

# Ezekiel

## Explained & Applied 26

Ger de Koning





# **The Book of Ezekiel**



# The Book of Ezekiel

The Glory of the LORD

Ger de Koning

Dutch version:

Ezechiël – Toegelicht en toegepast 26

© Tweede druk 2019 Uitgeverij Het Zoeklicht & Uitgeverij Daniël

ISBN / EAN 978-90-64513-00-8

Web shop: [www.uitgeverijdaniel.nl](http://www.uitgeverijdaniel.nl)

Layout for website: Jan Noordhoek

Available as pdf, EPUB and MOBI file on

<https://www.oudesporen.nl/artikelen.php?lang=EN>

© 2021 by Ger de Koning. All rights preserved.

No part of this publication may be – other than for personal use – reproduced in any form without written permission of the author.

New American Standard Bible Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation La Habra, Calif. All rights reserved. For Permission to Quote Information visit <http://www.lockman.org>.

# Contents

<b>Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible</b>	<b>14</b>
Old Testament	14
New Testament	15
<b>Explanation of general format</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>The Book of Ezekiel</b>	<b>18</b>
Preface	18
Introduction	19
<b>Ezekiel 1</b>	<b>24</b>
Eze 1:1-3   The Heavens Are Opened	24
Eze 1:4-14   The Living Beings	27
Eze 1:15-21   The Wheels and Their Movement	33
Eze 1:22-25   Under the Expanse	36
Eze 1:26-28   Above the Expanse	37
<b>Ezekiel 2</b>	<b>40</b>
Eze 2:1-7   The Calling of Ezekiel	40
Eze 2:8-10   The Scroll	43
<b>Ezekiel 3</b>	<b>45</b>
Eze 3:1-9   Ezekiel Eats the Scroll	45
Eze 3:10-15   Ezekiel Comes to the Exiles	47
Eze 3:16-21   Watchman to the House of Israel	49
Eze 3:22-27   The LORD Appears Again	52
<b>Ezekiel 4</b>	<b>54</b>
Introduction	54
Eze 4:1-3   The Siege of Jerusalem Played Out	54
Eze 4:4-8   The Years of Iniquity	56
Eze 4:9-17   Eating and Drinking of Ezekiel	58

<b>Ezekiel 5</b>	<b>61</b>
Eze 5:1-4   Shaving and Dividing Hair	61
Eze 5:5-10   The Sins of Jerusalem	62
Eze 5:11-17   Meaning of Dividing the Hair	63
<b>Ezekiel 6</b>	<b>66</b>
Eze 6:1-7   Judgment on the Mountains of Israel	66
Eze 6:8-10   A Remnant	68
Eze 6:11-14   Judgment by Sword, Famine and Plague	69
<b>Ezekiel 7</b>	<b>71</b>
Eze 7:1-4   The Judgment Is Total	71
Eze 7:5-9   The Judgment Is Near	72
Eze 7:10-13   The Doom Has Gone Forth	73
Eze 7:14-27   Response to Judgment	74
<b>Ezekiel 8</b>	<b>78</b>
Introduction	78
Eze 8:1-6   The Idol of Jealousy	78
Eze 8:7-13   Idolatry by the Elders	81
Eze 8:14-15   Tammuz Worship by Women	83
Eze 8:16   Worship of the Sun	83
Eze 8:17-18   The Judgment of the LORD	84
<b>Ezekiel 9</b>	<b>86</b>
Eze 9:1-4   The Man With the Writing Case	86
Eze 9:5-7   Judgment Begins With the Household of God	88
Eze 9:8-11   Ezekiel's Response – Answer From the LORD	89
<b>Ezekiel 10</b>	<b>92</b>
Introduction	92
Eze 10:1-7   The Man in Linen Must Scatter Fire	92
Eze 10:8-17   The Cherubim	94
Eze 10:18-22   The Glory of the LORD Departs	96
<b>Ezekiel 11</b>	<b>98</b>
Eze 11:1-4   The Leaders Devise Iniquity	98

Eze 11:5-13   The Leaders of Jerusalem Punished	99
Eze 11:14-15   The Brothers of the Prophet	101
Eze 11:16-21   Promise of Restoration	102
Eze 11:22-23   The Departure of Glory	104
Eze 11:24-25   Ezekiel Back With the Exiles	105
<b>Ezekiel 12</b>	<b>106</b>
Introduction	106
Eze 12:1-7   The Exile Depicted	106
Eze 12:8-16   The Exile of the King	108
Eze 12:17-20   Eating and Drinking in Fear	109
Eze 12:21-28   Contempt of True Prophecy	110
<b>Ezekiel 13</b>	<b>113</b>
Introduction	113
Eze 13:1-16   Judgment on the False Prophets	113
Eze 13:17-23   Judgment on the False Prophetesses	117
<b>Ezekiel 14</b>	<b>120</b>
Eze 14:1-11   Punishment of the Idolaters	120
Eze 14:12-23   Four Severe Judgments and Three Righteous Men	123
<b>Ezekiel 15</b>	<b>128</b>
Introduction	128
Eze 15:1-5   The Useless Wood of the Vine	129
Eze 15:6-8   The Application of the Parable	130
<b>Ezekiel 16</b>	<b>132</b>
Introduction	132
Eze 16:1-7   Origin of Jerusalem	132
Eze 16:8-14   Rise of Jerusalem	134
Eze 16:15-22   Decay of Jerusalem	136
Eze 16:23-29   Jerusalem Continues to Sin	138
Eze 16:30-34   Jerusalem, a Special Harlot	140
Eze 16:35-43   Jerusalem Judged by Her Lovers	141
Eze 16:44-52   Jerusalem Compared to Her ‘Sisters’	143
Eze 16:53-59   Promise of Restoration	146

Eze 16:60-63   The New Covenant With Jerusalem	147
<b>Ezekiel 17</b>	<b>150</b>
Introduction	150
Eze 17:1-10   Parable of the Two Eagles	150
Eze 17:11-21   Explanation of the Parable	152
Eze 17:22-24   The Tender Twig of the LORD	154
<b>Ezekiel 18</b>	<b>156</b>
Introduction	156
Eze 18:1-20   Responsibility of Each Generation	156
Eze 18:21-32   Responsibility and Turning Away	163
<b>Ezekiel 19</b>	<b>167</b>
Introduction	167
Eze 19:1-9   The Lioness	167
Eze 19:10-14   The Withered Vine	169
<b>Ezekiel 20</b>	<b>171</b>
Introduction	171
Eze 20:1-3   The Elders Come to Consult the LORD	171
Eze 20:4-9   Israel's Idolatry in Egypt	172
Eze 20:10-17   Israel's Idolatry in the Wilderness	174
Eze 20:18-26   Idolatry of the Children in the Wilderness	175
Eze 20:27-29   Israel's Idolatry in the Promised Land	177
Eze 20:30-32   The Verdict	179
Eze 20:33-44   Lawsuit and Restoration in the Future	179
Eze 20:45-49   The Fire of Judgment in the Negev	182
<b>Ezekiel 21</b>	<b>184</b>
Eze 21:1-7   The People Are Massacred	184
Eze 21:8-17   The Sword Song	186
Eze 21:18-23   The Oracle of Nebuchadnezzar	188
Eze 21:24-27   The Last King	189
Eze 21:28-32   Judgment on Ammon	191
<b>Ezekiel 22</b>	<b>193</b>
Introduction	193

Eze 22:1-16   The Bloody City	193
Eze 22:17-22   The Melting Furnace	196
Eze 22:23-29   The Wicked Land	197
Eze 22:30-31   No One Stands in the Gap	199
<b>Ezekiel 23</b>	<b>201</b>
Introduction	201
Eze 23:1-4   Oholah and Oholibah	201
Eze 23:5-10   The Sin of Oholah and the Judgment on Her	202
Eze 23:11-21   The Sin of Oholibah	203
Eze 23:22-35   Judgment on Oholibah	206
Eze 23:36-49   The End of Oholah and Oholibah	209
<b>Ezekiel 24</b>	<b>213</b>
Introduction	213
Eze 24:1-14   Parable of the Boiling Pot	213
Eze 24:15-18   Death of Ezekiel's Wife	217
Eze 24:19-24   Meaning of the Death of Ezekiel's Wife	218
Eze 24:25-27   The Day of the Destruction of the Temple	219
<b>Ezekiel 25</b>	<b>221</b>
Introduction	221
Eze 25:1-7   Judgment on Ammon	222
Eze 25:8-11   Judgment on Moab	223
Eze 25:12-14   Judgment on Edom	224
Eze 25:15-17   Judgment on the Philistines	225
<b>Ezekiel 26</b>	<b>227</b>
Introduction	227
Eze 26:1-14   Judgment on Tyre	227
Eze 26:15-21   Reaction to the Fall of Tyre	230
<b>Ezekiel 27</b>	<b>233</b>
Introduction	233
Eze 27:1-3   The Haughtiness of Tyre	233
Eze 27:4-11   Description of the Ship	233
Eze 27:12-25   The Trade Relations	235

Eze 27:26-36   The Shipwreck	237
<b>Ezekiel 28</b>	<b>239</b>
Introduction	239
Eze 28:1-5   The Pride of the Leader of Tyre	239
Eze 28:6-10   Judgment on the Leader of Tyre	240
Eze 28:11-19   Lamentation Over the King of Tyre	242
Eze 28:20-24   Judgment on Sidon	245
Eze 28:25-26   Promise of Restoration for Israel	246
<b>Ezekiel 29</b>	<b>248</b>
Introduction	248
Eze 29:1-12   Judgment on Egypt	248
Eze 29:13-16   Restoration of a Remnant of Egypt	251
Eze 29:17-21   Egypt as a Reward for Nebuchadnezzar	252
<b>Ezekiel 30</b>	<b>254</b>
Introduction	254
Eze 30:1-12   The Judgment Day Upon Egypt	254
Eze 30:13-19   Judgment on the Cities of Egypt	257
Eze 30:20-26   Judgment on Pharaoh	259
<b>Ezekiel 31</b>	<b>261</b>
Introduction	261
Eze 31:1-18   Assyria as a Warning Example	261
<b>Ezekiel 32</b>	<b>266</b>
Eze 32:1-16   Lamentation Over Pharaoh	266
Eze 32:17-32   Wailing for Egypt	269
<b>Ezekiel 33</b>	<b>273</b>
Introduction	273
Eze 33:1-9   The Duty of the Watchman	273
Eze 33:10-20   Call to Turn Back	275
Eze 33:21-22   Message of the Fall of Jerusalem	278
Eze 33:23-29   Arrogance of the Remnant	278
Eze 33:30-33   Hearing, but Not Doing	279

<b>Ezekiel 34</b>	<b>281</b>
Introduction	281
Eze 34:1-10   ‘Woe’ to the False Shepherds	281
Eze 34:11-16   The LORD Himself Feeds His Sheep	284
Eze 34:17-22   The LORD Judges	286
Eze 34:23-31   Promise of the One Shepherd	287
 <b>Ezekiel 35</b>	 <b>290</b>
Introduction	290
Eze 35:1-15   Prophecy Concerning Mount Seir	290
 <b>Ezekiel 36</b>	 <b>294</b>
Introduction	294
Eze 36:1-7   The Invaders Driven Out	294
Eze 36:8-15   Israel Bears Fruit and Is Populated	296
Eze 36:16-21   Concern for His Holy Name	297
Eze 36:22-32   A New Heart and a New Spirit	298
Eze 36:33-38   The Sole Purpose: The Glory of the LORD	301
 <b>Ezekiel 37</b>	 <b>303</b>
Introduction	303
Eze 37:1-10   The Vision of the Bones	303
Eze 37:11-14   Explanation of the Vision	306
Eze 37:15-28   God Will Reunite Judah and Israel	307
 <b>Ezekiel 38</b>	 <b>311</b>
Introduction	311
Eze 38:1-9   Prophecy About Gog	312
Eze 38:10-13   Deliberations of Gog	314
Eze 38:14-16   Gog and His Allies	315
Eze 38:17-23   Gog Judged by the LORD	316
 <b>Ezekiel 39</b>	 <b>320</b>
Introduction	320
Eze 39:1-16   Gog as Spoil for Israel	320
Eze 39:17-24   The Judgment on Gog Glorifies the LORD	323
Eze 39:25-29   Israel Restored in Their Land	324

<b>Ezekiel 40</b>	<b>327</b>
Introduction	327
Eze 40:1-4   Ezekiel in Visions Brought into Israel	331
Eze 40:5   The Wall on the Outside	334
Eze 40:6-16   The Outer East Gate	335
Eze 40:17-19   Pavement and Thirty Chambers	339
Eze 40:20-23   The Outer North Gate	340
Eze 40:24-27   The Outer South Gate	340
Eze 40:28-31   The Inner South Gate	341
Eze 40:32-34   The Inner East Gate	342
Eze 40:35-37   The Inner North Gate	342
Eze 40:38-43   Objects for Sacrificial Service	343
Eze 40:44-47   Chambers for the Singers and the Priests	344
Eze 40:48-49   The Porch	345
<b>Ezekiel 41</b>	<b>347</b>
Introduction	347
Eze 41:1-4   The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place	347
Eze 41:5-11   The Side Chambers	348
Eze 41:12   The Building West of the Temple House	350
Eze 41:13-21   Sizes, Materials and Decoration	351
Eze 41:22   The Altar in the Temple	354
Eze 41:23-26   The Doors	356
<b>Ezekiel 42</b>	<b>357</b>
Introduction	357
Eze 42:1-12   The Priests' Chambers of the Temple	357
Eze 42:13-14   What the Priests' Chambers Are for	359
Eze 42:15-20   The Holy Area Around the Temple Grounds	361
<b>Ezekiel 43</b>	<b>363</b>
Introduction	363
Eze 43:1-5   The Glory of the LORD Returns	363
Eze 43:6-12   The LORD Among His People	364
Eze 43:13-17   The Altar	369
Eze 43:18-27   The Consecration of the Altar	371

<b>Ezekiel 44</b>	<b>375</b>
Introduction	375
Eze 44:1-3   The Shut East Gate	375
Eze 44:4-9   The Sanctuary Not Profaned Again	376
Eze 44:10-16   Unfaithful and Faithful Levites	378
Eze 44:17-27   The Holiness of the Sons of Zadok	380
Eze 44:28-31   The Inheritance of the Sons of Zadok	384
 <b>Ezekiel 45</b>	 <b>386</b>
Introduction	386
Eze 45:1-8   The Land That Is for the LORD	386
Eze 45:9-12   Righteous Weights and Measures	388
Eze 45:13-17   Sacrifice for the Prince	389
Eze 45:18-20   Offering on New Year	391
Eze 45:21-25   The Great Annual Feasts	392
 <b>Ezekiel 46</b>	 <b>395</b>
Introduction	395
Eze 46:1-15   The Offering of the Prince	395
Eze 46:16-18   Inheritance of the Prince	400
Eze 46:19-24   The Boiling Places of the Temple	402
 <b>Ezekiel 47</b>	 <b>404</b>
Introduction	404
Eze 47:1-12   The Water From the New Temple	404
Eze 47:13-20   The Boundaries of the land	409
Eze 47:21-23   Inheritance of the Alien	411
 <b>Ezekiel 48</b>	 <b>412</b>
Introduction	412
Eze 48:1-7   New Division of the North	412
Eze 48:8-14   The Allotment for the LORD	413
Eze 48:15-19   The City and Its Area	414
Eze 48:20-22   The Holy Allotment	415
Eze 48:23-29   New Division of the South	416
Eze 48:30-34   The Gates of the City	417
Eze 48:35   The Name of the City; Summary of Future Events	418

<b>Summary of future events</b>	<b>420</b>
Introduction	420
Overview	421
<b>Other Publications</b>	<b>424</b>

## Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

### **Old Testament**

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah  
Nah – Nahum  
Hab – Habakkuk  
Zep – Zephaniah  
Hag – Haggai  
Zec – Zechariah  
Mal – Malachi

**New Testament**

Mt – Gospel of Matthew  
Mk – Gospel of Mark  
Lk – Gospel of Luke  
Jn – Gospel of John  
Acts – Acts of the Apostles  
Rom – Letter to the Romans  
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians  
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians  
Gal – Letter to the Galatians  
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians  
Phil – Letter to the Philippians  
Col – Letter to the Colossians  
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians  
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians  
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy  
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy  
Tit – Letter to Titus  
Phlm – Letter to Philemon  
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews  
Jam – Letter of James  
1Pet – First Letter of Peter  
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter  
1Jn – First Letter of John  
2Jn – Second Letter of John  
3Jn – Third Letter of John  
Jude – Letter of Jude  
Rev – Revelation

## Explanation of general format

**PERSONAL PRONOUNS** are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

**BRACKETS [ ]** are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

**SHARP BRACKETS < >** are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS \*** are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

**ALL CAPS** in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

# The Book of Ezekiel

## **Preface**

The book of Ezekiel gives insight into the glory of the God of Israel in a special way. Ezekiel falls down on his face several times at the sight of that glory. That is also the effect with us if we open ourselves to the working of God's Spirit as we read this book.

Most of what is passed on to the reader in this commentary is not original. I have gratefully used what others have received from the Lord in terms of insight about this book. I did make many new discoveries through it, and as a result have been impressed even more by the richness of God's Word.

It is not my custom to mention names of those from whom I have received help – in written or spoken form – in writing a commentary. It seems clear to me that it is not possible to write a commentary without help from others. It may be someone who has given a comprehensive explanation, it may also be someone who has pointed out a detail with a suggestion for improvement. The Lord has arranged it in the church in a way that the members need each other to perform the task He has given each member. He will reward each one who has contributed to this book for that. I could just forget someone, but He does not forget one.

I will now make an exception by mentioning that I am particularly grateful to the Lord for the help I received from Ron Vellekoop of Zoetermeer. It is because of the special form of collaboration on this book. We consulted intensively on many passages. His contribution has resulted in numerous substantive and linguistic improvements.

In one of his first contributions, he wrote: 'I am deeply impressed that He Who sat on the throne descended and lay in a manger. Wrapped in cloths. And that He Who has lain there is now sitting on that throne again. With the signs of suffering and death in His hands and in His side ...'

This is what we wish for the reader: to be deeply impressed with the Lord Jesus Christ. His glory is what the book of Ezekiel and this commentary are all about.

Ger de Koning

Middelburg, September 2017, translated March 2021

## **Introduction**

### **The person Ezekiel**

Of Ezekiel's personal history, we know only what we find of him in this book and what is known of the time in which he lived. Some of the things we know about him:

1. His name (Eze 1:3). Ezekiel means 'God makes strong' or 'may God strengthen'.
2. During the reign of Jehoiachin, he was taken into exile (Eze 1:2).
3. In the fifth year of his exile he is called a prophet (Ezekiel 1-3).
4. His father's name and that he belongs to a priestly family (Eze 1:3).
5. He has been married. His wife dies during his service, but God expressly forbids him to mourn (Eze 24:16-18).
6. He has a home of his own (Eze 8:1). The elders of Israel come to him there to seek his counsel.
7. He was active as a prophet for about 22 years, from 593 BC to 571 BC (Eze 1:2; 29:17).

