs to God.*
- *God is the true landowner. And all of this is about keeping holiness and sanctity around worship.*

**2** Of this a square plot of 500 by 500 cubits shall be for the sanctuary, with fifty cubits for an open space around it. **3** And from this measured district you shall measure off a section 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 broad, in which shall be the sanctuary, the Most Holy Place. **4** It shall be the holy portion of the land. It shall be for the priests, who minister in the sanctuary and approach the Lord to minister to him, and it shall be a place for their houses and a holy place for the sanctuary. **5** Another section, 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 cubits broad, shall be for the Levites who minister at the temple, as their possession for cities to live in. **6** “Alongside the portion set apart as the holy district you shall assign for the property of the city an area 5,000 cubits broad and 25,000 cubits long. It shall belong to the whole house of Israel. **7** “And to the prince shall belong the land on both sides of the holy district and the property of the city, alongside the holy district and the property of the city, on the west and on the east, corresponding in length to one of the tribal portions, and extending from the western to the eastern boundary

*So, the land of Israel has been set apart by God to be for the glory of God and for the worship of God and that's where the Lord's going to come back in the second coming. Ultimately The New Earth, The New Heaven, The New Jerusalem coming down.*

The final vision in the Book of Revelation talks about that in **Ezekiel 45:8-17** We have some miscellaneous regulations about how the leaders are supposed to act, do justice and righteousness and business; i.e., the way they conduct their business, etc. **8** of the land. It is to be his property in Israel. And my princes shall no more oppress my people, but they shall let the house of Israel have the land according to their tribes. **9** “Thus says the Lord God: Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and execute justice and righteousness. Cease your evictions of my people, declares the Lord God. **10** “You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath. **11** The ephah and the bath shall be of the same measure, the bath containing one tenth of a homer, and the ephah one tenth of a homer; the homer shall be the standard measure. **12** The shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels plus twenty-five shekels plus fifteen shekels shall be your mina. **13** “This is the offering that you shall make: one sixth of an ephah from each homer of wheat, and one sixth of an ephah from each homer of barley, **14** and as the fixed portion of oil, measured in baths, one tenth of a bath from each cor (the cor, like the homer, contains ten baths). **15** And one sheep from every flock of two hundred, from the watering places of Israel for grain offering, burnt offering, and peace offerings, to make atonement for them, declares the Lord God. **16** All the people of the land shall be obliged to give this offering to the prince in Israel. **17** It shall be the prince's duty to furnish the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the new moons, and the Sabbaths, all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel: he shall provide the sin offerings, grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to make atonement on behalf of the house of Israel.

And then we have a long section from **Ezekiel 45:18 through Ezekiel 46:15** about the regulations regarding the national festivals. **Ezekiel 45:18-25** through the end of that chapter says **18** “Thus says the Lord God: In the first month, on the first day of the

month, you shall take a bull from the herd without blemish, and purify the sanctuary. 19 The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the temple, the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and the posts of the gate of the inner court. 20 You shall do the same on the seventh day of the month for anyone who has sinned through error or ignorance; so you shall make atonement for the temple. 21 “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall celebrate the Feast of the Passover, and for seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten. 22 On that day the prince shall provide for himself and all the people of the land a young bull for a sin offering. 23 And on the seven days of the festival he shall provide as a burnt offering to the Lord seven young bulls and seven rams without blemish, on each of the seven days; and a male goat daily for a sin offering. 24 And he shall provide as a grain offering an ephah for each bull, an ephah for each ram, and a hin of oil to each ephah. **25** In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month and for the seven days of the feast, he shall make the same provision for sin offerings, burnt offerings, and grain offerings, and for the oil.”