### **Chronology**

We can best understand the time in which he lives through a review of some prior events:

1. The ten tribes were taken away by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

2. The two tribes experience a revival after that. This revival takes place under Josiah, who is king over Judah from 640/639-609 BC (2 Kings 21:24-23:30; 2 Chronicles 33:25-35:27). However, the revival is only temporary.
3. Josiah is succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, also called Shallum. Jehoahaz is king for only three months in the year 609 BC (2Kgs 23:30-34; 2Chr 36:1-4).
4. Then another son of Josiah comes to the throne, Jehoiakim, also called Eliakim (2Kgs 23:34-37; 24:1-6; 2Chr 36:4-8; Jer 36:1-31; Dan 1:1-2). He reigns from 609-598 BC. During his reign, around the year 606 BC., Nebuchadnezzar comes to Jerusalem and besieges the city. The LORD gives Jehoiakim and some of the temple utensils into his hand (2Chr 36:5-8; Dan 1:1-2). Also, at Nebuchadnezzar's command, a number of "Israelites ... from the royal family and from the nobles" are transported to Babylon, including "from among the Judeans: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah" (Dan 1:1-6). This fulfills Isaiah's prophecy to Hezekiah (Isa 39:5-7; 2Kgs 20:16-18).
5. After the death of Jehoiakim, Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin (Jeconiah, Coniah), a grandson of Josiah, comes to the throne (2Kgs 24:6-17; 2Chr 36:9-10). He reigns from December 7, 598 to March 16, 597 BC., which is only three months and ten days (2Chr 36:9). When Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem in 597 BC., Jehoiachin and a number of others go out of the city to the king of Babylon, who captures them (2Kgs 24:12). Of this transportation into exile, Ezekiel is a part (2Kgs 24:14-16; Eze 1:1-2). He is then twenty-five years old.
6. Zedekiah (Mattaniah), a third son of Josiah, is the last king of Judah (2Kgs 24:17-20; 25:1-7; 2Chr 36:10-14). He is appointed by Nebuchadnezzar in place of Jehoiachin and rules from 597-587 BC.
7. Zedekiah's kingship ends because he rebels against Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar goes up to Jerusalem and destroys the city in 586 BC. and carries again some of the population away into exile (2Kgs 25:11).
8. Finally, around 582 BC., the last transportation into exile takes place (Jer 52:30).

## A Prophet of God in Babylon

As we see in the chronology above, Zedekiah, one of the sons of Josiah, is appointed by Nebuchadnezzar as the successor to Jehoiachin to govern Judah. During his reign, God uses the prophet Jeremiah to warn the people and their wicked king Zedekiah in Judah and Jerusalem. We find his service in the book of the Bible named after him, Jeremiah. Also among the exiles, God uses a prophet to warn the part of His people who are in exile: Ezekiel. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesy about the fall, but also about the restoration of Jerusalem and Judah. That restoration is connected with the coming, that is, the return, of the Messiah.

Prophets are always called to be prophets *in the promised land*. Ezekiel, along with Daniel, is an exception to this. We see in the book of Ezekiel – and also in the book of Daniel – that God’s presence is not confined to the temple in Jerusalem, which is what many Jews have thought. Even David thought in that direction. We hear this in what he says when he is driven out of his inheritance by Saul (1Sam 26:19-20). Similarly, the Jews who were led into exile felt far from the presence of God. It is conceivable that it is a great surprise to Ezekiel when the glory of God appears to him in Babylon. He will not have counted on it.

Why is God calling a prophet in Babylon? Surely He has withdrawn His hands from the exiles in Babylon, hasn’t He? Surely those who are in Judah are in the place where God is, aren’t they? However, it is exactly the other way around. Jeremiah brought this out in his preaching time and again. Those who have been transported to Babylon are in the place where God wants them to be. Those who have remained in Jerusalem and Judah do not repent and remain disobedient to God. Therefore, they too will be removed from the land.

In Babylon, the people as a whole become disobedient to God. There are even false prophets at work who turn things around by suggesting to the people that they will soon be back in Judah. Therefore, in His mercy, God also gives a man in Babylon who tells His people that they should not hold out false hopes of a speedy recovery, but that acknowledgment of God’s judgment opens the way of blessing.

## **The glory of Christ**

We see in this book from beginning to end the sovereignty and glory of the LORD. He is sovereign in all things concerning Israel and all nations, no matter how it may seem at times that man is thwarting Him. Ezekiel is a book that often speaks of the Spirit of God. The Spirit is mentioned 19 times, sometimes twice in one verse (Eze 1:12,20,21; 2:2; 3:12,14,24; 8:3; 10:17; 11:1,5,24; 36:27; 37:1,14; 39:29; 43:5). It should therefore come as no surprise that in this book the “glory” of the LORD or of God is mentioned up to 18 times, sometimes even twice in one verse (Eze 1:28; 3:12,23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4,18,19; 11:22,23; 39:21; 43:2,4,5; 44:4). After all, the Holy Spirit does nothing but glorify the Lord Jesus (Jn 16:14), for it is about Him when the glory of the LORD or of God is spoken of (Jn 12:37-42).

Ezekiel is in many ways a type of Christ. We see this especially in the oft-used expression “son of man” the LORD uses to address him. This expression occurs over 100 times in the Old Testament, of which over 90 times in this book. “Son of man” is the translation of the Hebrew *ben adam*, which means “son of adam” or “son of man”. The name “son of man” is the name used for the Lord Jesus in the Gospels and in the book of Revelation. He is the true Son of Man. It is the title that designates both His humiliation and rejection and His exaltation (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:22; Rev 14:14).

## **Division of the book**

The book can be divided as follows:

### **A. Introduction (Ezekiel 1-3)**

1. The vision of the glory of the LORD (Ezekiel 1)
2. The calling of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2-3)

### **B. The fall of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 4-24)**

1. Announcement of the judgment on Jerusalem and the land (Ezekiel 4-7)
2. The glory of the LORD leaves Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8-11)

3. The sins of the leaders denounced (Ezekiel 12-17)
4. Defense of God's righteousness (Ezekiel 18-21)
5. The guilt and end of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 22-24)

**C. Judgment on the peoples (Ezekiel 25-32)**

1. Ammon (Ezekiel 25:1-7)
2. Moab (Ezekiel 25:8-11)
3. Edom (Ezekiel 25:12-14)
4. Philistia (Ezekiel 25:15-17)
5. Tyre (Ezekiel 26:1-28:19)
6. Sidon (Ezekiel 28:20-26)
7. Egypt (Ezekiel 29-32)

**D. The future glory of Israel (Ezekiel 33-39)**

1. The faithful watchman and the faithful Shepherd (Ezekiel 33-34)
2. A renewed land (Ezekiel 35-36)
3. A renewed people (Ezekiel 37)
4. Extermination of the last enemy (Ezekiel 38-39)

**E. The glory of the LORD in the new temple (Ezekiel 40-48)**

1. The new temple (Ezekiel 40:1-43:12)
2. The new priestly service (Ezekiel 43:13-47:12)
3. The new division of the land (Ezekiel 47:13-48:35)

# Ezekiel 1

## **Eze 1:1-3 | The Heavens Are Opened**

*1 Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth [day] of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. 2 (On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, 3 the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the LORD came upon him.)*

The book begins with “now it came about” (verse 1). This emphasizes an activity, the action of God. Before saying what comes about, what God is doing, there is a time indication. [NOTE In the book 13 accurate time indications occur: Eze 1:1-3; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1; 29:17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1; 32:17; 33:21; 40:1.] This is the dating of Ezekiel’s calling as a prophet. It is an indeterminate time reference: “In the thirtieth year, on the fifth [day] of the fourth month.” It does not say, for example, that it is the thirtieth year of a king. This time indication has been explained in several ways. The simplest, most obvious explanation is that “the thirtieth year” refers to Ezekiel’s age.

This statement is supported by the fact that thirty years is an age at which a person may begin priestly service (Num 4:1-3,23). Ezekiel belongs to a priestly family (verse 3). However, he is not in Jerusalem to exercise the special privilege of priestly service in the temple there, but in exile outside the land.

That must have been a special test for him. From everything we know about him, we see his close relationship with God. For such a person strongly the wish expressed by the sons of Korah lives: “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand [outside]. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psa 84:10). God has other plans for him, however: He appoints him a prophet.

Then we are informed of the place of action. The writer of the book says that he is “by the river Chebar among the exiles”. Verse 3 clarifies that the river Chebar is “in the land of the Chaldeans”. The use of the word “I” makes it clear that the writer of the book is none other than the prophet who is shown the visions: Ezekiel.

Ezekiel is there, by the river Chebar, “among the exiles”. So he is there along with other exiles. He may be a priest, but his fate and his circumstances are no different as a result. He shares in the consequences of the total unfaithfulness of the people. God does not put special protection around faithful believers when it comes to discipline that He brings upon the whole. What He does do in those circumstances is to connect faithful believers more and more to Himself. He helps them not to succumb and uses them as a testimony to their neighbors, to believers and unbelievers alike.

On the fifth day of the fourth month of the year in which Ezekiel turned thirty – if the assumption is correct that this is his age – in Babylon “the heavens were opened” to him (cf. Mt 3:16; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Rev 4:1; 19:11) and he sees “visions of God”. His eye is opened to what natural man cannot see. The invisible world becomes visible to him so that he can see what is happening there.

The thirtieth year corresponds to “the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile” (verse 2). Thus, it is also the fifth year of Ezekiel’s exile. Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar after a reign of only three months and ten days (2Chr 36:9-10). This is the deportation that took place around 597 BC.

When Ezekiel has been in exile for five years, on the once more accurately dated day – “the fifth of the month” (verses 1-2) – “the word of the LORD” comes “expressly” to him (verse 3). As he is shown visions of God, the LORD speaks to him in clear, unmistakable language. What he is told underscores that what he sees in the visions is reality and not imagination. Also, the source of Ezekiel’s service is unequivocally established. He has no input at all in his calling. The visions come *from God Almighty* (verse 1).

It is the word “of the LORD”, the name of God in connection with man and especially with His people.

The word comes “to Ezekiel”. Here he mentions his name for the first time, after speaking of “I” twice in verse 1. Further in this book his name is only mentioned in Ezekiel 24 (Eze 24:24). Ezekiel – in accordance with the meaning of his name – experiences the power of God through the Spirit in a special way during his ministry.

Ezekiel is “the priest, son of Buzi”. Nothing is known of Buzi (means “despised”, “scorned”) but only what is written here of him, which is his name and his service. Here we see that Ezekiel belongs to a lineage of priests, as did his contemporary Jeremiah (Jer 1:1). Therein undoubtedly lies the reason for the central role of Jerusalem and all that has to do with the temple and the sacrificial service in his book. He is a priest at heart.

While Ezekiel is “in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar ... the hand of the LORD” comes upon him. The land of the Chaldeans is the region surrounding Babylon. The Chaldeans are the core of the Babylonian empire. In the foreign land, the hand of the LORD comes upon him to introduce him into His thoughts. He is seized by that hand and thus comes under the power and influence of the Spirit of God (Eze 3:14,22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1). Thus he becomes an instrument for communicating the truth of God and is kept from communicating his own thoughts. The hand of the Lord can also be upon someone in judgment (Acts 13:11).

It must have been a great encouragement to Ezekiel, after being in Babylon for such a long time, to get a glimpse into and a word from heaven. He would never have expected that either, familiar as he is with the idea that God dwells in the temple in Jerusalem. He is far away from that place. But God is not bound to place and time and makes Himself known to everyone whose heart goes out to Him. He gives Ezekiel insight into His work, which continues despite the unfaithfulness of His people. Through this, Ezekiel learns to rise above the circumstances of the moment and see things that happen on earth from God’s perspective.

The rest of the chapter is devoted to the vision Ezekiel sees of the glory of the LORD (verse 28; cf. Isa 6:1-3). This vision is also referred to in Ezekiel

10-11 (Eze 10:1-22; 11:22-24). The prophet attempts to describe this vision by which his ministry as prophet is inaugurated. The words he uses to describe what he sees make it clear that a full description is beyond the capabilities of human language.

### **Eze 1:4-14 | The Living Beings**

*4 As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. 5 Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form. 6 Each of them had four faces and four wings. 7 Their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf's hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze. 8 Under their wings on their four sides [were] human hands. As for the faces and wings of the four of them, 9 their wings touched one another; [their faces] did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward. 10 As for the form of their faces, [each] had the face of a man; all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle. 11 Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another [being], and two covering their bodies. 12 And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go, without turning as they went. 13 In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire. 14 And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning.*

The visions describe the glory of the LORD on His throne. A throne is the center of government, meaning that Ezekiel sees the LORD in His government. The throne is shaped like a chariot, so we can speak of the throne chariot of God. Human words fall short of describing God and His government. Hence, Ezekiel always makes comparisons that he precedes with expressions such as “something like” or “the form of” or “figures resembling”. Even the comparison remains vague. It is impossible for people to fully describe the glory of the eternal, infinite God.

God rides on His throne chariot through history. He holds history in His hand, both that of His people and that of Babylon and every other nation.

If the throne chariot is so glorious, how great is the glory of Him Who sits on it. No power can stop that chariot. God's Spirit determines the way.

The description begins with *the government of God* to show Ezekiel and us that God is above everything and that He never loses control of events. Everything is in His hands, even though we, who often look only "under the sun" (Ecc 1:9), are sometimes overcome by doubt and fear. This awareness can comfort anyone who is in difficult circumstances.

The first thing Ezekiel sees when the heavens are opened is a storm wind coming from the north (verse 4). The storm wind from the north is the symbol of the suffering that enemies from the north bring upon Israel (cf. Jer 1:14), but they do so as a judgment that comes from God (Eze 13:11-13). Through the storm He speaks to His people (Psa 50:3).

Because the storm comes from God, it is not just a judgmental storm wind. There is also "a great cloud", indicating the glory of the LORD. He is present in the judgment. Although there is fire of judgment flashing coming from it continually, there is "a bright light" around it. That bright light is caused by something reminiscent of "glowing metal in the midst of the fire" (cf. verse 27; Eze 8:2).

The scene shows that judgment comes from the north from God, that it emanates from Him. The enemy serves God's plan and can do nothing but only what God wants. The "bright light around it" shows that God sets the limit of judgment. He does not tempt beyond what can be endured (1Cor 10:13).

The phrase "glowing metal" occurs two more times in the Old Testament, both times in this book (Eze 1:27; 8:2). It is the description of a characteristic of Him Who sits on the throne and rules, exercising utterly pure, unyielding judgment. Fire is a picture of God's judgment. Fire consumes everything that is not in accordance with God's righteousness. In judgment, His righteousness shines forth.

We see in the description besides various features or attributes of God also that the one comes forth from the other. The fact that the brilliance of precious metal comes from the midst of fire can also be applied to the believer.

God wants to work in the lives of His own so that His features become visible in them. In this context we can say that He wants to make His own as precious metal, as people who reflect His image. For this purpose He controls everything. He works to remove from our lives everything that covers up that brilliance (Heb 12:10; 1Pet 1:6-7).

Then in the midst of the fire “figures resembling four living beings” are seen (verse 5; Rev 4:6-9; 5:6-11,14; 6:1-7; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4). These are cherubim (Eze 10:15,19), which are mighty beings whose mission is to watch over the holiness, majesty and dominion of God (cf. Gen 3:24; Psa 99:1; Heb 9:5).

The general sight of the living beings is that they have “human form”. This shows, on the one hand, that God’s government is carried out by a Man, the Son of Man (Jn 5:27). On the other hand, God’s government is focused on man and He does what is appropriate for man so that he will meet His purpose. The Son, Who became Man, has perfectly answered what God asks of man. For us, human beings, this is a great grace. We may know that we are governed by the living God Who, as Man, cannot come closer to us.

Two developments can be seen in our time that deprive man of his humanity. The first development is the ‘dehumanization’ of man, that is, man’s behavior becomes more and more bestial and more and more mechanical. The second development is that the computer is made more and more ‘human’. God has shown us the value man has to Him by becoming Man in Christ. He also shows the value of man in the judgment He executes on him.

Each of the living beings has “four faces” (verse 6). In humans, the “face” is the main part of the body, for by it one can recognize each other as individuals. In addition, one can often read feelings from certain facial expressions (Gen 31:2). In the “four faces” that each of the four living beings has, God shows in what way He rules and what His purposes with it are.

Each of them also has “four wings”. By “wings” we can think of freedom of movement. Birds use their wings to move apart from and above the earth. Wings speak of the fact that God’s action is exalted and cannot be stopped by anything on earth. Wings show that the living beings can come

into God's presence (cf. Exo 19:4). They also speak of protection, safety, security (Psa 91:4; Rev 12:14; Rth 2:12).

"Their legs were straight feet", meaning that their walk or the path they take to uphold God's justice is never winding, but – unlike man's walk – always straight (verse 7). No one can deflect Him from His purpose. "Their feet were like a calf's hoof" refer to the perseverance (of which the calf is a symbol) with which God goes His way.

The "burnished bronze" speaks of God's justice. This can be inferred from the history of the judgment on Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16. The rebels perish by the fire of God's judgment, but the bronze censers are not consumed by it (Num 16:36-39). Thus, God's righteousness withstands His judgments. His judgments are always just, and when He judges, His glory shines and glitters.

"Under their wings", which they have "on their four sides", that is, toward all directions, are "human hands" (verse 8). Hands refer to working, doing something. They are "human hands" here, by which we see that their quick actions take place in a way that is usual for humans. It may also mean that they are using people to perform their service.

Then "the faces and wings" are described in more detail. The description applies "of all four". That it is said "their wings touched one another" (verse 9), seems to indicate that they form a circle, as we do when four people stand hand in hand, forming a circle. It shows that they are a unity. They also show this unity in the way they go. Without turning, they go "each ... straight forward". This shows that God's government continues and that He does not go back on things once they are carried out. Nor does He ever need to go back on anything or take anything back, for His government is always perfect. To that acknowledgment we will always come (cf. Eze 14:22-23).

The face of the living beings has four features (verse 10; cf. Rev 4:7). These four features correspond to the four groups of living beings God creates in Genesis 1: man, wild animals, cattle, and winged birds.

1. The first feature of the face is that it has the form of “the face of a man”. Man was created in the image and likeness of God (Psa 8:5-8). The living beings have the form of a man (verse 5), hands of a man (verse 6) and here we read that their face resembles the face of a man.

2. The next feature is that the face of the living beings when viewed “on the right” resemble “the face of a lion”. The Old Testament draws the lion as an animal full of strength (2Sam 1:23) and with a brave heart (2Sam 17:10). He terrifies with his roar and he tears apart his opponents (Psa 22:13).

3. The third feature is that their face, when viewed “on the left”, resembles “the face of a bull [or: ox, Darby Translation]”. The ox is characterized by horns and cloven hooves (cf. verse 7). The people use the ox to carry burdens and in plowing. The ox knows its owner (Isa 1:3). When cattle are enumerated, the ox is usually mentioned first (Deu 22:10; Jdg 6:4; 1Sam 12:3; Isa 32:20) as the most valuable animal on the farm.

4. Finally, “all four” have “the face of an eagle”. The eagle speaks of speed (2Sam 1:23; Job 9:26; Jer 4:13; Lam 4:19) and the ability to soar to heaven (Job 39:27; Isa 40:31). The eagle has sharp vision (Job 39:29).

It is worth mentioning what is said about the four living beings in an old rabbinic commentary, the so-called Midrash (several commentaries cite this remark):

1. Man is exalted above all creatures.
2. The lion is exalted above all wild animals.
3. The ox is exalted above all cattle.
4. The eagle is exalted above all birds.

It emphasizes that all created things, however exalted among their like, are subject to God.

We also see these four features in the four descriptions we have of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels.

1. The lion points to the King of Whom Matthew writes.

2. The ox reminds us of the persevering service, which we see in the Lord Jesus as the true Servant of Whom Mark writes.

3. The face of a man corresponds to the perfect Man Who is presented to us by Luke.

4. Finally, the eagle is the symbol of the Son of God Who came from heaven to explain the Father to us and Who will come to judge. The evangelist John presents Him to us in this way in his Gospel.