*This is the Passover that's been expanded. The Passover, the central feast, in the book of Exodus after God saves them from the Angel of Death by the blood of the Lamb. The Passover is not just to mark the excess, The Passover becomes the focus for the whole nation. The Passover becomes the one feast that brings God's people together as His people eating with Him for the forgiveness of their sins.*

*So immediately we think of Holy Communion, the Eucharist. Holy Communion is the fulfillment of the Passover that brings us together, unites us as a people by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His real presence, His Body and Blood shed and given for us in Holy Communion. God's Word says that, The very sacrifice of Christ, Christ's death on the cross is the bridge from Him to us that makes us a people of God.*

*The Prince is elevated in stature and honor above the people, but He is also in solidarity with them. The doctrine of solidarity is extremely important Scripture. How is it that the death of Jesus Christ, one man's death, can offer the forgiveness of sin for all men and women? It is the doctrine of solidarity, “one for all, all for one,” and it is really important that we talked about the death of The Messiah.*

### **Theological Implications:**

- The person of the Prince deserves special attention.
- He alone may enter the east gate of the inner wall
- and observe the ritual performed in the inner court.
- He will be the first available for Yahweh in worship.
- He will provide the sacrificial animals for worship.
- Even so, He identifies with the lay people,
- and they look to Him as their leader.
- And of course, we think about The Lord Jesus Christ.

**Ezekiel 46 1** “Thus says the Lord God: The gate of the inner court that faces east shall be shut on the six working days, but on the Sabbath day it shall be opened, and on the



day of the new moon it shall be opened. 2 The prince shall enter by the vestibule of the gate from outside, and shall take his stand by the post of the gate. The priests shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate. Then he shall go out, but the gate shall not be shut until evening. 3 The people of the land shall bow down at the entrance of that gate before the Lord on the Sabbaths and on the new moons. 4 The burnt offering that the prince offers to the Lord on the Sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish. 5 And the grain offering with the ram shall be an ephah, and the grain offering with the lambs shall be as much as he is able, together with a hin of oil to each ephah. 6 On the day of the new moon he shall offer a bull from the herd without blemish, and six lambs and a ram, which shall be without blemish. 7 As a grain offering he shall provide an ephah with the bull and an ephah with the ram, and with the lambs as much as he is able, together with a hin of oil to each ephah. 8 When the prince enters, he shall enter by the vestibule of the gate, and he shall go out by the same way. 9 “When the people of the land come before the Lord at the appointed feasts, he who enters by the north gate to worship shall go out by the south gate, and he who enters by the south gate shall go out by the north gate: no one shall return by way of the gate by which he entered, but each shall go out straight ahead. 10 When they enter, the prince shall enter with them, and when they go out, he shall go out. 11 “At the feasts and the appointed festivals, the grain offering with a young bull shall be an ephah, and with a ram an ephah, and with the lambs as much as one is able to give, together with a hin of oil to an ephah. 12 When the prince provides a freewill offering, either a burnt offering or peace offerings as a freewill offering to the Lord, the gate facing east shall be opened for him. And he shall offer his burnt offering or his peace offerings as he does on the Sabbath day. Then he shall go out, and after he has gone out the gate shall be shut. 13 “You shall provide a lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering to the Lord daily; morning by morning you shall provide it. 14 And you shall provide a grain offering with it morning by morning, one sixth of an ephah, and one third of a hin of oil to moisten the flour, as a grain offering to the Lord. This is a perpetual statute. **15** Thus the lamb and the meal offering and the oil shall be provided, morning by morning, for a regular burnt offering.”

**Ezekiel 46:16-18** We have regulations regarding the management of royal lands, and again the land, the land, and it points us to the new earth, the new heaven the New Jerusalem. **16** “Thus says the Lord God: If the prince makes a gift to any of his sons as his inheritance, it shall belong to his sons. It is their property by inheritance. **17** But if he makes a gift out of his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his to the year of liberty. Then it shall revert to the prince; surely it is his inheritance—it shall belong to his sons. **18** The prince shall not take any of the inheritance of the people, thrusting them out of their property. He shall give his sons their inheritance out of his own property, so that none of my people shall be scattered from his property.”

**Ezekiel 46:19-24** The Temple kitchens. **19** Then he brought me through the entrance, which was at the side of the gate, to the north row of the holy chambers for the priests, and behold, a place was there at the extreme western end of them. **20** And he said to

me, “This is the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offering and the sin offering, and where they shall bake the grain offering, in order not to bring them out into the outer court and so transmit holiness to the people.”

21 Then he brought me out to the outer court and led me around to the four corners of the court. And behold, in each corner of the court there was another court— 22 in the four corners of the court were small courts, forty cubits long and thirty broad; the four were of the same size. 23 On the inside, around each of the four courts was a row of masonry, with hearths made at the bottom of the rows all around. **24** Then he said to me, “These are the kitchens where those who minister at the temple shall boil the sacrifices of the people.”

*We are never told in the Book of Exodus about kitchen(s) in The First Temple. Why in the world would The Temple have kitchen(s)? Well it's about holiness to make sure the food is not profaned. Everything needs to be for the service of The Lord.*

*What would be the kitchen today at St. John. Across from the Church office is the Sacristy. In the Sacristy we keep the altar furnishings, the elements, the bread and the wine. The Sacristy is our temple kitchen, where we keep, if you will, the food of worship and the appointments of worship until they're ready to be used and consecrated in worship.*

And now we come to this amazing section **Ezekiel 47 of The River of Life** in the new land and so forth. We would not want to miss this. **Ezekiel 47:1-12 1** Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. 2 Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. 3 Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep.

*This is the the man that we saw before—he was the guide through The Temple.*

4 Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. 5 Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. 6 And he said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?” Then he led me back to the bank of the river. 7 As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 And he said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea;

*“the sea” is the Dead Sea; down below Jerusalem. And so the river of life is going to give life even to the Dead Sea.*

when the water flows into the sea,

*the Dead Sea*

the water will become fresh and wherever the river goes every living creature that swims will live.

*There is no living creature in the Dead Sea. Nothing lives there because of the saline content,*

9 And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. 10 Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea.

The “Great Sea” is the Mediterranean.

11 But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. 12 And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

**Now this is one of the seminal central visions of God to us in the Holy Scriptures. You could put a red circle around this whole section and spend the rest of your life contemplating in thanksgiving to God for this vision.**

*So it's the river of life. It comes from the very heart of God of worship out of The Temple, filling the whole world. It has trickled into a river too deep to wade through; deep enough for swimming. The sides of the river are lined with trees and fills the earth with a New Eden. Yes, Eden is being recreated by God for God's people.*

**John 7:38** “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

*That's directly from Ezekiel 47.*

And then the final vision of Scripture **Revelation 22:1-2** **1** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb **2** through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

*The River of the Water of Life, where the leaves the trees are given for the healing of the nations directly from this vision in **Ezekiel 47**.*

*It is also important to understand that this vision underscores the fact that God is going to bring spiritual and physical renewal to His people. Christians (believers), Biblical Christianity is not gnostic; i.e., we are not divorced from the body. God wants to restore our bodies and our souls spiritually and physically, thus, the proclamation of the Christian faith is the resurrection of the body and not just the release of the immortal soul from the prison the body. God raises us up bodily for the full renewal of His people. That great vision of resurrection starts here in Ezekiel. There's so much in Ezekiel that leads to the classic clear Biblical New Testament teaching of the resurrection of the body because God is going to restore His people physically and spiritually. It's is so amazing. That's why the sacraments are so important. The sacraments are physical signs of a spiritual reality. (There's so much to be unpacked here.)*

*The abundant life now is offered to all who worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth, for whoever believes in him will overflow with rivers of living water.*