“Their wings were spread out above” (verse 11), which means that they are willing and ready to receive their commands from heaven. They carry out those commands in unity, which is presented in the two wings touching another being. There is an undisturbed cooperation. In carrying out their work, they cover their bodies with two wings, for it is not about them, but about their work.

When they go, each goes straight forward (verse 12). They go a straight way, straight to the set goal. In their going they are led by “the Spirit”. Wherever He wants to go, that is where they go. Any independent action is foreign to them. Therefore, they go without turning, they do not need to turn when they go. They go the right way and do the right things. They do not have to ‘recalculate’ their route at any point. Nor is there anything they have to revise because they would have done it wrong.

In the preceding verses 4-12, the bearers of the throne, the cherubim, have been described. In verses 13-14 follows a description of what characterizes them. Those characteristics make it clear that the throne is a throne of judgment (cf. Dan 7:9-10). Their form is not that of lovely angels, but it “looked like burning coals of fire, like torches” (verse 13). This fire goes “darting back and forth among” them, indicating the movability of judgment by which the threat emanating from them is intensified.

The fire has two characteristics. It is “bright”, and “lightning” is “flashing” from it. The light glow reveals everything; nothing can be hidden. The lightning judges everything that has been made public by the light glow. The judgment takes place in full light and with the inimitable speed and unpredictability of flashing.

The living beings themselves also run “to and fro like bolts of lightning” (verse 14). In addition to moving straight forward, the living beings move with the speed and capriciousness of lightning. Humans have no grasp of this, but are consumed by it if they do not bow down to God’s government.

### **Eze 1:15-21 | The Wheels and Their Movement**

*15 Now as I looked at the living beings, behold, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings, for [each of] the four of them. 16 The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship [was] like sparkling beryl, and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship [being] as if one wheel were within another. 17 Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions without turning as they moved. 18 As for their rims they were lofty and awesome, and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about. 19 Whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living beings rose from the earth, the wheels rose [also]. 20 Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings [was] in the wheels. 21 Whenever those went, these went; and whenever those stood still, these stood still. And whenever those rose from the earth, the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings [was] in the wheels.*

After the wings, the wheels of the living beings are now described. The wings are for the heaven, the wheels for the earth. Every living being has “one wheel on the earth beside” him (verse 15). The wheels connect the throne chariot to the earth. A wheel indicates that the throne of God is not static, but dynamic. There is no standstill. Everything is in motion and progress, moving toward God’s purpose.

The wheels are “on the earth”. This means that God is making His way on earth. He determines the course of history and events. He is the One Who was and is, and also the One Who is to come, in which we see His acting (Rev 1:8).

The wheels point to the rotation of time, with the rotation done by God. God is the acting God. He created heaven and earth, but then did not leave them to themselves. He has been continually upholding creation since its

creation “by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3). In the word “upholding” there is movement. He upholds and brings the creation to His purpose.

The wheels shine “like sparkling beryl” (verse 16). A beryl is a precious stone. It is the first stone of the fourth row of precious stones on the high priest’s breastplate (Exo 28:20; 39:13). This brings to mind the Gospel of John, the fourth gospel. In it we see the heavenly Man, God the Son, on earth. The color of the beryl is blue-green.

Ezekiel sees “the appearance of the wheels”, a view, but also their “workmanship” how they were made, the construction, the composition. It is “as if one wheel were within another” wheel. As a result, it sometimes seems that the wheels are running against each other. It can seem that way in our lives, too, at times. But the wheels interlock like the wheels of a clock, in which there are also cogs that turn in opposite directions, yet they cooperate to make the hands move forward. So it is with the ways of God. They always interlock and never interfere with each other, but always work together to achieve God’s purpose in history and also in our lives.

The wheels of God’s throne can go in all directions, but they do not turn (verse 17). That they can go in all directions does not mean that there is arbitrariness or, as we say, that something can still go in all directions, with which we say we are uncertain about its course. This is not the case with God. He determines the way and knows no limitations in His actions. He knows the best way for everyone and everything and that through time. Time is also in His hands. We see an impressive example of God’s government throughout Joseph’s history (Genesis 37-50). Everything that happened to Joseph was so governed by God in order to accomplish His purpose with him. It is the same way in our lives.

When God acts, He never has to go back on it (Num 23:19a). His work is always perfect, “for all His ways are just” (Deu 32:4a). We see an illustration of this in the chariots of the nations that cannot go where they want to go because they are “between the two mountains” of “bronze” (Zec 6:1). This means that God determines the course of those chariots.

We cannot check out God in this. His ways are “lofty” (verse 18), as the sky. His way is in the sanctuary in heaven and therefore higher than our

ways (cf. Isa 55:9). When we see this, God's ways are "awesome" to us, that is, they inspire in us fear or awe of Him. This is also right and proper. We feel our futility in the light of His sovereignty and glory.

Furthermore, we see that "the rims of all four" of the wheels are "full of eyes round about". This indicates that God's government is not carried out blindly or depends on coincidences, but that God performs all His governmental acts with insight. He knows how to perfectly connect all His actions with each other so that He gets where He wants to go. This also applies to all the actions of all people and all nations. He is omniscient, and His eyes roam the whole earth to act according to His wisdom for the benefit of His own (2Chr 16:9a; Pro 15:3).

The wheels are inseparable from the living beings (verse 19). It is not the wheels that determine the way, but the living beings. The wheels are the means by which the living beings move. The living beings that bear God's throne determine the way. The wheels point to the way that God's government is going. Sometimes the chariot of God's government is lifted from the earth. This indicates that there are times when God withdraws and leaves man to himself (Isa 18:4; Hos 5:15), but without losing control of the earth in the slightest degree. He remains hovering above it, as it were.

The living beings are governed by the Spirit of God (verse 20). The Spirit is the active Person. Through Him, God and Christ do everything. We see this from the very beginning of the Bible (Gen 1:2). The Spirit works in the living beings, who go where the Spirit wants them to go. There is no reluctance or hesitation. Everything is certain.

Once again the unity of the living beings and the wheels is emphasized (verse 21). Both go or stand still. We also see this complete unity between the living beings and the wheels when the living beings rise from the earth, for then the wheels rise "close beside them". This is because the Spirit not only governs the living beings, but also the wheels. Everything in the government of God, everything concerning the throne of God, is perfectly harmonious because the Spirit of God directs everything. All means are at His disposal and He determines which ones He uses and when.

## Eze 1:22-25 | Under the Expanse

*22 Now over the heads of the living beings [there was] something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads. 23 Under the expanse their wings [were stretched out] straight, one toward the other; each one also had two wings covering its body on the one side and on the other. 24 I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. 25 And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings.*

Then Ezekiel sees above the heads of the living beings a kind of an expanse (verse 22). That expanse recalls the second day of creation, when God made the expanse (Gen 1:6-8). We can think of this expanse as the celestial expanse visible to us. Its brilliance reminds Ezekiel of “the awesome gleam of crystal” (cf. Rev 4:6a; 22:1). It sparkles and shines and is transparent and solid. It is an overwhelming sight of God’s firm government over the whole earth, in which there is nothing that defiles. Water can be defiled, but nothing can affect the purity and brilliance of crystal.

Again Ezekiel describes the wings of the living beings (verse 23), which are here brought into direct connection with this expanse. The wheels are not mentioned, for we are close to heaven, where the government has its origin. The wings are stretched out “straight, one toward the other”; they are straight, as are the legs and way they go (verses 7,12). This shows that all God’s ways in heaven and His ways on earth are straight. God’s government over the angels in heaven is just as straight as His government over men on earth.

In addition to having their wings stretched out straight, one toward the other, they also cover their bodies with them. They work harmoniously together to uphold God’s law. In covering themselves “on the one side and on the other”, we see that they are forgetting themselves both as to their future (“one side” or “before”) and as to their past (“the other” side or “behind”) (cf. Isa 6:2).

In the previous verses Ezekiel has *seen* certain things, but now he also *hears* something (verse 24). When the living beings use their wings to go, it sounds “like the sound of abundant waters” (cf. Eze 43:2), in which “the voice of the Almighty” resounds (cf. Rev 1:15b). His voice sounds like thunder (Job 37:4; Psa 29:3-4). The sound is reminiscent of “tumult”, hubbub, and of “the sound of an army camp”. All of these comparisons that Ezekiel uses to describe what he hears are in keeping with the whole description of God’s government.

Ezekiel hears the sound as long as the living beings are going and thus using their wings. When they stand still, they do not use their wings and drop them. Then it becomes silent. The living beings stand at rest, ready to receive and carry out the next command.

In the silence, a voice is heard from above the expanse (verse 25). Once more the attitude of calm of the living beings is pointed out, by which the silence has come. This attitude of rest and silence and also reverence is important to be able to listen to the voice that is now going to speak.

### **Eze 1:26-28 | Above the Expanse**

*26 Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, [was] a figure with the appearance of a man. 27 Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and [there was] a radiance around Him. 28 As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so [was] the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such [was] the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw [it], I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.*

In these verses we are taken even higher. We are now “above the expanse” (verse 26). Before Ezekiel hears the voice speak, he sees something above the expanse that is above the heads of the living beings. He has already been vague in describing everything he has seen, but now he becomes even vaguer. Again and again the words “something resembling” or “in

appearance” or “the appearance of the likeness” recur. What and Who he sees is God on the throne of His glory. But how could a human being fully perceive and describe that?

The first thing Ezekiel should think of when he sees above the expanse is “something ..., like lapis lazuli in appearance”. Lapis lazuli or sapphire stone [Hebrew: eben-sappir] is a precious, transparent blue gemstone. It is one of the most precious gemstones. The color blue is so characteristic of this stone that in the past all blue stones were called ‘sapphire’. The sapphire is the second stone of the second row of precious stones on the high priest’s breastplate (Exo 28:18; 39:11). The blue sapphire is an allusion to heavenly things. This brilliant blue color radiates from “something resembling a throne”. On what resembles a throne, he perceives “a figure with the appearance of a man”. When God appears, it is in the form of a Man.

Here we see that the world is ruled by a Man in glory. From what Ezekiel saw only vaguely, we know the reality. We know that the Father gave the Lord Jesus, as Man, authority to execute judgment (Jn 5:27; Acts 17:31), and that He has been given “all authority ... in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18). He is the Son of Man to Whom all things are subject, although we do not see that at this time. But we see Him in heaven, crowned with honor and glory (Heb 2:8b-9a)!

His government is reminiscent of “glowing metal” (verse 27). All iniquity He will destroy with the fire of judgment that comes from Him. His whole stature, “of His loins and upward” and “of His loins and downward” looks “like fire; and [there was] a radiance around Him”. He is the Man Who is in connection with heaven (“His loins and upward”) and makes His way on earth (“His loins and downward”) in righteousness. The loins represent the strength needed to walk. In Ezekiel, He goes His way in judgment, just as He once went His way on earth in grace and humiliation.

The vision ends not with the appearance of Christ as Judge of the whole earth, but with “the appearance of the rainbow” (verse 28). This impressively points to God’s grace that is present even in the execution of His righteous judgments (Gen 9:12-17; Rev 4:3). He in wrath remembers mercy (Hab 3:2). This is a great comfort to us when, in God’s governing ways

with us, we go through great trials. God's government for His own is always mixed with mercy. Always Christ will fulfill His promise that He will be with us "always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

Then it dawns on Ezekiel that "the appearance of the likeness" is that "of the glory of the LORD". The sight of the glory of God in judgment and mercy makes him fall on his face. We see such a reaction with Daniel and John (Dan 8:17; 10:8-9; Rev 1:17). It is hoped that we too will know moments when, overwhelmed by the greatness and majesty of God, we fall on our faces and worship Him.

In that attitude of awe and worship, God can speak to Ezekiel – and to us as well. Until now he has only heard *sound*; now he hears *a voice* speaking words he can understand. God's speaking is evidence that He is interfering with us.

## Ezekiel 2

### **Eze 2:1-7 | The Calling of Ezekiel**

*1 Then He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!" 2 As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard [Him] speaking to me. 3 Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' 5 As for them, whether they listen or not—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them. 6 And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house. 7 But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.*

When God gives someone a vision of His glory, it is always for a purpose: He wants to make man acquainted with His will and purpose. With the vision, God also makes it clear what man is to do with the vision. When Ezekiel lies in worship before God, God tells him to get up again, because He wants to speak to him (verse 1).

This order is also important for us. When we are in worship in the sanctuary, the Lord can give us a mission to the outside world. We must first see the glory of the Lord Jesus in the sanctuary – which happens through the reading of Scripture – and then we can go out on His behalf and witness to Him there. These are the two forms of priestly service we have, which Peter writes about (1Pet 2:5,9). After worship in the sanctuary comes public service.

The LORD addresses Ezekiel as "son of man", or "son of Adam" (verse 3). This is the first word that the Person on the throne says to Ezekiel, a word that indicates a contrast to that glorious and mighty God. Compared to Him, Ezekiel is but a weak, mortal son of Adam.

---

The name “son of man” is typical of this book. It occurs more than 90 times and always refers to Ezekiel. The name is also never used for any other prophet. It means that he is simply human. At the same time, Ezekiel in his ministry is a type of Christ. The Lord Jesus, Who is also often called Son of Man, is Man, remembering that He is unique as a Man, for He is without sin through His conception by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35; Heb 4:15).

It is an impressive grace that God wants to send this son of man to His people, and not the awesome living beings of Ezekiel 1. The public presence of these living beings in the midst of the people would result in an instantaneous annihilation of the rebellious people. Therefore, God sends Ezekiel as the “son of man”, so that in him we see again a beautiful picture of Christ in His life on earth in the midst of the same rebellious people. He, Who in Himself is “too pure to approve evil” (Hab 1:13a), comes to a thoroughly sinful people to redeem them.

It seems as if Ezekiel himself has no power to rise. The Spirit Who controls the living beings in Ezekiel 1 (Eze 1:20) enters the prophet (verse 2). This is not to dwell in him permanently. Nor is he just now coming to faith. The Spirit only dwells in the believer after Pentecost. That happens once a person has believed the gospel of his salvation (Eph 1:13). In the Old Testament, He works in the believer. For this, He comes temporarily in or about him to enable him to do a certain service.

Ezekiel is commanded to go to the Israelites, whom the LORD calls “a rebellious people” because they “have rebelled against” Him. They are not just rebellious once either, but their entire life and history exhibit this behavior, “to this very day”, which is this day when the LORD speaks to Ezekiel here.

The word “peoples” – Hebrew *gojim* – is used by the Jews with contempt for the nations who do not serve the LORD and have no relationship with Him. The LORD now uses that name for His people who have departed from Him and have become like the nations. This makes Ezekiel’s service necessary and also difficult.

The Israelites have been called so many times to repent of their wicked ways, but they “are stubborn and obstinate children” (verse 4). They are

not an audience that is easily approached and open to a word from the LORD. The LORD does not present Ezekiel with a more beautiful picture than it is.

Ezekiel must go to this shameless and hard-learned people and say to them: "Thus says the Lord GOD." He comes not with a message of his own but with that of *Adonai Yahweh*. "Lord", *Adonai*, is the name of God as the sovereign Lord Who governs all things. "GOD", *Yahweh*, is the name of God that points to His covenant relationship with His people.

We encounter this double name often in this book. It is a reminder that the LORD still loves His chosen people and will finally bless them. For us, that name means that He is above all our difficulties and directs the course of our lives in every detail. He loves us and has thoughts of peace over us.

Ezekiel should not count on a warm welcome for his message, "for they are a rebellious house" (verse 5). The word "for" indicates that he knows this too. The primary issue, however, is not whether they are listening or not, but that they will have to acknowledge that a prophet has been in their midst (cf. Eze 33:33). They will be without excuse when God judges them for their sins. Then they will have to acknowledge that he has been a true prophet (Deu 18:21-22; Jer 28:9).

That Ezekiel, an ordinary human, will not meet willing listeners for his message is evident from the words of encouragement God speaks to him (verse 6). He is not to be afraid of them nor of what they say. This is said by God no less than four times in this verse. They will make life very difficult for him. God compares these people to "thistles and thorns" and "scorpions". Those are terrifying designations.

Thistles and thorns are the result of the fall into sin (Gen 3:18). Scorpions cause intense pain when they sting someone, which they do with the poison sting on their abdomen. Ezekiel is surrounded by people who exhibit these characteristics. Any contact with these people causes him pain. The Lord Jesus felt this in a perfect way (Psa 57:4). Ezekiel should not be intimidated by them, not by their mean words and not by their looks full of hatred.

Undaunted, he must speak the words of the LORD, “My words”, to them (verse 7). How they respond is not his business. The power of God’s words must sound to those who are “rebellious”. From this it is clear that he should not count on them to listen to him. In doing so, they reject not him, but the LORD, in Whose Name he comes and Whose words he speaks (cf. 1Sam 8:7).

We, too, live in a part of the world where the Word of God has often sounded, but where people are increasingly clearly rejecting this Word. This applies not only to the world without God, but also to the so-called Christian world. When we speak to people, there is mainly rejection. Yet we must preach in the Name of the Lord because we know “the fear of the Lord” (2Cor 5:11). “The love of Christ controls us” (2Cor 5:14) to do so.

### **Eze 2:8-10 | The Scroll**

*8 “Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.” 9 Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll [was] in it. 10 When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.*

Before Ezekiel carries out the command, God tells him to listen to what He speaks to him (verse 8). First listen and then speak. How will we know what to speak if we do not listen first? God warns Ezekiel not to have the same rebellious mind as the people. If he does, he will not be able to perform the service assigned to him. He must be careful not to react in the same way as the people. Therefore, in obedience, he must open his mouth and eat what God gives him.

Eating indicates identification with the message. God’s message to the people must first pass through Ezekiel’s inner being. He must undergo the Word himself, it must become a part of him before he can pass on the message. Those who pass on a message from the Word of God must first have fed on that Word. A servant is not a speaker who passes on words that do not touch him. The Word must first have an effect in the servant.

The servant must learn that he does not live by bread alone, "BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD" (Mt 4:4).

Then Ezekiel sees a hand extended to him containing a scroll (verse 9; cf. Rev 5:1). It is the hand of the LORD that gives him the scroll to eat. The LORD Himself spreads the scroll before Ezekiel (verse 10). He is preparing him for his service.

The scroll is written on both sides, on the front and back. It indicates the fullness of the Word and also its balance. What is written on it are "lamentations, mourning and woe". The balance is that the judgment is perfectly balanced with the unfaithfulness of God's people. Ezekiel sees here the sad and ominous content of his preaching. God shows him the most difficult part of his work here.

## Ezekiel 3

### **Eze 3:1-9 | Ezekiel Eats the Scroll**

*1 Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." 2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. 3 He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. 4 Then 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 being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, [but] to the house of Israel, 6 nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you; 7 yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate. 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 I have made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them, though they are a rebellious house."*

In the case of Jeremiah, it is enough that the LORD touches his mouth to give him His words (Jer 1:9). With Ezekiel, He acts differently. The LORD instructs him to eat the scroll He offers him (verse 1). This means that he is to speak what the LORD inspires in him and nothing else (cf. Jer 1:9; 15:16). It also makes it clear that the message he passes on is part of himself. He must make the content and scope of the word of God entrusted to him his own (cf. Jn 6:52-53). Thus he must speak to the house of Israel. His whole person is involved in the prophecies he will utter.