The reapportionment of the land of Israel is described after this in **Ezekiel 47:13 through Ezekiel 48:29 13** Thus says the Lord God: "This is the boundary by which you shall divide the land for inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph shall have two portions. 14 And you shall divide equally what I swore to give to your fathers. This land shall fall to you as your inheritance. 15 "This shall be the boundary of the land: On the north side, from the Great Sea by way of Hethlon to Lebo-hamath, and on to Zedad, 16 Berothah, Sibraim (which lies on the border between Damascus and Hamath), as far as Hazer-hatticon, which is on the border of Hauran. 17 So the boundary shall run from the sea to Hazar-enan, which is on the northern border of Damascus, with the border of Hamath to the north. This shall be the north side. 18 "On the east side, the boundary shall run between Hauran and Damascus; along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel; to the eastern sea and as far as Tamar. This shall be the east side. 19 "On the south side, it shall run from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah-kadesh, from there along the Brook of Egypt to the Great Sea. This shall be the south side. 20 "On the west side, the Great Sea shall be the boundary to a point opposite Lebo-hamath. This shall be the west side. 21 "So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. 22 You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who reside among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. 23 In whatever tribe the sojourner resides, there you shall assign him his inheritance, declares the Lord God.

**Ezekiel 48 1** "These are the names of the tribes: Beginning at the northern extreme, beside the way of Hethlon to Lebo-hamath, as far as Hazar-enan (which is on the northern border of Damascus over against Hamath), and extending from the east side to the west, Dan, one portion. 2 Adjoining the territory of Dan, from the east side to the west, Asher, one portion. 3 Adjoining the territory of Asher, from the east side to the west, Naphtali, one portion. 4 Adjoining the territory of Naphtali, from the east side to

the west, Manasseh, one portion. 5 Adjoining the territory of Manasseh, from the east side to the west, Ephraim, one portion. 6 Adjoining the territory of Ephraim, from the east side to the west, Reuben, one portion. 7 Adjoining the territory of Reuben, from the east side to the west, Judah, one portion. 8 “Adjoining the territory of Judah, from the east side to the west, shall be the portion which you shall set apart, 25,000 cubits in breadth, and in length equal to one of the tribal portions, from the east side to the west, with the sanctuary in the midst of it. 9 The portion that you shall set apart for the Lord shall be 25,000 cubits in length, and 20,000 in breadth. 10 These shall be the allotments of the holy portion: the priests shall have an allotment measuring 25,000 cubits on the northern side, 10,000 cubits in breadth on the western side, 10,000 in breadth on the eastern side, and 25,000 in length on the southern side, with the sanctuary of the Lord in the midst of it. 11 This shall be for the consecrated priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept my charge, who did not go astray when the people of Israel went astray, as the Levites did. 12 And it shall belong to them as a special portion from the holy portion of the land, a most holy place, adjoining the territory of the Levites. 13 And alongside the territory of the priests, the Levites shall have an allotment 25,000 cubits in length and 10,000 in breadth. The whole length shall be 25,000 cubits and the breadth 20,000. 14 They shall not sell or exchange any of it. They shall not alienate this choice portion of the land, for it is holy to the Lord. 15 “The remainder, 5,000 cubits in breadth and 25,000 in length, shall be for common use for the city, for dwellings and for open country. In the midst of it shall be the city, 16 and these shall be its measurements: the north side 4,500 cubits, the south side 4,500, the east side 4,500, and the west side 4,500. 17 And the city shall have open land: on the north 250 cubits, on the south 250, on the east 250, and on the west 250. 18 The remainder of the length alongside the holy portion shall be 10,000 cubits to the east, and 10,000 to the west, and it shall be alongside the holy portion. Its produce shall be food for the workers of the city. 19 And the workers of the city, from all the tribes of Israel, shall till it. 20 The whole portion that you shall set apart shall be 25,000 cubits square, that is, the holy portion together with the property of the city. 21 “What remains on both sides of the holy portion and of the property of the city shall belong to the prince. Extending from the 25,000 cubits of the holy portion to the east border, and westward from the 25,000 cubits to the west border, parallel to the tribal portions, it shall belong to the prince. The holy portion with the sanctuary of the temple shall be in its midst. 22 It shall be separate from the property of the Levites and the property of the city, which are in the midst of that which belongs to the prince. The portion of the prince shall lie between the territory of Judah and the territory of Benjamin. 23 “As for the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west, Benjamin, one portion. 24 Adjoining the territory of Benjamin, from the east side to the west, Simeon, one portion. 25 Adjoining the territory of Simeon, from the east side to the west, Issachar, one portion. 26 Adjoining the territory of Issachar, from the east side to the west, Zebulun, one portion. 27 Adjoining the territory of Zebulun, from the east side to the west, Gad, one portion. 28 And adjoining the territory of Gad to the south, the boundary shall run from Tamar to the waters of Meribah-kadesh, from there along the Brook of Egypt to the Great Sea. **29** This is the land that you shall allot as an inheritance among the tribes of Israel, and these are their portions, declares the Lord God.

*So the boundaries of the land are given, and this is an incredible, radical, new thought introduced in Scripture; i.e., full citizenship is given to all foreigners who marry and raise their children within the family of Israel. That is a prophecy that's fulfilled today in Israel. I am so sick of hearing the liberal media criticize Israel as an apartheid state. In Israel, Arab Israelis have full citizenships. That's happening in Israel. In Israel, Muslims, Arabs have freedom of worship; freedom of election; of voting; freedom of speech; they are in the civic government. The fulfillment of **Ezekiel 47** is happening today in the 21st century in the land of Israel. Israel is the only nation in the Middle East that has freedom of speech, religion, voting; i.e., a Jew in Saudi Arabia cannot worship; a Jew in Jordan cannot worship legally, etc., but the Muslims in Israel have hundreds, perhaps, thousands of mosques throughout the land. So, we are seeing now, the fulfillment of Ezekiel in our day and age.*

*The 12 tribes have a new allotment in this section.*

In **Ezekiel 48:8-22** there's a special section called, "the reserve." The Hebrew word is translated "reserve." And this is a particular plot of land around both The Temple and the city to make sure it stays sacred and Holy and set apart. So it's a special reserve for the worship of God.

**Ezekiel 48:30-35** And then finally, brothers and sisters, our last section of the Book of Ezekiel, a vision of the new city. Let's read together the remainder of **Ezekiel 48** beginning with verse **30** "These shall be the exits of the city: On the north side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, 31 three gates, the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah, and the gate of Levi, the gates of the city being named after the tribes of Israel. 32 On the east side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates, the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin, and the gate of Dan. 33 On the south side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, three gates, the gate of Simeon, the gate of Issachar, and the gate of Zebulun. 34 On the west side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates, the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, and the gate of Naphtali. **35** The circumference of the city shall be 18,000 cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord Is There."

*"Yahweh is There."*

So, in the center of the city is The Temple, but the whole city reflects the Holy presence of God. This is the Biblical foundation for the final vision of Christ to the Apostle John in **Revelation 21** for the New Earth, the New Heaven, and the New City of Jerusalem, coming down to renew all things. So the vision of Israel's territorial arrangement offers a profound theology of the land. It all belongs to Yahweh for His glory, His Holiness, and for the blessing of His Holy people. The land and city given by God also binds His people into a new community, to love Him and to love one another in His Holy Name.

*And finally, the Prince oversees all of this. He is the exalted figure of the land of the people. He is The Messiah who is to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. The God of Israel has fulfilled His covenant promises. He has regathered His people and has restored them to*

*their land. He has called the people to Himself. And God has established His residence in their midst. And the Prince shall lead the way. In Messiah Jesus, the glory of Yahweh has come and dwells among us, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). He is Immanuel, God with us. God is there. Let us rejoice and worship His Holy name!*

*And so finally, brothers and sisters, after 48 chapters in the Book of Ezekiel, a lot of its been hard; a lot of its been about judgment, and we've had to really wrestle with a lot of it. There is no more glorious vision in the Old Testament than the vision left for us in the Book of Ezekiel.*

And, I would say that God is leading us to end our study on the highest note of grace and Gospel, good news and joy. I would love to hear comments or questions about today and anything we have talked about since September, nine months ago. Any question is germane.