Ezekiel opens his mouth to receive the word (verse 2). In doing so, he shows his willingness to eat. He does not express objections, which others have done when called (Exo 3:11,13; 4:1,10,13; Jer 1:6; Jona 1:3). Then the LORD gives him the scroll to eat it. He adds that Ezekiel, who is a son of man and totally dependent on Him, must feed his stomach (verse 3). The

scroll comes from Him; they are God's words. Thus we are to keep His Word in our hearts (Psa 119:11).

The word must come in his stomach, that is, in his inner being. He must fill his inner being, his deepest feelings, with the scroll, that is, with the words of God. He must be completely full of the message he has to deliver, so that there is no room for anything else. Thus the Lord Jesus is always fully in the things of His Father (Lk 2:49). There is no room for anything else. In the same way, we must look only to the Lord Jesus and renounce everything else (Heb 12:2).

When Ezekiel eats the scroll, it becomes sweet as honey in his mouth (cf. Jer 15:16a; Psa 119:103; Rev 10:8-9). It gives him the foretaste that doing the will of God will be a pleasurable activity, no matter how much opposition he may encounter on the part of men.

God tells this son of man to go to the house of Israel (verse 4). To them he must then speak with God's words, not with his own words. We cannot figure out the message for ourselves or what words we use to pass on God's message. Only the words of God can have any effect.

They are words that the people to whom he is sent can understand (verse 5). No interpreter is needed and no explainer is needed. The language in which Israel hears God's words is intelligible and comprehensible. God always allows His Word to be preached in an intelligible way. It is also important for our preaching that we speak intelligibly and understandably when we pass on a word from the Lord to others.

Ezekiel is not sent to many peoples who speak a very different language and with whom he cannot communicate (verse 6). If the people of those nations said something to him, he would not be able to understand them. Then God says something remarkable. He says that those foreign nations would listen despite the language barrier if He had sent Ezekiel to them (cf. Mt 11:21-23). This shows that rebellious bias is a greater obstacle to accepting God's Word than a language barrier.

Of the house of Israel, the LORD must say to Ezekiel that they will not listen to him (verse 7). The cause of this is that they are *not willing* to listen

to God. There is no thought of Him with them, they do not think of Him. This is represented by their being “stubborn and obstinate [literally: of a hard forehead and a stiff heart]”. Their attitude comes from a great inner resistance. Their hardness says something about the mind of their hearts. They are not willing to listen (cf. Acts 7:51).

Ezekiel should not be impressed by this. The LORD will equip him so that he can deliver his message fearlessly (verse 8). He will deliver his message as stubborn as they are stubborn in accepting it. The LORD will make his forehead like emery (verse 9). He will have a hard forehead, but not a stiff heart, which the people have. Because of his hard forehead, he will be preserved from their intimidation and from their attacks to silence him. He need not be afraid of them, whatever their mocking and threatening remarks and attitudes. Nor should their looks full of hatred and rejection frighten him. It is part of their rebellion against the LORD.

### **Eze 3:10-15 | Ezekiel Comes to the Exiles**

*10 Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you and listen closely. 11 Go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’” 12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me, “Blessed be the glory of the LORD in His place.” 13 And I [heard] the sound of the wings of the living beings touching one another and the sound of the wheels beside them, even a great rumbling sound. 14 So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away; and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit, and the hand of the LORD was strong on me. 15 Then I came to the exiles who lived beside the river Chebar at Tel-abib, and I sat there seven days where they were living, causing consternation among them.*

All the words that God will speak to him, a son of man, he must first take into his heart and then he must listen to them closely (verse 10). To begin with, God emphasizes that Ezekiel must take “all” His words into his heart. Ezekiel is not allowed to leave out words that he does not understand or whose content he does not like. He had to eat the *whole* scroll (verses 1-3). For us, it is equally true that we are to take all the words of God into our hearts (cf. Col 3:16a).

Furthermore, we can only hear God's Word, that is, listen to it and understand it, if we have a heart, a mind, a desire, to do what God says. Our mind determines whether we are open to listen with our ears. It is the same with the believers in Berea of whom we first read that they received the Word with great eagerness. That shows their mind. Immediately afterwards we read that they examined the Scriptures daily to see whether the things proclaimed by Paul were in agreement with them (Acts 17:11).

Then Ezekiel is given a further description of those to whom he is to address his message (verse 11; cf. verse 4). They are the exiles in the midst of whom he finds himself. He is not to feel above them, for they are the sons of his people, people of the same nation to which he belongs. Whether they are listening or not does not matter, as long as Ezekiel speaks to them as the mouth of "the Lord GOD" (*Adonai Yahweh*). He must clearly say that the words he speaks are *His* words. We can only bring God's Word if we have had an impression of the glory of Christ, if we have seen something of it through the reading of God's Word.

When God has thus spoken to Ezekiel, the Spirit lifts him up (verse 12). He receives a vision. As this happens, he hears behind him the sound of a great thumping and praise to the LORD. Further, he hears a great rumbling sound of the wings of the living beings. They are coming into motion (verse 13). He also hears the sound of the wheels and a great rumbling sound. That is the sound of the throne chariot of the LORD moving, but Ezekiel does not see the throne chariot.

Then the Spirit lifts him up further and takes him away (verse 14). He is aware of what is happening to him. He leaves, being bitterly grieved and intensely upset. What has happened to him and what he has been told has affected him deeply. The message he has eaten and now has to deliver makes a great impression on him. He feels the hand of the LORD pressing strongly on him. The message he has to bring is difficult.

In this state of heart, he joins the exiles of Tel-abib who live by the river Chebar (verse 15). When the LORD appears to Ezekiel in a vision, Ezekiel finds himself in the midst of those taken into exile (Eze 1:1,3). After receiving his calling, the Spirit lifts him up and brings him back to the river Che-

bar. The prophet has received his calling for his service in the place where the glory of the LORD dwells (verse 12).

In the midst of the exiles, Ezekiel takes his place again as one of them. He shares in their exile. The exiles are in Tel-abib. 'Abib' is the name of the first month, of the formation of the ears, of the greening of what is on the land. 'Tel' means hill or hope. The name Tel-abib speaks of restoration and revival. He shows something of the work of the Lord Jesus by which that alone is possible. He is the grain of wheat that has fallen into the earth and died, thereby bringing forth rich fruit (Jn 12:24).

Ezekiel does not immediately begin to carry out his mission. For seven days he is astonished because of what he has seen and heard (cf. Job 2:13). These seven days of mute astonishment has caused consternation among the exiles around him (cf. Lk 1:21-22). To his fellow exiles it will be an indication that something special has happened to him, so that they will not be too surprised when he starts to perform as a prophet in their midst.

### **Eze 3:16-21 | Watchman to the House of Israel**

*16 At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 17 "Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. 18 When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. 20 Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. 21 However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself."*

After seven days of having caused consternation among the exiles, the word of the LORD comes to him (verse 16). He is told what his prophetic

task will be. There is no mention of a vision this time. The LORD – *Yahweh*, the Lord Jesus – Himself comes to him as the Word. This goes beyond Ezekiel only hearing words. What he hears and the Person Who speaks are the Same. It indicates the identification of the Word and the Person of Christ (Jn 1:1).

The LORD addresses him as “son of man” (verse 17). This expression, as noted earlier, reads *ben adam* in Hebrew, which is “son of Adam”, and indicates that it refers to one who belongs to the human race. This clearly draws the contrast between the exaltedness of the heavenly Speaker, the Son of God, the eternal Word, and a mortal, earthly son of man.

The LORD says to him that He has appointed him a watchman to the house of Israel. A watchman is one who warns when danger threatens (Isa 21:6; Jer 6:17). The word for “watchman” comes from the Hebrew word for bending over, which someone does on a tower to see even more sharply. Ezekiel, hearing a word from the mouth of God, is to warn the people on His behalf. For if the people persist in their sin they will perish.

Ezekiel must also warn *for* or *in view of* the LORD and not only *on* His behalf. The threat of judgment emanates namely from the LORD. He appoints Ezekiel as a watchman between Himself and the people, that He may not have to let judgment come.

This command places a great responsibility on Ezekiel. In his service, he is not to be afraid of the people, but of the LORD in case he refuses to speak the word the LORD gives him to speak (cf. Amos 3:8). Later this command is repeated, at the beginning of the fourth part of the book (Eze 33:1-9). God determines the service of His own. To this the servant has to obey. In the case of unfaithfulness, the servant does not go free (Pro 24:11-12). Paul was also well aware of this (1Cor 9:16).

Then Ezekiel is presented with four cases that he will encounter in his ministry and of which God presents the responsibility to him. Twice it involves the wicked (verses 18-19) and twice it involves the righteous (verses 20-21). Both the preacher and the one to whom the preaching is done have their own responsibilities. Ezekiel must preach because God says so. The

result is a matter for God. It is also noteworthy that Ezekiel is to address his fellow exiles not so much as a group, but individually, head by head.

First comes the word about the wicked. If God says to the wicked that he will die and Ezekiel does not warn him, then Ezekiel is guilty of his blood (verse 18). If he does warn the wicked, then Ezekiel has delivered himself (verse 19). Judgment comes on the wicked for his own willful transgression and his persistence in evil.

Then there is a word regarding warning a righteous person who commits iniquity (verse 20). A righteous person is one who walks in the way of God (cf. Lk 1:6). This is only about the practice, the outward appearance, and not about the inward, about whether someone has life from God. If there is a change for the worse in the life of such a person, then the prophet must warn him. If he fails to do so, he brings upon himself the same guilt as in the case where he failed to warn the wicked (verse 18).

It is about a righteous person who turns away from his righteousness and commits injustice. The word “turn” in verse 19 and “turn away” in verse 20 are the same word in Hebrew. Thus, a righteous person who turns away turns of his righteousness. Such a righteous person willfully turns away from the things that are good in the sight of the LORD. It is not about an initially unconscious sin or a one-time sin. It is about a purposeful choice to go in a different direction. Such a person has the Word of God at his disposal, but chooses not to listen.

Before such a person the LORD will “place an obstacle” and as a result “he will die”. The obstacle the LORD places before the righteous is not a temptation to sin, for “He Himself does not tempt anyone” (Jam 1:13). It is a test of what a person confesses. We can think of circumstances the LORD allows that put a righteous person in a crisis. What does he do then? If he goes down the wrong road, he should be warned. If this is not done, he, who should have done so is guilty of the downfall of the righteous. All the righteous man’s righteous deeds no longer help him. Their value expires if he continues in his sinful way.

Ezekiel is not only to warn the wicked and the strayed righteous, he is also to warn the righteous who has not yet strayed (verse 21). This is a preven-

tive warning, lest the righteous person come to sin. Ezekiel must not only seek the lost, but also watch over those who are going the right way to keep them there. This is watching over souls (Heb 13:17).

The responsibility is great, even for us, to warn people. We know that we sometimes fail in this. Then we can confess that. Forgiveness is also possible for blood guilt that rests on us in those cases (1Jn 1:9).

### **Eze 3:22-27 | The LORD Appears Again**

*22 The hand of the LORD was on me there, and He said to me, "Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you." 23 So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the LORD was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face. 24 The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself up in your house. 25 As for you, son of man, they will put ropes on you and bind you with them so that you cannot go out among them. 26 Moreover, I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be mute and cannot be a man who rebukes them, for they are a rebellious house. 27 But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.*

The hand of God is on Ezekiel when he is in Tel-abib (verse 22). That God's hand is on him means that God is seizing him and working with him. It also means that He protects and guides him. Then He instructs him to go out to the plain or the valley, where He will speak to him. A plain or valley is a low place. It suggests that we must be in a place of humility to hear the words of the Lord. In that place, before he begins his ministry, Ezekiel sees the glory of the LORD one more time (verse 23; Eze 1:28). It does not *appear* to him as in Ezekiel 1, but is already *standing* there. Again he falls on his face.

Again, the Spirit makes him stand on his feet (verse 24; Eze 2:2). The Spirit gives the strength to see the glory of God and continue in the service. Ezekiel is to shut himself up in his house. That seems a strange command for someone who is to warn the people. But God determines for each of His

servants individually how to deliver His message. Each prophet brings His message in a way that speaks to the people in a special way and suits their condition in a special way. People who want to hear God's Word should come to Ezekiel.

The ropes spoken of here will be put on him, so that he cannot go out among the people (verse 25). The LORD Himself will bind him and thus isolate him even further (Eze 4:8). His entire separation is compounded by the muteness that the LORD imposes on him (verse 26; cf. Job 29:10; Psa 22:15; 137:6). Such a performance underscores the seriousness of Ezekiel's message to a rebellious house.

His muteness will not be permanent (verse 27). Also, his muteness will be interrupted by periods when he can speak (Eze 8:1; 11:25). Ezekiel cannot leave his house during this speaking. After the destruction of Jerusalem, this changes at God's command and he speaks again (Eze 24:25-27; 33:21-22). In the same way, our service can change. It is important to let the Spirit lead us. When Ezekiel is to speak again, he is to say again: "Thus says the Lord GOD." His listeners he addresses personally: "He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse", while the people as a whole "are a rebellious house".

## Ezekiel 4

### **Introduction**

Ezekiel 4 is a continuation of a section that begins in Ezekiel 3:22. Ezekiel must remain in his house and his tongue will stick to the roof of his mouth. Thus, he cannot go around freely among the exiles and warn people. In his house he must perform various symbolic acts to present his message. In them he shows what will happen to Jerusalem. The LORD has several purposes in doing this:

1. He wants to cause the exiles to think through this, that they may come to repentance.
2. He wants to make it clear to the exiles through this that they will not be returning to Jerusalem anytime soon. The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, will take Jerusalem.
3. The prophet is thereby identified with the people and feels what they feel when God's discipline comes upon them. A servant of God who is suffering himself is much better able to understand and warn those who are undergoing the same suffering.

### **Eze 4:1-3 | The Siege of Jerusalem Played Out**

*1 "Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem. 2 Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps and place battering rams against it all around. 3 Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it. This is a sign to the house of Israel.*

Ezekiel, again called "son of man", must take a brick and inscribe Jerusalem on it (verse 1). He is not allowed to speak, but he can communicate with his hands. The brick he must use is a clay tablet, the ordinary writing

---

material of the Babylonians. In order to inscribe on it properly, Ezekiel must place it before him, for he must concentrate well while inscribing.

Then he must indicate on the brick how Jerusalem will be besieged (verse 2). He is to lay siege against the city, that is, to besiege the city. The LORD gives him precise instructions on how to do this. He is to build “a siege wall”, that is, an assault tower, against it, raise up “a ramp”, pitch “camps”, and place “battering rams” against it all around the city. The people will have gathered around him and understood what he was portraying.

When Ezekiel is finished with the inscribing, he is to take “an iron plate”, which is a plate on which one bakes bread (verse 3; Lev 2:5). The plate is an ordinary utensil usually made of pottery. An iron plate is a unique object at that time. That iron plate he must set up between himself and the city he has just inscribed. The plate symbolizes “an iron wall” and represents the separation between God and His people that the people caused by their sins (Isa 59:2).

Then the LORD instructs Ezekiel to set his face toward the city. The face is a face full of threat. As Ezekiel looks at what he has inscribed, so the LORD looks at the city. All the prayers from the city do not penetrate to heaven. They are held back by the iron plate. The connection with God is cut off, He delivers Jerusalem to the enemy.

As Ezekiel inscribes, it is as if he himself is laying siege to the city. This is true in a sense. The enemy will do this to the city, but in reality it is God Himself Who, in and through the enemy, is laying siege to the city and thus bringing His anger upon it. By commissioning Ezekiel to inscribe this, He lets him experience what He will do to the city (cf. Lk 19:43). At the same time, his inscribing is “a sign to the house of Israel”.

A sign is needed when words are no longer heard. False prophets in Jerusalem proclaim that the exiles will return to Jerusalem in the near future (Jer 28:1-4,10-11). There are also prophets who prophesy that Jerusalem will not see a sword nor will be hungry (Jer 14:13-16; 23:16-17). God has spoken otherwise. The exiles, if they are open to this sign, can see what will happen to Jerusalem.

### Eze 4:4-8 | The Years of Iniquity

4 *“As for you, lie down on your left side and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; you shall bear their iniquity for the number of days that you lie on it. 5 For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their iniquity, three hundred and ninety days; thus you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. 6 When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, [but] on your right side and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah; I have assigned it to you for forty days, a day for each year. 7 Then you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared and prophesy against it. 8 Now behold, I will put ropes on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your siege.*

In the symbolic act of verses 1-3, Ezekiel has represented God in His dealings with Jerusalem. In the symbolic act he must now perform, he represents the people. In this, his personal involvement is great. He must feel firsthand what the people will experience. These are the two aspects of the service that every servant must know and experience. He must share in God’s feelings about evil and he must share in the sorrow of those over whom this evil comes, in the awareness of being part of this people and being no better than they are.

God tells Ezekiel what to do. Ezekiel is to lie down on his “left side” and “lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it” (verse 4). Of course, this is not a substitutionary bearing of the iniquity. Only the Lord Jesus can do that (Isa 53:6,12). It is about suffering and experiencing the *consequences* of iniquity. The iniquity of the people is doing what is evil in the eyes of God and harming their neighbors, their fellow citizens, in all areas of life.

Ezekiel is to lay the iniquity on his left side, the side on which he lies. This implies at the same time that he is lying on the iniquity. Thereby Ezekiel is portraying that he is identifying with God’s people in their iniquity. It will be a touching sermon for the people.

The time he must lie like this is set by God at “three hundred and ninety days”, with Ezekiel having to suffer one day for each year (verse 5). To which time period in the history of Israel (the twelve tribes) the three hundred and ninety years refers is not clear. Several commentators assume

that this period begins with the tearing of Israel into two and ten tribes and specifically Jeroboam's introduction of idolatry into Israel by making the two golden calves (1Kgs 12:25-30). In any case, it is about the iniquity, the sins, of all twelve tribes, that is, Israel as a whole. They constitute God's people, no matter how much they have lived separately from one another.

When those days are completed, the prophet is to lie down on his "right side" (verse 6). On that side he is to lie "forty days" to bear "the iniquity of the house of Judah". Again, a day represents a year. The period of forty days connects to that of three hundred and ninety days. God tells Ezekiel to lie on his right side for a number of days and to do so when he has "completed" the days on his left side.

That an additional number of days of bearing iniquity is added for Judah is because Judah sinned even more severely than Israel (Eze 23:11-35). This is underscored by the following verses. In them it is about the siege of Jerusalem, where the Judeans are at that time.

God speaks to Ezekiel about the siege of Jerusalem. These total of four hundred and thirty days that Ezekiel lies on his side, he is to "set" his "face toward the siege of Jerusalem" (verse 7; verse 3), which comes down to looking at what he has inscribed on the brick. He must do so with "bare arm". Ezekiel's bare arm symbolizes that God is ready to act in judgment (cf. Isa 52:10a). Ezekiel's prophecy consists not of words, but of his attitude. Everything he portrays speaks to the conscience with great force.

God will restrain him in such a way – the ropes that He puts on Ezekiel speak of this – that he will be able to accomplish this difficult task until the end (verse 8). This also has a symbolic meaning. God says to him that he will be bound until he has completed the days of his siege. This means that bearing the iniquity is directly connected to the siege of Jerusalem by the armies of the king of Babylon.

By speaking of "your siege", the siege of Jerusalem is presented as an act of Ezekiel, remembering immediately that here we symbolically see the action of God Himself with Jerusalem. The ropes also make it clear that the people cannot possibly evade this judgment of God. God is executing

His judgment. He will give the city into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and have the inhabitants taken away into exile.