**Alan Denekas:** Mark, a couple of quick things from the early part of this session. There's an Israeli archaeologist named Elisha Crone, who has excavated a lot of the City of David and he actually found a place where there were holes in the floor for the legs of tripods, upon which the sacrificial animals were raised up to let the blood drain out and then also a number of those blood channels.

And then you mentioned also, the altar has to be sacred. Well, you know from in any contact we might have with Muslims, they regard the Quran as very Holy and nothing should be put on top of it. So when they see us, maybe casually, putting a book on a table and then putting a sweater or something on top of our Bibles or carrying our Bibles tucked up under our armpits, that's very disrespectful to them.

And so those are just the couple of comments. I just want to thank you for all the time and effort that you've put into this course. There's a wealth of insight that we've been able to gain from the whole sweep of Scripture. Thank you so much.

**Mark:** This has been a collaborative effort. I have learned so much from all of you and thoroughly appreciate your faithfulness and great insights.

**David Leamon:** Mark, at the beginning of today's session, you mentioned the large number of animals that were sacrificed all day, six days a week. Was any of that meat consumed as food?

**Mark:** In the Book of Leviticus, a lot of the food was consumed by the priests. The Levites did not have their own land. They were mingled into tribes for worship with no way to raise their own livestock, their food. A portion of the sacrificial meat was always given to the priests. And that's part of the problem in Ezekiel because the priests are eating the best parts that were supposed to be given as sacrifice to God, and were giving God the leftovers. So the priests would eat some, the right portion; and then

other parts could have been eaten by the other people, but the best parts were always to sacrifice fully upon the altar to Yahweh.

**Vickie Smith:** Can you explain the thousand year reign of Christ and where that comes in with the new Jerusalem coming down. Is that when the thousand year reign of Christ begins? I thought we would be with Christ forever so I'm confused as to where that (comes in).

**Mark:** This is a huge difficult question about the Millennium that begs much more time...

- We find that in The Book of Revelation primarily.
- In the history of the church, the pre Millennials say that Christ will come back; there's a thousand year reign; and then the final judgment.
- And then there are the Amillennials who say there is no actual thousand year reign; that we are living in that right now; that the age of the church right now is the reign of Christ and He's coming back to judge the living and the dead.
- And the post Millennials who believe there'll be a tribulation and then a thousand years.
- I tend to say, "Thank You, Jesus" when He says in The Gospels not to try to work this out and to trust Him. God has this; believe Him and don't get too caught up in how the future is going to play out. Perhaps, that's a cop out, but it's very complicated.
- And then there's the rapture in seven or eight verses of 1 Thessalonians that play into this as well; and so it gets very complicated.
- Well-meaning, faithfuls spend their whole lives trying to unpack all that. And so, I would direct you to those who have studied this and would have much more to say than we can today.
- We would really have to look at it carefully.
- So, I am of the opinion that there will be the second coming and that will be the final judgement. And basically, I believe that the first Advent of Christ is His incarnation birth in Bethlehem until His second and then the second coming; we are living in the final age of the world right now.
- In other words, the end time started in Bethlehem at the Incarnation of the Son of God; and the clock has been ticking. How much longer God gives us? I don't know, but we're on the clock, right now.

Thank you all very much. Hope you'll continue to draw upon Ezekiel and Scripture.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, we give You thanks for Your amazing work, Your love and Your Truth that we read verse after verse in the Book of Ezekiel. May it bring us Lord into closer, obedience and love for You. May our worship Lord, just fill this Church, fill the sanctuaries of our hearts. May we be living sacrifices to You, Lord, day by day. We are so grateful to You Jesus, and to You we resubmit our lives. In the name of God the Father Son Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen. God bless you all.