### **Eze 4:9-17 | Eating and Drinking of Ezekiel**

9 *“But as for you, take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in one vessel and make them into bread for yourself; you shall eat it according to the number of the days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days. 10 Your food which you eat [shall be] twenty shekels a day by weight; you shall eat it from time to time. 11 The water you drink shall be the sixth part of a hin by measure; you shall drink it from time to time. 12 You shall eat it as a barley cake, having baked [it] in their sight over human dung.” 13 Then the LORD said, “Thus will the sons of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will banish them.” 14 But I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I have never been defiled; for from my youth until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has any unclean meat ever entered my mouth.” 15 Then He said to me, “See, I will give you cow’s dung in place of human dung over which you will prepare your bread.” 16 Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, behold, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they will eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and drink water by measure and in horror, 17 because bread and water will be scarce; and they will be appalled with one another and waste away in their iniquity.*

The next act Ezekiel is to perform is also related to the siege of Jerusalem inscribed above as a result of their iniquity (verses 4-8). He is to portray food scarcity (verse 9). This indicates that famine will strike the city as a result of the siege. He is to take various cereals and legumes to make bread from them.

“Wheat” is used to make the best bread. However, if wheat is scarce, it should be mixed with other grains of lesser quality, such as “barley ... millet and spelt”. “Beans” and “lentils” are not grains, but they are common foods (cf. 2Sam 17:27-29). However, when they must be taken together to make bread, it does indicate the scarcity of these foods. Then it is a kind of “war bread”, which is eaten in times of food scarcity. Ezekiel is to put all the ingredients “in one vessel” and mix them together and make bread.

---

That bread he must eat during the days that he lies on his side, for three hundred and ninety days.

The ration is “twenty shekels a day by weight”, which is two hundred to three hundred grams (verse 10). This ration he must eat at set times, that is, he must divide it among several meals and not eat it all at once. Water is also rationed (verse 11). He gets “the sixth part of a hin” per day, which is about a liter. For a hot country, that is very little. He also has to divide the water throughout the day.

He is also commanded to eat “a barley cake”, which he is to bake in the sight of the exiles “over human dung” (verse 12). This is indicative of the state of emergency in which Jerusalem will find itself. He points to that emergency by doing this “in their sight”. The LORD explains the act He is prescribing to Ezekiel (verse 13). It is symbolic of the time when the Jews will be scattered, both in Babylon and in the time after the year 70. They will be among the nations and often forced to eat food that is unclean according to the law (Hos 9:3-4).

As a faithful Jew, Ezekiel shrinks from preparing and eating his bread in this way and makes his objection to the LORD about it (verse 14; cf. Acts 10:14). The use of human dung as fuel for cooking is nowhere expressly forbidden. Yet the disgust shown by Ezekiel is understandable when we know what God said about how to deal with excrement (Deu 23:13-15). We must also remember that God Himself has just attached to this symbolic act the statement that the Israelites “eat their bread unclean” among the nations.

Ezekiel points out to God how he has always kept the law, ever since he was a child. Never did he eat anything that was forbidden to eat (Lev 11:39; Exo 22:31). He never ate unclean meat. As befits a priest, he has always strictly observed the food laws. It is his fervent desire to continue to do so even in the land of exile (cf. Dan 1:8).

God takes into account the conscience of His servant. He allows him to use “cow’s dung” instead of human dung to prepare his bread over it (verse 15). He does not override His command, but makes it easier for Ezekiel to obey Him.

God knows that we need time to adjust our view to His view. This Divine sensitivity is an example for us in our dealings with fellow believers who sometimes have difficulty with things in which we are free before the Lord (Rom 14:1-4; 15:1-4).

God explains the actions Ezekiel must perform (verses 16-17). He addresses him again as “son of man”. What Ezekiel is to portray is the lack of sufficient bread in Jerusalem during the siege. Water will also be scarce. Meals that are otherwise joyous affairs will become sad and grievous. Dismay will reign because the meals will be dominated by hardship and lack. They will “waste away in their iniquity”, meaning that they have brought their hardship and lack and dismay upon themselves by their own behavior and finally they will die of hunger.

## Ezekiel 5

### **Eze 5:1-4 | Shaving and Dividing Hair**

*1 “As for you, son of man, take a sharp sword; take and use it [as] a barber’s razor on your head and beard. Then take scales for weighing and divide the hair. 2 One third you shall burn in the fire at the center of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. Then you shall take one third and strike [it] with the sword all around the city, and one third you shall scatter to the wind; and I will unsheathe a sword behind them. 3 Take also a few in number from them and bind them in the edges of your [robes]. 4 Take again some of them and throw them into the fire and burn them in the fire; from it a fire will spread to all the house of Israel.*

Ezekiel is even more personally involved in the judgments he is to announce. He must shave off his head hair and beard with a sharp sword (verse 1). This is a great reproach to him (cf. 2Sam 10:4; 1Chr 19:4; Neh 13:25) and is even forbidden to a priest (Lev 21:5; Eze 44:20). That he must use a sharp sword as a razor shows that this is an act that symbolically represents the judgment of God (Deu 32:41; Isa 7:20).

Then he must take a scale and divide the hair. This indicates a very precise weighing, for hair is so light that it can hardly be weighed. That precise weighing means that each one gets the punishment he deserves, no more and no less. God punishes perfectly justly (Rev 20:12-13).

He is to divide the hair into three heaps (verse 2). With each of those heaps he is to do something:

1. One-third of the hair he is to lay “at the center of the city” – that is in the center of the inscribing he made on the brick (Eze 4:1) – and burn it with fire. The LORD adds that he is to do this “when the days of the siege are completed”.
2. The next third of hair he is to take and “strike [it] with the sword all around the city”.

3. The last third he must “scatter to the wind”. Those hairs are carried everywhere.

Judgment does not come on all the hair (verse 3). Ezekiel is to take a few hairs, “a few in number”, and bind them in the edges of his robes. There are also hairs that Ezekiel is to throw directly into the fire to burn them in the fire (verse 4). These are not burned only after the days of the siege. From this part “a fire will spread to all the house of Israel”, that is, it will burn all that is left.

### **Eze 5:5-10 | The Sins of Jerusalem**

*5 “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her. 6 But she has rebelled against My ordinances more wickedly than the nations and against My statutes more than the lands which surround her; for they have rejected My ordinances and have not walked in My statutes.’ 7 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because you have more turmoil than the nations which surround you [and] have not walked in My statutes, nor observed My ordinances, nor observed the ordinances of the nations which surround you,’ 8 therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations. 9 And because of all your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again. 10 Therefore, fathers will eat [their] sons among you, and sons will eat their fathers; for I will execute judgments on you and scatter all your remnant to every wind.*

The Lord GOD (*Adonai Yahweh*) explains to Ezekiel the meaning of the symbolic acts, which he in turn is to communicate to God’s people. The acts concern Jerusalem which the LORD has set as the center of all nations, as the center [literally: navel] of the earth (verse 5; Eze 38:12; cf. Deu 32:8). Globally, we can say that Israel is the geographical center of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. Also, Jerusalem is the spiritual center of the world, where the throne of the LORD will stand and from where He will send forth His Word for instruction to all nations (Isa 2:2-4; Mic 4:1-3).

Then follows God’s “but” regarding the city (verse 6). Jerusalem has sinned against Him in a horrible way. She has been disobedient to His stat-

utes. Jerusalem's sin is even greater than that of all the nations around her. While the inhabitants of Jerusalem have received the knowledge of God, they have rejected His statutes and not observed His ordinances. What a great insult this is to Him Who has so provided them with good statutes and ordinances.

Even by heathen standards, the inhabitants of Jerusalem have acted horribly (verse 7). The nations remain faithful to their idols, even though they are not gods, but the inhabitants of Jerusalem have denied the true God and have begun to serve idols. This is a dramatic development. As a result, their turmoil is more than that of the idolatrous nations.

Therefore the LORD is against Jerusalem (verse 8), that is, He will punish Jerusalem (cf. Nah 2:13; 3:5; Jer 23:31). He says it with great emphasis: "I, even I" He will judge Jerusalem in the sight of the nations, in accordance with the unfaithfulness toward Him that Jerusalem also committed in the sight of the nations.

The judgment He will bring on Jerusalem will be without parallel (verse 9). This is because of all her abominations. Jerusalem brought this on herself. The judgments will cause a terrible famine, so great that some will fall to cannibalism during the siege of Jerusalem, with even fathers eating their own children and children eating their own fathers (verse 10). A deeper fall of man's moral awareness is not possible. So severe God's judgments on Jerusalem will be (Lev 26:29; Deu 28:53; 2Kgs 6:28-29; Jer 19:9; Lam 2:20; 4:10).

### **Eze 5:11-17 | Meaning of Dividing the Hair**

*11 So as I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye will have no pity and I will not spare. 12 One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them. 13 'Thus My anger will be spent and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I will be appeased; then they will know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My zeal when I have spent My*

*wrath upon them. 14 Moreover, I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations which surround you, in the sight of all who pass by. 15 So it will be a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror to the nations who surround you when I execute judgments against you in anger, wrath and raging rebukes. I, the LORD, have spoken. 16 When I send against them the deadly arrows of famine which were for the destruction of those whom I will send to destroy you, then I will also intensify the famine upon you and break the staff of bread. 17 Moreover, I will send on you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you of children; plague and bloodshed also will pass through you, and I will bring the sword on you. I, the LORD, have spoken.”*

The words “‘so as I live,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘surely’”, are an oath swearing from the LORD (verse 11). He expresses Himself in this way several times in this book (Eze 5:11; 14:16,18,20; 16:48; 17:16; 18:3; 20:31,33; 33:11; 34:8; 35:6,11). He swears by His own life. That means His decision is absolute. That applies always to everything He says, but He wants to impress Jerusalem with the gravity of His decision. He is also extremely wroth at her sins. These, indeed, are no small matter. Jerusalem has defiled His sanctuary with her detestable idols, and with her abominations, which are her idolatries, the things that the inhabitants of Jerusalem do for their idols.

Therefore, the LORD will “withdraw”, which means He will take from Jerusalem all honor and ornament. He will not spare her and He will do it without pity. He will no longer show mercy, as He has so often, time and again, in the past. That He has no compassion for Jerusalem does not show an unmerciful God, but a stubborn city that will not break with its iniquities. Therefore, He must judge Jerusalem and there is no escape for the city (cf. Psa 130:3).

Because of the siege of the city, one-third will perish because of plague and famine (verse 12). Plague and famine belong together. Plague is a consequence of famine. Those who think they can escape God’s discipline by fleeing will be killed by the sword of the enemy. Those who are taken captive and scattered everywhere will equally fall by the sword.

When God brings this severe judgment upon Jerusalem and His anger rests upon her inhabitants, He will be appeased (verse 13). After all that He has had to endure on the part of Jerusalem, all that she has done to Him to offend Him, He will feel free of her when He has made Himself known to her in this way. He will not allow Himself to be mocked endlessly. He is a zealous God and will execute His wrath against the city because Jerusalem has forced Him to do so. He makes a desolation of Jerusalem (verse 14). The nations around the city will hear of the reproach inflicted on Jerusalem. The city's ignominious demise will be seen by every person who passes by it.

The judgments that God in His wrath executes on the city express His anger and wrath (verse 15). They are punishments of anger and wrath. God makes His deep indignation heard through these words. What He has done to Jerusalem in His judgments provides the nations around them with material for reproach and scorn. But not only that. It also supplies education and cause for dismay.

There is also a warning message to the nations. Jerusalem and the nations must realize that He, the LORD, has spoken. They are not words without meaning, they are not threats from impotent wrath that lacks the power to assert itself. What God says, He does.

He has announced famine that will come into the city (verse 16). This is no idle threat, but He will cause famine to come into the city as "deadly arrows" that He Himself shoots. Those arrows will lead to destruction and bring them to ruin. The hunger will truly increase and the bread to satisfy the hunger will be lacking. No matter how desperately they will search, it will not be there.

The famine will be sent by the LORD, and in its immediate aftermath, the wild animals will also come (verse 17). Both plagues will rob them of their children. In addition to these two plagues, there are also plague and bloodshed. These will roam among them and make their victims. The combination of these four judgments will result in complete destruction and extermination. There is no doubt that this is how it will go, for "I [emphatically], the LORD, have spoken".

## Ezekiel 6

### **Eze 6:1-7 | Judgment on the Mountains of Israel**

*1 And the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 “Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them 3 and say, ‘Mountains of Israel, listen to the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains, the hills, the ravines and the valleys: “Behold, I Myself am going to bring a sword on you, and I will destroy your high places. 4 So your altars will become desolate and your incense altars will be smashed; and I will make your slain fall in front of your idols. 5 I will also lay the dead bodies of the sons of Israel in front of their idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars. 6 In all your dwellings, cities will become waste and the high places will be desolate, that your altars may become waste and desolate, your idols may be broken and brought to an end, your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be blotted out. 7 The slain will fall among you, and you will know that I am the LORD.*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He, “son of man”, is to “set” his “face toward the mountains of Israel” (cf. Eze 4:3) and prophesy against them (verse 2). The phrase “mountains of Israel” occurs only in Ezekiel (Eze 6:2,3; 19:9; 33:28; 34:13,14; 35:12; 36:1,4,8; 37:22; 38:8; 39:2,4,17). The mountains of Israel is a mountain range that lies in the heart of Israel and extends for about 250 km from the plain of Jezreel, just north of Nablus or Shechem, to the southern end of the Dead Sea. Those mountains include Jerusalem, Bethel, Ai, Shechem, Bethany and Hebron. There Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, Jacob, Joshua, Joseph and David were buried. They made up most of what is now called the West Bank.

It is toward that area that Ezekiel must set his face because the Israelites erected their idolatrous altars there to serve their idols. In addressing the mountains, everything and everyone involved in this idolatry is addressed. This idolatry is often accompanied by sacred prostitution and all kinds of other debauchery.

Ezekiel is to preach against these mountains, and also the lower “hills”, the word of the Lord GOD in judgment (verse 3). The LORD will bring the sword on them, on the idolaters and the idolatrous heights and all that is in the immediate vicinity of them, such as the ravines or water streams and the valleys. Ravines or water streams and valleys may refer to the refreshments and fertile ground they attribute as a blessing to their idols.

We can learn much from Ezekiel’s obedience. God not only gives him the words to speak, but also determines to whom they are to be spoken. And Ezekiel obeys. He does not ask if it makes sense to prophesy against Jerusalem which is hundreds of miles away (Eze 4:3,7). Nor does he ask if the mountains and hills of Israel will hear the sound of his voice. He simply does what is asked of him.

The places of worship of the idols will be broken smashed (verse 4). The idolaters will lie down before their idols mortally wounded (cf. Lev 26:30). It is the epitome of the madness of their idolatry. With the utmost contempt, God calls their idols “stink gods” [the word for idols here is a word of utmost contempt, which is best rendered with ‘stink gods’, and is used 38 times in Ezekiel]. Under the ‘watchful’ eye of these stink gods, He will make their slain fall. Then it will be clear that these stink gods will not lift a finger to ward off the calamity. The dead bodies lie there, in front of the stink gods (verse 5). Someone who worships such gods has truly lost his mind. What folly it is to worship dead matter and expect salvation from it!

These gods do not spread a pleasant odor, but stench, the stench of the slain who lie in front of them. God carries the defamation to a climax by scattering the bones of the dead around their altars. This punishment has a double effect. The offenders are denied the honor of a burial – a burial is highly valued – and at the same time the places they consider holy are defiled.

The judgment of God will destroy everything that has come under the influence of the stink gods (verse 6). In all habitations He will destroy the cities through the enemy. The heights on which they have committed their idolatry will become a wilderness. The judgment will be thorough and will leave nothing of the altars, the stink gods, the incense altars and the works

of the idolaters. The Holy Spirit uses a multitude of words to describe the devastation in the most impressive way possible: “waste”, “desolate”, “waste and desolate”, “broken and brought to an end”, “cut down”, “blotted out”.

In the midst of all this rubble lie the slain (verse 7). The whole area is an open mass grave full of corpses and destroyed habitations. Then they will finally know that He is the LORD. The acknowledgment of this will not mean life for them. They have passed up the opportunity every time the LORD has called them to repentance.

The phrase “and you will know that I am the LORD” or an almost identical expression, occurs frequently in this book. However, this expression is remarkably absent in Ezekiel 40-48. At the same time, this is understandable because that part of the book is about the realm of peace and there they will all know the LORD and know that He is the LORD (Jer 31:34).

### **Eze 6:8-10 | A Remnant**

*8 “However, I will leave a remnant, for you will have those who escaped the sword among the nations when you are scattered among the countries. 9 Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations to which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from Me, and by their eyes which played the harlot after their idols; and they will loathe themselves in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations. 10 Then they will know that I am the LORD; I have not said in vain that I would inflict this disaster on them.”*

Although the judgment is so severe, God promises that there will be “remnant” (verse 8). Here, in the midst of all the unfaithfulness and warnings, is a first reference to a remnant and thus to restoration. This remnant will be scattered, but among the nations where they will then be, they will come to repentance and remember the LORD (verse 9; cf. Jer 51:50; Zec 10:9).

He has had to scatter them because they have hurt His heart by the aberrations of their *hearts*, and by their eyes which played the harlot after their stink gods. The idolatry of Israel is represented as harlotry, as unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant between the LORD and His people (cf.

Exo 34:15; Hos 1:2). Their eyes play a major role in their unfaithfulness to God (Eze 18:12,15; 20:24; cf. Num 15:39). Through the eyes, sin entered the world: Eve saw (Gen 3:6).

When the people come to repentance through God's work in them, they will loathe themselves in their own sight for all their abominations, for all their disgusting idolatrous practices. We too must know this loathing ourselves in order to truly know and love the Lord.

Also this section ends with "then they will know that I am the LORD", a knowledge that comes here not through judgment, as in verse 7, but through the grace that brought them to repentance (verse 10). They will recognize that He has dealt with them fully righteously. The full fulfillment of this will be experienced by the remnant in the end time.

### **Eze 6:11-14 | Judgment by Sword, Famine and Plague**

*11 "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Clap your hand, stamp your foot and say, "Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, which will fall by sword, famine and plague! 12 He who is far off will die by the plague, and he who is near will fall by the sword, and he who remains and is besieged will die by the famine. Thus will I spend My wrath on them. 13 Then you will know that I am the LORD, when their slain are among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, under every green tree and under every leafy oak—the places where they offered soothing aroma to all their idols. 14 So throughout all their habitations I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land more desolate and waste than the wilderness toward Diblah; thus they will know that I am the LORD.'"*

Ezekiel is commanded to clap his hand, stamp his foot, and say "alas", as an expression of disgust "because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel" (verse 11). He is thus again personally involved in the judgment God is bringing on His people. The announcement of judgment is not an emotionless affair. It works an emotional response in each person who must do so.

Judgment will come on Jerusalem by the sword of the enemy, by famine because of the siege, and by the plague (pestilence) that will come as a

result of starvation. The people here do not have the choice to choose one of these plagues, as once David had (2Sam 24:13-14), but will be affected by every plague.

The pestilence that is going through the land will affect all those who live further away in the land (verse 12). The sword will strike those who are in and around the city, surrounded by the enemies. Those who have been able to hide and have been spared from the sword will die the slow death of starvation. This is how God will execute His wrath. He announces clearly what He will do.

When the slain lie in all those places where they paid homage to their stink gods, they will know that He is the LORD (verse 13). Here again we have this knowledge of the LORD through and after judgment. It is terrible to come to know God in judgment (Heb 10:31). They will also gain that knowledge through God's judgment of their land which He will make more desolate and waste than the wilderness toward Diblah (verse 14). The wilderness toward Diblah is presumably east of Moab (see Num 33:46 Almon-Diblathaim and Jer 48:22 Beth-Diblathaim).

## Ezekiel 7

### **Eze 7:1-4 | The Judgment Is Total**

*1 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 “And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel, ‘An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land. 3 Now the end is upon you, and I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways and bring all your abominations upon you. 4 For My eye will have no pity on you, nor will I spare [you], but I will bring your ways upon you, and your abominations will be among you; then you will know that I am the LORD!’*

“The word of the LORD” comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He, “son of man”, is to speak the word on behalf of “the Lord GOD” and is directed to “the land of Israel” (verse 2). The judgment is not confined to the mountains and hills, the center of the land, which the previous chapter deals with. The end is coming “on the four corners of the land”, that is, over the whole land, to every corner of it (cf. Isa 11:12).

The word “end” is mentioned three times in verses 2-3, giving it emphasis. It is also mentioned twice more in verse 6 (cf. Amos 8:2). The end for the land has come because the LORD is sending His anger against it (verse 3). That is a terrifying message. It must be brought to the people.

The LORD must let His judgment come on the evil ways the land has gone. His judgments will be in accordance with that. He will also repay them for all their abominations. The iniquity is so great and their taunting of the LORD so grievous, that He will not spare the land and will have no pity (verse 4).

When He deals with the land in that way, they will know that He is the LORD. This refrain is also found in verse 9 and verse 27, by which this chapter can be divided into three parts. All the suffering that the LORD will bring upon His land is for the purpose of bringing the guilty people to recognition of His right and majesty.

### Eze 7:5-9 | The Judgment Is Near

5 *“Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘A disaster, unique disaster, behold it is coming! 6 An end is coming; the end has come! It has awakened against you; behold, it has come!’ 7 Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near—tumult rather than joyful shouting on the mountains. 8 Now I will shortly pour out My wrath on you and spend My anger against you; judge you according to your ways and bring on you all your abominations. 9 My eye will show no pity nor will I spare. I will repay you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst; then you will know that I, the LORD, do the smiting.*

The Lord GOD (*Adonai Yahweh*) lets Ezekiel – and through him the people – know that the time of His patience is over (verse 5). His patience with them has run out. One disaster will follow another in rapid succession and it is coming! These disasters announce the end (verse 6). “The end” is presented as a person awakening, moving and taking action.

When the end comes, it means the downfall of the “inhabitant of the land” (verse 7). Then “the day” has come when confusion will prevail and joy will be silenced. For those who think that day will bring them joy, it is a disillusionment, for that day brings judgment, terror and dismay (Amos 5:16-20). “The day” is the day of the LORD, the day when He will judge openly and no longer hide Himself.

“Shortly” that will happen, then the LORD will pour out His wrath on the land (verse 8). He will no longer withhold His anger, but execute it and judge the land in accordance with the sinful ways it has gone. His anger is completely justified. He will repay the land for all its abominations.

When He brings His judgments on the land, He will show no pity and spare nothing (verse 9). When He brings disaster upon disaster upon the land, the Israelites will know that He, the LORD, does the smiting (verses 4,27).

The actions of the LORD are presented in short sentences in the preceding verses. Verses 5-9 are largely a repetition of verses 1-4. It is a double testimony and they are, as it were, exclamations made in great emotion. They

are to impress upon the people the horrors of the coming judgments which are approaching with great speed and inescapably.

### **Eze 7:10-13 | The Doom Has Gone Forth**

*10 'Behold, the day! Behold, it is coming! [Your] doom has gone forth; the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed. 11 Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness. None of them [shall remain], none of their people, none of their wealth, nor anything eminent among them. 12 The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller mourn; for wrath is against all their multitude. 13 Indeed, the seller will not regain what he sold as long as they [both] live; for the vision regarding all their multitude will not be averted, nor will any of them maintain his life by his iniquity.*

The announcement of the day of the LORD resounds again (verse 10). The many repetitions of the announcement of judgment place great and serious emphasis on its immutability. "Behold, it is coming", is also said several times (verses 5,6,10). The warning sounds over and over again. It should be an incentive for us to warn those around us of the judgment that is coming, for "the Judge is standing right at the door" (Jam 5:9b).

The "doom has gone forth" because the king of Babylon is about to move into the land. "The rod has budded" means that God's discipline – symbolized by the rod – is about to assert itself in the coming of the armies of Babylon. "The arrogance has blossomed" means that Babylon will act in the arrogance of its heart.

Instead of acknowledging the rod of God's discipline and bowing to it, violence has risen like a rod (verse 11). The wickedness of God's people has caused the rod to rise. They rely on violence to maintain themselves. Their rod is a rod of wickedness. Therefore, the judgment that God brings on them through the king of Babylon will leave nothing of them. All their wealth, all their eminence, all their boastfulness will disappear.

Once again the warning is repeated that the time of judgment has come and the day of judgment has approached (verse 12). In such a time of threat, people do want to sell their stuff, because it will be of no use to them. It is possible that Paul was thinking of this section when he wrote

to the Corinthians that the time is short and that they should view buying and using resources in that light (1Cor 7:29-31).

Buyers like to take advantage of the misery of others to get a lot of property at extremely low prices. They are warned not to rejoice in this. Enrichment at the expense of the misery of others is repaid by God. They too will not escape the judgment that strikes the whole crowd. The seller should also not worry about the loss of his possessions. He would do better to worry about his soul (Lk 12:13-21).

The seller will never see his possessions again, even if both he and the buyer were still alive (verse 13). The vision of the judgment of exile “regarding all their multitude will not be averted”, for it is certain. Both the seller and the buyer have lived in iniquity. They will not be able to maintain their life, but perish.

### **Eze 7:14-27 | Response to Judgment**

*14 'They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but no one is going to the battle, for My wrath is against all their multitude. 15 The sword is outside and the plague and the famine are within. He who is in the field will die by the sword; famine and the plague will also consume those in the city. 16 Even when their survivors escape, they will be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each over his own iniquity. 17 All hands will hang limp and all knees will become [like] water. 18 They will gird themselves with sackcloth and shuddering will overwhelm them; and shame [will be] on all faces and baldness on all their heads. 19 They will fling their silver into the streets and their gold will become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot satisfy their appetite nor can they fill their stomachs, for their iniquity has become an occasion of stumbling. 20 They transformed the beauty of His ornaments into pride, and they made the images of their abominations [and] their detestable things with it; therefore I will make it an abhorrent thing to them. 21 I will give it into the hands of the foreigners as plunder and to the wicked of the earth as spoil, and they will profane it. 22 I will also turn My face from them, and they will profane My secret place; then robbers will enter and profane it. 23 'Make the chain, for the land is full of bloody crimes and the city*

*is full of violence. 24 Therefore, I will bring the worst of the nations, and they will possess their houses. I will also make the pride of the strong ones cease, and their holy places will be profaned. 25 When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none. 26 Disaster will come upon disaster and rumor will be [added] to rumor; then they will seek a vision from a prophet, but the law will be lost from the priest and counsel from the elders. 27 The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with horror, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. According to their conduct I will deal with them, and by their judgments I will judge them. And they will know that I am the LORD.”*

In a desperate attempt to avert judgment in the form of the oncoming enemy, they have blown the trumpet to mobilize the warriors (verse 14). But no one has the courage to go to war, even though they are ready for it. They are paralyzed. That is because of the wrath of the LORD against them. Death is everywhere (verse 15). Outside the city, in the fields, the violence of war makes its victims. In the city, death and destruction reign through plague and famine.

Some will manage to escape and think they have a safe haven in the mountains (verse 16). They are like defenseless doves, whose natural abode is the valleys, but have fled from there for fear of the enemy to seek refuge in the mountains, where they feel alone and not at home. There they will each mourn over his own iniquity. They may be able to escape the violence of war around them, but the deep-seated fear of the enemy and ultimately of the LORD will torment them and make them restless day and night. They will realize that through their own sins they have brought this suffering upon themselves.

They will be without strength, while water – here a euphemism, i.e. mild expression, for urine – runs down their knees (verse 17). They are utterly demoralized and powerless to resist. Their appearance is the epitome of mourning, shuddering, shame and baldness (verse 18). Any attractiveness has disappeared and been replaced by signs of mourning and misery.

The silver and gold on which they cling so much and of which they have made idols, they will cast away as unclean (verse 19; cf. Isa 2:20). They will see how useless those things are in saving them from the wrath of the

LORD (Pro 11:4; Zep 1:18). All this filthy lucre does not satiate the soul or fill the stomach. Gold and silver do not appease God's wrath (cf. Psa 49:7-9; Pro 10:2). Their silver and gold led them to iniquity, as wealth so often does with people today.

Instead of honoring God in "the beauty of His ornaments", which is the temple, and thereby showing Him that He is outstanding to them, they have made His temple an idol temple and defiled it (verse 20). Therefore, He now hands it over into the hands of the enemy who will further profane it. He has made His temple an object of uncleanness for them. God does not tolerate outward worship accompanied by idolatry, for that is an attack on the very essence of worship. All worship belongs exclusively to God. God does not tolerate an object of worship outside of Himself (Mt 4:9-10).

He will deliver them "as plunder" into the hands of the foreigners and "as spoil" to the wicked of the earth, that is, the Babylonians (verse 21). These will enter God's ornaments, His temple. Their unholy acts will profane the temple and thereby bring profanity upon them. He will turn His face away from them, meaning He will no longer look upon them in favor (verse 22). He will surrender His temple, "My secret place", which they boast of so much (Jer 7:4), to the Babylonians. These will violently invade it and profane it.

Ezekiel is to perform another symbolic act. He is to make a chain to indicate with it that the remnant of God's people will be taken away into exile (verse 23; Jer 39:7; 40:1). God can no longer maintain them in His land, for they have made it full of blood by killing innocents. The city of Jerusalem is full of violence of one against the other. The rights of the other are not taken into account.

God will send "the worst of the nations", that is, Babylon and the nations it subdued, to Israel (verse 24). These will take possession of their homes and thus deprive them of all security. The pride of the strong ones, that is the princes, the leaders, will cease. They will have nothing left to boast of. Those who sanctify them, their false priests, will have no more influence. They will lose their special status of holiness.

Anguish will overtake them and rule over them (verse 25). Desperately they will search for peace, but there will be none. External disasters will follow one another in rapid succession (verse 26). In addition to what they are experiencing, they will hear rumors of even more calamity, which will drive them inwardly to despair (cf. Eze 21:7; Jer 51:46; Mt 24:6). Rumors are beyond your control.

The three sources of knowledge to know what to do will fail. The *prophet* no longer receives a vision or revelation, the *priest* no longer teaches from the law, and the *elders* no longer have wisdom to give counsel. No one has an answer to the calamity that befalls them because the connection to heaven has been severed (cf. Mic 3:7). The silence of the grave prevails.

The highest authority, the king (Zedekiah), mourns (verse 27). The prince (high government official) is in despair. They are powerless and unable to provide a solution. As a result, the common people are paralyzed with terror and unable to do anything.

God deals with His people according to their own way. They reap the fruits of their sinful walk of life. He judges them according to their own regulations according to which they have arranged and lived their lives. There is no arbitrariness in His dealings. Everything He brings upon them, they have brought upon themselves. Through everything that happens to them because of the LORD, they will know that He is the LORD (verses 4,9). They have to deal with Him, not with Nebuchadnezzar.

With the next chapter a new section begins, which we can derive from the mention of a new date and that the hand of the LORD falls on Ezekiel (Eze 8:1).

## Ezekiel 8

### **Introduction**

Here begins the second section (Ezekiel 8-11) of the second main section (Ezekiel 4-24) that deals with the fall of Jerusalem. Its division is as follows:

1. The idolatry in the temple (Ezekiel 8).
2. The judgment on the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 9).
3. The glory of the LORD leaves the temple (Ezekiel 10).
4. Jerusalem, a pot (Ezekiel 11:1-13).
5. The sanctuary of those taken away into exile (Ezekiel 11:14-25).

### **Eze 8:1-6 | The Idol of Jealousy**

*1 It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth [day] of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there. 2 Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward [there was] the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal. 3 He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner [court], where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was [located]. 4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel [was] there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain. 5 Then He said to me, "Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north." So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate [was] this idol of jealousy at the entrance. 6 And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations."*

In August/September of the year 592 BC – that is fourteen months after his calling vision (Eze 1:1) – Ezekiel is visited by the elders of Judah (verse 1). He sits in the house, as the LORD has commanded him. Those who want to hear the word of the LORD should come to him. Ezekiel appears to be known to the people. The leaders of the exiles have come to him to hear if he has a message from the LORD for them. They have sat down before Ezekiel to listen to him.

The fact that they are called “the elders of Judah” may indicate that they were already this when they were taken away and that they have a certain position of authority even now in exile. They have been in exile for over six years now, and they probably want to know from Ezekiel how things are going in Jerusalem. The vision Ezekiel receives offers no hope for a soon return, for the city sins heavily. As a result, the inhabitants of Jerusalem who are still there will also be driven out of the city. This is quite different from what the false prophets say, who predict the exiles a soon return to Judah and Jerusalem.

When the elders sit before Ezekiel, the hand of the LORD, that is the Spirit of God, falls on him, putting him in a visionary state. That the hand of the LORD falls on him indicates that it happens suddenly, unexpectedly. It also makes it clear that he does not command the Spirit to come to him or even have any influence over Him. God’s Spirit is sovereign and He has authority over Ezekiel.

Ezekiel is given a message for these leaders of God’s people. That message comes to him through “a likeness as the appearance of a man” (verse 2). There is no doubt that this is an appearance of the Lord Jesus before His incarnation. Like the description of the appearance in Ezekiel 1, this description is vague. It is also just as impressive as the one in Ezekiel 1. His loins get extra attention. It is the part of the body in which there is the power to walk. It recalls the Lord Jesus walking in the midst of the seven lampstands to judge (Rev 1:12-16).

His loins are connected to the earth (“downward”) and to heaven (“upward”). Downward, there is “the appearance of fire”, and upward, there is “the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal”.

The judgment, of which the fire speaks, He executes below, on earth. He does so because, as the Man from heaven, He is the radiance of heaven and brings everything on earth into conformity with heaven. Judgment must be carried out to accomplish that goal because sin reigns on earth. Through the judgment, He will ensure that the prayer is fulfilled that God's will will be done "on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10).

This Person catches him by a lock of his head with what has the form of a hand (verse 3). This gives him the sense that what he sees in the vision is really happening. Then the Spirit lifts him up between earth and heaven and brings him in the visions of God to Jerusalem and there to the temple, God's dwelling place in Jerusalem. While Ezekiel is physically in his house with the elders, he experiences in the vision how the Spirit brings him to the entrance of the gate of the inner court that faces north.

The inner court is the place where the altar of burnt offering stands on which the burnt offerings are offered to the glory of God. That place, however, shows a different scene. There is located "the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy". Having such an abomination in this place does offend God in a particularly repulsive way. It evokes His jealousy. His jealousy relates to both His majestic holiness and His overwhelming love. Both are defied. This abomination is a deeply defamatory treatment of "the glory of the God of Israel" which still dwells there (verse 4).

God tells Ezekiel that he, son of man, should raise his eyes in the direction of the north (verse 5). Ezekiel does so. Then he sees what God sees. What he perceives, "the idol of jealousy", is something repulsive to a priest who wants to serve God in His house (cf. 2Kgs 23:6). What he sees is an idol that provokes the LORD to jealousy. He cannot allow His people to love other gods besides Him.

The LORD asks Ezekiel if he sees what they are doing (verse 6). He emphatically points out that Ezekiel must take it in. The reason is that he will feel what the LORD feels at this great insult. He is telling Ezekiel that the great abominations of the house of Israel are forcing Him to move far away from His sanctuary. Here the LORD announces that He must leave His sanctuary. He must, as it were, go into exile Himself. Nor are what Ezekiel

has seen the only abominations committed by the people. He will have to see still greater abominations.

### **Eze 8:7-13 | Idolatry by the Elders**

*7 Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. 8 He said to me, "Son of man, now dig through the wall." So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance. 9 And He said to me, "Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here." 10 So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts [and] detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. 11 Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising. 12 Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'" 13 And He said to me, "Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing."*

In the vision, the LORD brings him to the entrance of the court, where he sees a hole in the wall (verse 7). He is commanded to dig through the wall, probably because the hole is too small to crawl through (verse 8). When he has done so, he sees an entrance. The LORD tells him to go in through that entrance and adds that he will see "the wicked abominations" that happen in that room (verse 9). Ezekiel enters and sees that on the wall, all around, are carved "every form of creeping things and beasts [and] detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel" (verse 10).

Then he sees that seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel are standing in front of them (verse 11). The number seventy is not without significance. It is the full council of elders. They represent the whole people. Jaazaniah, the son of Shaphan, plays the leading role among these apostate leaders. His name is the only one mentioned. It is also mentioned that he stands "among them", indicating his central place in this event. He is looked to, he sets the example.

His father Shaphan was a faithful man who played an important role in the revival under King Josiah (2Chr 34:14-20). Jaazaniah also has brothers and cousins who are faithful to the LORD (Jer 26:24; 29:3; 36:10-11; 40:7). Shaphan means 'Yahweh listens', but he does not live according to the meaning of that name. He is a deeply sad example of one who belongs to a family where the Lord is served, but deliberately turns away from Him to serve the world and even becomes a leader of apostasy in it. It shows the serious truth that faith is not something you can inherit. Each person is himself responsible to God.

Each elder has a censer in his hand, from which the fragrance of the cloud of incense, the symbol of worship, rises. They are fully engaged in practicing their idolatry. The LORD asks Ezekiel if he has seen what the elders of the house of Israel are "committing in the dark" (verse 12). What they are doing cannot bear the light of day. They are there as a group, but each one is in his own dark way in his own room, his own heart and thoughts, preoccupied with his own carved image.

In their blindness and foolishness, they even believe that the LORD does not see them. After all, He has forsaken the land, they say. Perhaps they used as an argument that He would have delivered them from the Babylonian siege if He were still in the land. Thus they accuse Him of unfaithfulness and justify their idolatrous practices. While they are talking and practicing their idolatry, the LORD is watching them and even shows what they are saying and doing to Ezekiel in a vision. What follies can a man fall into when he excludes God!

This scene recalls the "unfruitful deeds of darkness", the things that "are done by them in secret", of which God's Word says that they are to be judged (Eph 5:11-12). Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, but we may harbor sinful thoughts in the secret corners of our hearts. Through His Spirit, God wants to break through that wall. He wants to make sin clear to us, so that we may judge it.

What Ezekiel has seen is not yet all the abominations. He will see still greater abominations (verse 13).

**Eze 8:14-15 | Tammuz Worship by Women**

*14 Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD's house which [was] toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. 15 He said to me, "Do you see [this], son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these."*

The LORD brings Ezekiel to the entrance of the gate of the house of the LORD which is on the north side (verse 14). There he sees women sitting and weeping. They are sad because Tammuz has died. Tammuz is a nature god, the patron god of crops and flocks. The belief in Tammuz says that he dies every year in the fourth month (June/July), which explains the weeping of the women here. It is also believed that he becomes alive again every spring. Therefore, the sorrow is not deep.

These women weep over a dead god in the place where the true God dwells and should be honored. They are giving nature the honor that only the true God is due. We see this in our time in the environmental movement which is gaining more and more religious traits and calling for "back to nature". The New Age movement is the spiritual bearer of this ideology. In it, demonic powers and forces are at work in the background and they receive the worship that is due only to God.

What Ezekiel has now seen is very shocking: women whining because of the so-called death of a so-called idol. That is a special defiance of God. God emphatically draws Ezekiel's attention to it by asking if he has seen it (verse 15). He wants to involve him in His great abhorrence of this. And even with that, Ezekiel has not seen all the abominations. He will see more, and even greater ones than this.

**Eze 8:16 | Worship of the Sun**

*16 Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house. And behold, at the entrance to 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; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.*

Then Ezekiel is brought by the LORD into the inner court of His house to see the fourth abomination. At a precisely defined location – at “the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar” – he sees about twenty-five men. They are standing with their backs to the temple of the LORD.

Turning their backs on Him is also a clear attitude of contempt for the LORD (2Chr 29:6). They provoke Him further by doing so in the very place where He so desires to receive His people with their faces turned toward Him. They stand with their backs to Him and their faces to the east. In that direction they prostrate themselves toward the sun. God and His statutes, in which He has decreed that they are not to worship any part of His creation (Exo 20:4-5; Deu 5:8-9), are rejected.

### **Eze 8:17-18 | The Judgment of the LORD**

*17 He said to me, “Do you see [this], son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose. 18 Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them.”*

Again the LORD asks Ezekiel if he, son of man, has seen it (verse 17). He involves him in His observation. He also involves him in His judgment when He asks him if the house of Judah can make it worse than what they are doing now with these abominations. Surely this beats everything, doesn't it? Surely it can't get any worse, can it? If Ezekiel may have had some hesitation in announcing the judgment, surely what the LORD has shown him convinces him of its justice.

The violence that fills the land was caused by them. They have provoked the LORD to wrath, not just once or occasionally, but again and again, continuously. In addition, they also put “the twig to their nose”. Its meaning is unclear. Given the connection and the LORD's indignation at this custom, we might think of it as an extremely offensive and reprehensible gesture toward Him. We might compare this to expressions we are familiar with,

such as contemptuously sticking out the tongue at Him, thumbing their noses at Him, or making obscene gestures with hands and fingers at Him.

The LORD cannot but deal with them in His wrath (verse 18). That will be a fully justified action. He will have no pity and will spare no one. They caused it themselves. If they cry out loud to Him then, He will not listen to them. The time for Him to listen is over because they never listened to Him.

In this chapter the diagnosis has been made. It has been established how terribly the people have fared. God has to judge His People. There is no alternative. Judgment is presented in the next chapter. It is not yet the actual judgment. Ezekiel is still in a visionary state. The actual judgment will come when Nebuchadnezzar destroys the city of Jerusalem.

## Ezekiel 9

### **Eze 9:1-4 | The Man With the Writing Case**

*1 Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, "Draw near, O executioners [literally: you who punish] of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." 2 Behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand; and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. 3 Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. 4 The LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, [even] through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst."*

The vision Ezekiel sees continues here. Now he hears the LORD calling, not to him, but to men who are to punish the city (verse 1). These men are angels (cf. Gen 18:2; 19:13). They are to draw near because they are to execute His judgment which He announced at the end of the previous chapter. For this they must be armed with a destroying weapon which they must have in their hands, ready for immediate use. The Hebrew word for destroying weapon implies that it is an instrument used to destroy something.

Six men come forward from the north (verse 2). That they come from the north shows the direction from which God's judgment is coming. The Babylonians will come from the north and destroy Jerusalem.

There is a seventh Man with them. He stands among them and is clothed in linen. Linen clothes are priestly garments (Exo 28:42; Lev 16:4; cf. Dan 10:5; 12:6) that symbolize the holiness of God. This seventh Man has no destroying weapon in His hand, but a writing case at his loins. He is not to destroy, but to protect from destruction. He is the Angel of the LORD, in Whom we recognize the Person of the Lord Jesus, "who rescues us from the wrath to come" (1Thes 1:10).

Then they all go in and stand beside the bronze altar. The bronze altar is a picture of the cross and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus. Christ's death is the means by which God can offer grace to repentant sinners. Those who refuse that salvation will themselves suffer God's judgment and perish. Their place next to the bronze altar indicates that the judgment that will be executed on Jerusalem is in perfect accord with the righteousness of God's judgment that struck the Lord Jesus on the cross.

When the men who are to execute the judgment have entered together with the Man with the writing case, "the glory of the God of Israel" goes up from above the cherub (verse 3). It goes from the cherub to the threshold of the temple and starts, as it were, its way out. Here we see the first indication that God is in the process of leaving the temple, His house.

What should the glory of God have found on the threshold? The gatekeepers. But no faithful gatekeeper stood up for the glory of God when the four forms of idolatry described in the previous chapter were introduced into the temple and practiced there. No Pinehas arose to remove these abominations (Num 25:6-9).

When God's glory is on the threshold, He calls to the Man Who is clothed in linen and Who has the writing case at His loins. He instructs the Man to pass through the midst of the city and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in the midst of the city (verse 4).

The whole city is full of idolatry, but there is a remnant who does not participate in it. Not only do they not participate in it, but they suffer from it. They suffer inwardly, they "sigh", and express it loudly, they "groan". To them, the word of the Lord applies: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mt 5:4). Do we suffer at the sight of all the horrors happening around us and do we keep far away from them?

The LORD knows them, just as the Lord Jesus in all times of decay knows the few who are His own (2Tim 2:19-22). The Lord Jesus – He is the Man with the writing case – is to put a mark on the foreheads of those who mourn. That mark will protect them from the destroying weapon of the six men who will pass through the city after Him to destroy. It is not a mark

of blood on the doorposts of their houses, as at the Passover (Exo 12:7,13), but a personal sign of the cross on their foreheads.

The Hebrew word translated “mark” is *tav*, which is also the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This letter corresponds to our letter ‘t’. In Ezekiel’s time this letter was written in the form of a cross, as we also recognize in our letter ‘t’. We can see in it the application that the believers in Jerusalem are kept from judgment by the sign of the cross applied to their foreheads by the Man clothed in linen.

In the future, during the time of the great tribulation, believers will receive a similar mark on their foreheads (Rev 7:3; 9:4; 14:1). In contrast, apostates will bear the mark of the beast on their foreheads (Rev 13:16-17; 14:9; 20:4). A spiritual application of the cross on the forehead for us is that we live in self-judgment and no longer set our mind on the things of the flesh, of man, but on those of God.

### **Eze 9:5-7 | Judgment Begins With the Household of God**

*5 But to the others He said in my hearing, “Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. 6 Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.” So they started with the elders who [were] before the temple. 7 And He said to them, “Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!” Thus they went out and struck down [the people] in the city.*

The executors of judgment are commanded to go after the Man in linen (verse 5). They are to pass through the city and kill without any pity for anyone and without sparing anyone. The judgment is without regard to persons; age and gender are not considered either (verse 6; cf. 2Chr 36:17). However, they are not allowed to even touch anyone who has the mark applied by the Man in linen. The mark is the sure protection from judgment because He has applied it.

The LORD also says where the six men are to begin. According to the Divine principle, they are to begin where the worst sins have happened and that is in the place where the greatest privileges were given. It is precisely

in that place that His people have despised them and replaced them with the greatest abominations. It is an illustration of the saying: the corruption of the best is the worst corruption. Therefore, they must start from God's sanctuary. Those who are in the closest relationship to God and serve in His house are most responsible to live in accordance with this great privilege. If they do not, they are the most guilty.

That is what the two oldest sons of Aaron experienced. They drew near to God in His dwelling place in a self-willed way. For this, God had to judge them. As the reason for this judgment He pronounces: "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy" (Lev 10:3). According to this principle, God also acts with His New Testament house, the church: "For [it is] time for judgment to begin with the household of God" (1Pet 4:17).

When the men start to judge, they also start with the most responsible, "the elders", the twenty-five who worship the sun (Eze 8:16). They are commanded to "defile the temple" by filling the courts with the slain (verse 7). This is no different than making visible what had long been the condition of temple. This is how God makes visible the hidden transgressions.

### **Eze 9:8-11 | Ezekiel's Response – Answer From the LORD**

*8 As they were striking [the people] and I [alone] was left, I fell on my face and cried out saying, "Alas, Lord GOD! Are You destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Your wrath on Jerusalem?" 9 Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land is filled with blood and the city is full of perversion; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!' 10 But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor will I spare, but I will bring their conduct upon their heads." 11 Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, "I have done just as You have commanded me."*

It seems that Ezekiel has felt so closely involved with what the LORD has said to the six men and the Man in linen that he feels as if he is in their midst. When he sees the men leave to strike, he feels he is left alone (verse 8).

It is not the application of the mark by the Man in linen that makes a great impression on him, but the striking of the men with their destroying weapon. He has seen what abominations the people have committed (Eze 8:1-16). However, when he sees the judgment being carried out without mercy, he falls on his face and makes intercession. We also see this love for an ungodly people to be judged by God in people like Moses and Paul.

He cries out to the Lord GOD (*Adonai Yahweh*) whether He intends to destroy what is left of Israel in Jerusalem by His wrath. Surely this cannot be true. Ezekiel is still too attached to the city to believe that the city will be destroyed. We see the same thing later with the disciples of the Lord Jesus. They are impressed by the temple, while there is no place there for the Lord. He therefore tells them that not one stone will be left upon another (Mk 13:1-2).

God answers Ezekiel and justifies Himself (verse 9). Israel and Judah have sinned "very, very great". "The land is filled blood and the city is full of perversion" (cf. Exo 23:2b) Twice God uses the word "full". The measure of iniquity is full. It can't get any worse. God is patient, but when the measure is full, He must judge. If His people no longer have an eye for Him, if they act as if He is not there, although He has so often shown His goodness and also His discipline, their situation is incorrigible and judgment must come without pity and without exception (verse 10). They get no more than they deserve, nothing but what they themselves ask for. Their self-willed way comes on their own heads.

Judgment, however, does not have the last word. In a striking way, at this moment the Man clothed in linen with the writing case at His loins comes to give an account (verse 11). He has done what was commanded Him by God: He has put the mark on the foreheads of those to whom judgment will pass. This means that not all the people have been annihilated, but that there is a remnant. God thinks of His own when they are in the greatest need and protects them.

Only the Lord Jesus can give such an account. Only He can say: "I have done just as You have commanded me." No other man has ever been able to utter that before God or will ever be able to utter that. He alone has

perfectly done what He was commanded to do. What the Man says here is an impressive reminder of the words of the Lord Jesus to His Father: “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (Jn 17:4). This includes that He would guard those whom the Father gave Him, which He did perfectly (Jn 17:12; 18:8-9).

## Ezekiel 10

### Introduction

This chapter is closely related to Ezekiel 1. Here we again find the chariot carrying the throne. Some details are repeated and new details are also added. The main idea of this chapter is that God controls all the instruments of judgment that He uses.

### Eze 10:1-7 | The Man in Linen Must Scatter Fire

*1 Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim something like a sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne, appeared above them. 2 And He spoke to the man clothed in linen and said, "Enter between the whirling wheels under the cherubim and fill your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim and scatter [them] over the city." And he entered in my sight. 3 Now the cherubim were standing on the right side of the temple when the man entered, and the cloud filled the inner court. 4 Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD. 5 Moreover, 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 It came about when He commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," he entered and stood beside a wheel. 7 Then the cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire which was between the cherubim, took [some] and put [it] into the hands of the one clothed in linen, who took [it] and went out.*

What Ezekiel was only able to refer to as "living beings" in Ezekiel 1, he now recognizes as cherubim (verse 20). What he sees above the expanse that is over the heads of the cherubim (verse 1), he has also seen in Ezekiel 1 (Eze 1:26). Here he sees the appearance of what looks like a throne. In Ezekiel 1 he also sees something sitting on the throne that looks like a Man. That is not the case here.

The LORD instructs the Man in linen to take coals of fire from between the whirling wheels under the cherubim, fill both His hands with them, and scatter them over the city (verse 2; cf. Lk 12:49; Rev 8:5). This means that not only will judgment come upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but the city itself will be burned with fire. This means that the city will undergo the same judgment that once came upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24; cf. Rev 11:8a).

Ezekiel sees the Man enter between the whirling wheels under the cherubim. The place where the cherubim stand when the Man enters is to the right of the house, which is the south side of the temple (verse 3). The cloud that fills the inner court is the cloud of the glory of the LORD.

Then the glory of the LORD rises from the cherub (singular) and goes to the threshold of the house (verse 4). One last time, before the glory leaves the temple, the cloud of glory fills the house. It is as if the LORD is impressively showing one last time that the temple is His house.

The sound of the wings of the cherubim indicates that they are moving (verse 5; cf. Eze 1:24). They are going to leave the house. This sound is heard as far as the outer court, where Jews may be performing their religious duties at that moment. The sound is reminiscent of the voice of God Almighty when He speaks, possibly thunder (cf. Jn 12:28-29; Psa 29:3-4). They are, as it were, His farewell words that He speaks full of threat to the people He is about to leave.

Then the gaze is turned again to the Man clothed in linen Who has been instructed to take fire from between the wheels, which is the space between the cherubim (verse 6). The Man takes a stand next to a wheel. The fire, a picture of judgment, is taken from the space between the cherubim by the cherub who is in the space between the cherubim (verse 7). The fire that he has taken in his hand, he puts into the hands of the Man in linen. He takes it and goes out. This concludes the description. The scattering of the fire, which is commanded (verse 3), is not described. Ezekiel's attention is first of all captivated by the appearance of the Man and of the cherubim.

The Man in linen Who is to take the coals of fire is the same as the Man with the writing case from the previous chapter. There He receives the

command to put a mark on the faithful believers so that judgment will pass them by. This Man is now commanded by God to bring judgment on the city. In the book of Revelation we see the same picture. The same Angel Who is to take fire from the altar to cast it on the earth in judgment, has just before dealt with the prayers of the saints (Rev 8:3-5). The Man in Ezekiel and the Angel in Revelation are both the Person of the Lord Jesus. In Him we see that God is both love and light.

### **Eze 10:8-17 | The Cherubim**

*8 The cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings. 9 Then I looked, and behold, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels [was] like the gleam of a Tarshish stone. 10 As for their appearance, all four of them had the same likeness, as if one wheel were within another wheel. 11 When they moved, they went in [any of] their four directions without turning as they went; but they followed in the direction which they faced, without turning as they went. 12 Their whole body, their backs, their hands, their wings and the wheels were full of eyes all around, the wheels belonging to all four of them. 13 The wheels were called in my hearing, the whirling wheels. 14 And each one had four faces. The first face [was] the face of a cherub, the second face [was] the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. 15 Then the cherubim rose up. They are the living beings that I saw by the river Chebar. 16 Now when the cherubim moved, the wheels would go beside them; also when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels would not turn from beside them. 17 When the cherubim stood still, the wheels would stand still; and when they rose up, the wheels would rise with them, for the spirit of the living beings [was] in them.*

The description of the cherubim in verses 8-14 largely corresponds to that in Ezekiel 1 (see comments there). We see here also with the cherubim under their wings something that has the form of a man's hand (verse 8). In the exercise of their government, the cherubim are oriented toward men; they act in a manner befitting men. The wings give rise to the idea that judgments come from above. The four wheels show that God's government is exercised on earth (verse 9). Each of the four cherubim has a

wheel beside them. The wheels shine like a Tarshish stone (see comments on Ezekiel 1:16).

The wheels all look the same, “all four of them had the same likeness” (verse 10). This indicates that there is complete unity in God’s government, that God always acts in a perfectly consistent manner. That it appears as if one wheel is within another wheel means that all of God’s acts of government are perfectly interlocked. With Him, events never stand alone; they are never separate. The one is always related to the other.

The way He is going in His governmental ways is irreversible (verse 11). His goal is determined. He is moving toward His goal, even though in doing so He often goes down roads that we cannot understand. Just as the wheels do not turn as they go, so He never has to return to a road He has gone. He never goes a wrong way, He never makes a mistake. That may be a great comfort to us when we do not understand certain things in our lives, why they have gone the way they have gone.

In Ezekiel 1 we saw that the rims of the cherubim are full of eyes. Here we see that their whole body, “their backs, their hands, their wings and the wheels” are “full of eyes all around” (verse 12). This shows us in an even more emphatic way that God is the Omniscient One Who acts with perfect insight.

“Their back” refers to the past. God has forgotten nothing of the past. He has perfect knowledge and understanding of the past. His actions in the present are consistent with that. Those actions are past tomorrow, but their effects are not. They work on, they are active (“their hands”) in the present. The hands contribute to the realization of the future, the achievement of the goal that God has in mind and that He always has in mind. This is symbolized by “their wings and the wheels”. The four wheels of the cherubim take Him where He wants to go. The wings indicate that He controls everything on earth from heaven.

The wheels also have a name, “the whirling wheels” (verse 13; cf. Eze 23:24; 26:10; Isa 5:28; Jer 47:3). “Whirling” refers to the speed of the movement, and “wheel” refers to the organic unity of the throne chariot.

Next, the faces of the cherubim are described (verse 14), which is also what happens in Ezekiel 1. Each cherub, like the description in Ezekiel 1, has four faces. Three faces are similar to those in Ezekiel 1. However, the first face mentioned here, “the face of a cherub”, differs from the description in Ezekiel 1, where instead we have the face of a bull or an ox. This means that the face of a cherub looks like the face of a bull or an ox (verse 22).

The living beings from Ezekiel 1 that Ezekiel saw by the river Chebar are cherubim (verse 15). The prophet sees this at the moment when the cherubim exalt themselves. He sees again the unity between the cherubim and their wings and wheels (verses 16-17; Eze 1:19-21). This unity involves both their movement and their standing still (verse 17). This is because the spirit of the living beings is also in the wheels. What the living beings determine, the wheels do.

### **Eze 10:18-22 | The Glory of the LORD Departs**

*18 Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. 19 When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. 20 These are the living beings that I saw beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; so I knew that they [were] cherubim. 21 Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and beneath their wings [was] the form of human hands. 22 As for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the river Chebar. Each one went straight ahead.*

In Ezekiel 1, Ezekiel saw the throne chariot in Babylon. Here he sees the throne chariot in Jerusalem. It is as if the throne chariot is coming to pick up the glory of the LORD so that He can take a seat on it and depart.

Then the glory of the LORD moves away from above the threshold of the house and takes its place above the cherubim (verse 18). He takes His place on His throne seat again to be escorted by the cherubim to the next stop (verse 19). Ezekiel sees how the cherubim raise their wings to depart from the earth. He also sees how the wheels do the same.

They do not leave directly for heaven. They first stop at the entrance to the east gate of the house of the LORD. There, “the glory of the God of Israel”, which is above them, hovers over them. It is as if there is reluctance on God’s part to leave His house.

What we have seen so far of the LORD’s departure and will yet see shows that this departure occurs in stages.

1. Ezekiel first sees the glory of the LORD in the inner court (Eze 8:3-4). The LORD has then left the most holy place.
2. Then the LORD goes to the threshold of the house (Eze 9:3), where He fills the whole court with His glory (Eze 10:3-4).
3. From the threshold He moves up above the cherubim (Eze 10:18), to go with them toward the east gate (Eze 10:19).
4. From there the glory of the LORD departs through the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives and then disappears completely (Eze 11:22-23).

When the glory of the God of Israel has departed, the people are no longer God’s people, but “Lo-Ammi”, which is “not My people” (Hos 1:9). When the Jews rebuild the temple after returning from the Babylonian exile, God’s glory does not return to it. In the Lord Jesus, His glory returns to His temple for a short time (Mal 3:1; Lk 2:22), but He is rejected and goes to heaven from the same Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12) as from whence the glory of the LORD now departs before the eyes of Ezekiel, 600 years earlier. At the beginning of the realm of peace, God’s glory will return to His temple (Eze 43:1-6).

After Ezekiel has seen everything, he knows that the living beings he has seen are cherubim (verse 20). He is a good observer with a desire to understand what the LORD is showing him. Such a desire He rewards with insight into His Word and His ways. Ezekiel confirms what each cherub looks like individually (verse 21). They are the same faces he saw by the river Chebar. This concerns both their appearance and their being and the straight way they go (verse 22).

## Ezekiel 11

### **Eze 11:1-4 | The Leaders Devise Iniquity**

*1 Moreover, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the LORD's house which faced eastward. And behold, [there were] twenty-five men at the entrance of the gate, and among them I saw Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, leaders of the people. 2 He said to me, "Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and give evil advice in this city, 3 who say, '[The time] is not near to build houses. This [city] is the pot and we are the flesh.' 4 Therefore, prophesy against them, son of man, prophesy!"*

The vision that began in Ezekiel 8 continues here. The Spirit brings Ezekiel to the east gate of the house of the LORD (verse 1), where the throne chariot of the LORD stood still (Eze 10:19). At the entrance of the gate are twenty-five men, the political leaders of the people. Attached to the gate is the idea that it is the place where justice is spoken by the leaders of a city (Rth 4:1,11; Job 5:4; Pro 8:3). It is also where the people gather to listen to the judges (Jer 26:10-11).

Of the leaders, two are mentioned by name, while it is emphatically stated that they are "leaders of the people". The LORD tells Ezekiel what these leaders devise and what advice they give in the city (verse 2). He knows their thoughts and their words through and through. Their deepest hidden thoughts are an open book to Him. He also sees the hidden deliberations of the heart (1Cor 4:5).

The advice they give goes head-on against what God has said (verse 3). Not only are they themselves wicked and faithless, but they are leading God's people down sinful paths and moving them to go against the words of God which He had proclaimed to them through His prophets. This is the most obvious thought here because what they are saying recalls what God had Jeremiah say about the exiles building houses in Babylon. Indeed, God said that the exiles did have to build houses in Babylon (Jer 29:4-5a), indicating thereby that the exiles should prepare for a long stay in Babylon.

This word of Jeremiah is ridiculed here by the authorities in Jerusalem. They say that for them building a house in Babylon is out of the question. Jerusalem may be surrounded by the armies of the king of Babylon, but of course the city will not fall into the hands of those armies. On the contrary, they appease the people with the imagery of a pot and the flesh. Jerusalem, they say, is the pot, and we, the inhabitants, are the flesh. As an iron pot protects the flesh from the fire, so the city protects its inhabitants.

Perhaps they also refer to what Jeremiah saw and said about “a boiling pot” with which God symbolizes judgment on Jerusalem (Jer 1:13-14). We might expect this from these scoffers. Someone who mocks God knows no limit, but ridicules everything.

Because of their great disobedience, Ezekiel must prophesy “against them” (verse 4). The word “prophesy” is twice used and indicates the seriousness of the task. God wants them to know that He hears their blatant words and that He will punish them for them.

### **Eze 11:5-13 | The Leaders of Jerusalem Punished**

*5 Then the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and He said to me, “Say, ‘Thus says the LORD, “So you think, house of Israel, for I know your thoughts. 6 You have multiplied your slain in this city, filling its streets with them.” 7 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, “Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of the city are the flesh and this [city] is the pot; but I will bring you out of it. 8 You have feared a sword; so I will bring a sword upon you,” the Lord GOD declares. 9 “And I will bring you out of the midst of the city and deliver you into the hands of strangers and execute judgments against you. 10 You will fall by the sword. I will judge you to the border of Israel; so you shall know that I am the LORD. 11 This [city] will not be a pot for you, nor will you be flesh in the midst of it, [but] I will judge you to the border of Israel. 12 Thus you will know that I am the LORD; for you have not walked in My statutes nor have you executed My ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations around you.”” 13 Now it came about as I prophesied, that Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I fell on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, “Alas, Lord GOD! Will You bring the remnant of Israel to a complete end?”*

After the command to prophesy, the Spirit of the LORD falls on Ezekiel (verse 5). Prophesying what God says can only be done by the Spirit. Ezekiel is also told by the LORD what to prophesy. Prophets may only pass on the Word of God. Here we see the close connection between the Spirit and the Word. Prophecy reveals the thoughts of the hearts of the hearers (1Cor 14:25). The LORD knows what comes up in the minds of these people. To His eyes all things are open and laid bare (Heb 4:13; Jer 17:10a; Psa 139:1-4).

The LORD adopts the picture they use and says that the city is indeed the pot and they are the flesh, but He gives it a different meaning (verses 6-7). Certainly, Jerusalem is the pot, but a pot filled with the flesh of the slain. Those slain are laid there by themselves, they are “your slain”, for they lie there as a result of their evil advice. The leaders will not find the supposed protection in “the pot” but will be taken out of it. The LORD Himself will see to that.

The LORD will do this by bringing the sword, which the leaders are so afraid of, upon them (verse 8). Here we see that these leaders, despite their boasting, are themselves afraid. That He will do what He says is underscored by the words “the Lord GOD declares”. Their fear is justified. The LORD will give them into the hand of “strangers”, the Babylonians, and cause them to depart from Jerusalem (verse 9; Eze 7:21). Through these “strangers” He will execute His judgments against these leaders (2Kgs 25:1-7; Jer 39:1-9; 52:9-10,24-27). Where they feel safe, they will be judged by the LORD and receive their deserved punishment (verse 10). As a result, they will know that He is the LORD (Eze 6:7).

Jerusalem will not be a pot for them to protect them from judgment (verse 11). Nor are they the flesh that will be saved. The punishment will be meted out by the Babylonians, but it is because the LORD uses them. Thus, they will know that He is the LORD (verse 12). He makes Himself known in the judgment He must execute because the leaders have not walked in His statutes. On the contrary, they have done according to the ordinances of the nations around them. In doing so, they have taunted Him to the extreme. He is a jealous God Who is not mocked.

God impressively confirms His word through the sudden death of one of the leaders, Pelatiah, the son of Benaiah (verse 13; verse 1). Through this He also demonstrates vividly the fate that will befall all. This is a reality in the vision. The men in Jerusalem have not heard the words of God that Ezekiel has prophesied. This sudden judgment confirms the words of God. Later when Ezekiel delivers his message to the exiles, he can refer to this event.

God's judgment on Pelatiah and his own announcement of judgment again elicit a vehement reaction from the prophet (cf. Eze 9:7-8). Again he acts very emotional as an intercessor for his people. If the remnant of Judah and Jerusalem is destroyed, it means the absolute end of Israel. Surely this cannot be so, can it? Perhaps in this complaint there is also an allusion to the name Pelatiah, which means 'Yahweh delivers'.

### **Eze 11:14-15 | The Brothers of the Prophet**

*14 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 15 "Son of man, your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles and the whole house of Israel, all of them, [are those] to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Go far from the LORD; this land has been given us as a possession.'*

The LORD responds to Ezekiel's complaint (verse 14). The prophet made intercession, first for the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Eze 9:8b) and then for the leaders (verse 13b). He asked God if He would destroy all the remnant of Israel. God now answers (verse 15) that his brethren, in whom he has so much interest, are not these inhabitants of Jerusalem and these leaders, but the Israelites who have been led into exile.

The exiles are considered by these inhabitants of Jerusalem to be cut off from the people of God. The repetition of "your brothers" ["your relatives" is literally also "your brothers"] serves to assure Ezekiel that they are his real, true brothers, as opposed to the Israelites, who only have the name of Israel and boast of it, but do not live up to it. His brethren have the right of redemption (Lev 25:25; Rth 2:20b).

"Your fellow exiles" is in Hebrew "the men of your redemption" by which the LORD refers to the right of redemption, which means that these

“brothers” have the inalienable right to the land from which they were taken. This already contains a promise of restoration. The core of the people are the exiles, to whom new exiles will soon join. God recognizes them as His people. From them He will form a remnant that will again possess the land according to the law. They have not lost it forever, which is what the inhabitants of Jerusalem in their haughtiness think and say of them.

Also, the words “whole” and “all” in the phrase “the whole house of Israel, all of them” emphasize the totality of what God sees as His people. With this totality, “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” form a contrast. For the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who claim the right to the land, the reverse is true. Them God no longer sees as His people. They look with contempt upon the expelled exiles of whom they think are far from God. For these people in Jerusalem, the expulsion from the land means the removal from God’s presence.

In their unbelieving posturing, they believe that the exiles are away from the God of Israel, Who after all dwells in Jerusalem. Thus, after the custom of idolatry around them, they make God a local god. At the same time, they claim the land of the exiles for themselves. They are blind to the fact that the glory of God is about to leave them.

### **Eze 11:16-21 | Promise of Restoration**

*16 Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Though I had removed them far away among the nations and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone.”’ 17 Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.”’ 18 When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. 19 And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God. 21 But as for those whose hearts go after their detestable things and abominations, I will bring their conduct down on their heads,” declares the Lord GOD.*

The inhabitants of Jerusalem see the removed ones as rejected by God, while they consider themselves the faithful Jews. To their presumption, God responds with promises for those who are carried away into exile (verse 16). These are the first promises of restoration in this book. God may have removed them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, but there He will be with them. They may be deprived of the beautiful temple and the service therein, but He Himself will be a sanctuary for them in the foreign land (cf. Isa 57:15a).

They will experience His presence in a special way. For them, the presence of God is no longer connected to a particular building (cf. Jn 4:21,24). In the time in which we live, a time in which the children of God are also scattered (cf. Jn 11:52), it is a great encouragement for us to know and experience that the Lord Jesus wants to be a sanctuary for us, even if we are only a few (Mt 18:20).

For the exiles, He will be a sanctuary only for a little while. "Little while" can also mean "limited". That He is a limited sanctuary for them in Babylon, then, should be understood to mean that they have no temple and cannot perform temple service and have no place to go during the feasts of the LORD. As a result, they are limited in the expressions of their service to God. But God Himself is their sanctuary and that, of course, cannot be limited. For those who put their trust in Him, He does not limit Himself to a building and statutes.

That He will be their sanctuary for a little while, in the sense of for a short time, in the countries to which they are scattered, implies that the exile will come to an end. To this thought connects the next verse, in which the promise of return to their land is given (verse 17). He will gather them out of all the countries to which they have been driven, and will give them the land of Israel.

Here the LORD gives this promise even before the whole people are removed out of the land. A first, provisional fulfillment, on a very small scale, is the return of a remnant in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. In our days, we experience in the return of the Jews to their land the beginning of the final fulfillment of this promise in the end time.

When the final fulfillment takes place, the Jews will remove idols and idolatry from the land (verse 18). Those abominable idols and abominations are the things that the antichrist will introduce. This situation will arise in Israel after the rapture of the church.

That they return and remove idolatry is the result of the new heart the LORD gives them (verse 19; cf. Deu 30:5-6). He gives that new heart in place of their heart of stone. The giving of new life and a new spirit is His work. Only God can change a sinner. A heart of stone is stolid and hard. A fleshly heart is one that responds to the Word of God with faith and obedience.

Because of that new heart, they will live from a different spirit. They will have one heart. This means that all double-mindedness and hypocrisy are gone (Psa 86:11). It also means that they will live in unity, that they will serve the LORD one in mind and one in feeling.

God is foretelling a spiritual renewal here (Eze 36:24-26). Then they will obey Him and respond to His desires (verse 20). The connection between them as His people and Him as their God (Jer 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1,33; 32:38; Eze 14:11; 36:28; 37:23,27) will then be fully restored to the great joy of God and also of His people. This will become a reality in the realm of peace.

Exiles who do not repent and those who have not been taken away and remain in Jerusalem persist in their idolatry (verse 21). They go with their hearts “after their detestable things and abominations”. Literally it says: “And to the heart of their detestable things and their abomination their heart goes.” Gods of silver and gold have no heart, no life. Demons do. The hearts of the demons and the hearts of the idol worshipers connect. The LORD will cause them to perish in their own abominable acts.

### **Eze 11:22-23 | The Departure of Glory**

*22 Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. 23 The glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.*

Ezekiel's vision is nearing its end. In these verses Ezekiel sees the departure of "the glory of the God of Israel" from Jerusalem. God, however, departs only after first giving comforting promises of the restoration of a remnant in the preceding verses. Then He withdraws, leaving city and land to their fate.

As a final stop, He stands over the mountain that lies east of Jerusalem, which is the Mount of Olives. This determines us that the glory of God will also return to the city over the Mount of Olives (Zec 14:4a; Acts 1:9-12) to fulfill the promises of the previous verses. The glory will again take up its residence in the new temple in the realm of peace (Eze 43:1-5).

### **Eze 11:24-25 | Ezekiel Back With the Exiles**

*24 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God to the exiles in Chaldea. So the vision that I had seen left me. 25 Then I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had shown me.*

The vision ends with Ezekiel seeing himself lifted up by the Spirit of God Who gave him the vision and brought back to the exiles (verse 24). All this time he has been physically with the elders (Eze 8:1). As a faithful witness, as a watchman, Ezekiel communicates to the exiles all that the LORD has shown him in the vision (verse 25).

## Ezekiel 12

### Introduction

With this chapter begins the third section of the great second section. This section, which covers Ezekiel 12-17, exposes the sins of the leaders. This chapter addresses the false prophecies that are circulating that the deliverance of Jerusalem will happen soon and that the exiles will return soon. The teaching of these chapters counters this false optimism.

### Eze 12:1-7 | The Exile Depicted

*1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house. 3 Therefore, son of man, prepare for yourself baggage for exile and go into exile by day in their sight; even go into exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand though they are a rebellious house. 4 Bring your baggage out by day in their sight, as baggage for exile. Then you will go out at evening in their sight, as those going into exile. 5 Dig a hole through the wall in their sight and go out through it. 6 Load [the baggage] on [your] shoulder in their sight [and] carry [it] out in the dark. You shall cover your face so that you cannot see the land, for I have set you as a sign to the house of Israel." 7 I did so, as I had been commanded. By day I brought out my baggage like the baggage of an exile. Then in the evening I dug through the wall with my hands; I went out in the dark [and] carried [the baggage] on [my] shoulder in their sight.*

From the beginning, the LORD has prepared Ezekiel that the carried away into exile of His people as a whole will not listen to His Word (Eze 2:3-8; 3:7-9). Here He confirms that again (verses 1-2). As a whole, they are "the rebellious house". Their eyes are blind to their sins and their ears are closed to God's Word. The cause of this is their rebellion; they are "a rebellious house."

Yet Ezekiel must convey to them God's message. He must do so by visible sign acts and an audible declaration of them. He must depict an exile

(verse 3). This might “perhaps” lead them to “understand though they are a rebellious house”. The word “perhaps” gives room for a glimmer of hope that there will be some who will listen after all.

The LORD’s command for this action of Ezekiel shows His great loving-kindness that He uses such means to get the attention of the rebellious people. He tells Ezekiel what to take, what to do with it, and to go to another place. Ezekiel is to do everything “in their sight”, an expression that appears seven times in verses 3-7.

Ezekiel is to perform the play in two acts, one act by day and the other by night. The first act, during the day, consists of his having to bring out from the house before their eyes the “baggage for exile”, that is, no more than the very essentials (verse 4a; cf. Jer 46:19). The performance of the second act takes place at night (verse 4b). While the exiles stand by and watch, he himself must come out in the evening and move away, as exiles move away.

To make it look like a real run, he must break through the wall to make an escape route and through it bring out everything (verse 5). To do this, he must carry everything on his shoulder, as exiles do (verse 6). It must be done at night. He must also cover his face, as people do who do not want to be recognized. Also, it is a sign that he will not see the land, because he is leaving it. Likewise, those who are still living in Jerusalem today will not see the land from which they will be carried away as exiles.

The LORD has given Ezekiel as a sign. In this sign, not only the future is announced, but it also shows what it looks like. In and during Ezekiel’s performance, the future becomes present. What is going to happen is seen in reality in the sign.

Ezekiel does exactly what the LORD has commanded him (verse 7), although he himself may not yet have understood what it means. It proves the utter obedience of the prophet. He literally does what the LORD has told him to do. All his actions are described again, except for covering his face. So he stands there waiting for further instructions. These come in the morning. The LORD gives him the explanation in the following verses, which he is also to pass on.

## Eze 12:8-16 | The Exile of the King

*8 In the morning the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 9 "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?' 10 Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This burden [concerns] the prince in Jerusalem as well as all the house of Israel who are in it.'" 11 Say, 'I am a sign to you. As I have done, so it will be done to them; they will go into exile, into captivity.' 12 The prince who is among them will load [his baggage] on [his] shoulder in the dark and go out. They will dig a hole through the wall to bring [it] out. He will cover his face so that he can not see the land with [his] eyes. 13 I will also spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. And I will bring him to Babylon in the land of the Chaldeans; yet he will not see it, though he will die there. 14 I will scatter to every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops; and I will draw out a sword after them. 15 So they will know that I am the LORD when I scatter them among the nations and spread them among the countries. 16 But I will spare a few of them from the sword, the famine and the pestilence that they may tell all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the LORD."*

When Ezekiel has performed his play, the next morning the word of the LORD comes to him (verse 8). The LORD is curious, as it were, about the reaction of the people (verse 9). How did they react to the performance? Did they also ask Ezekiel about the meaning? Whether they did or not, in any case Ezekiel must go and tell them what he wanted to make clear with his performance (verse 10). What he has played out is a speaking of God that applies to the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel in Jerusalem. He must say in plain words that he is a sign and that what he has played out will actually happen to the prince and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (verse 11).

Ezekiel says that in his performance he has mainly played out what will happen to the prince (verse 12). That prince is Zedekiah. Several years later, what Ezekiel has played out and is described again here will literally happen to Zedekiah (2Kgs 25:1-7; Jer 39:1-10; 52:7-11). Zedekiah flees through the wall at night. But the soldiers of the king of Babylon pursue

him and seize him. So the LORD spreads His net over him and takes him captive (verse 13). It is not bad luck that Zedekiah is seized.

Zedekiah is taken to Riblah and there his eyes are put out. Then the Chaldeans take him to Babylon, but he cannot see that land because he is blind. There, in Babylon, he dies. Those who helped him flee are scattered by the LORD throughout all the winds and will fall there by the sword (verse 14). Through their dispersion and scattering, they will know that He is the LORD (verse 15).

The dramatic conquest of Jerusalem and the extermination of its inhabitants will not put a final end to them (verse 16). The LORD will leave a small number of people alive. He will spare them so that they can tell the nations why all this has happened to them (cf. Eze 14:22; 33:21). It is the message to all that God punishes evil no matter how long the judgment waits because He is longsuffering. It is folly to deny eternal judgment when there is so much evidence that God punishes evil.

We can learn another lesson from the play that Ezekiel performed. Is our life in line with what he showed? Do we have only the bare necessities and are we ready to go to another place (1Pet 1:13). For us, it is not a departure to go into exile, but to the Father's house. Maybe then people will ask us why we live the way we do. Then we can point them to the anger of God that is coming upon the world and to the Savior Who can and wants to save from it. We can then give witness to the hope that is in us (1Pet 3:15a).

### **Eze 12:17-20 | Eating and Drinking in Fear**

*17 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 18 "Son of man, eat your bread with trembling and drink your water with quivering and anxiety. 19 Then say to the people of the land, 'Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel, "They will eat their bread with anxiety and drink their water with horror, because their land will be stripped of its fullness on account of the violence of all who live in it. 20 The inhabited cities will be laid waste and the land will be a desolation. So you will know that I am the LORD."'"*

Ezekiel is commanded by the LORD to perform a second symbolic act (verses 17-18). He is to perform a new drama. He is to eat his bread with trembling and drink his water with quivering and anxiety. The explanation of this he must communicate to the people of the land, which are the fellow exiles in Babylon. By the way he eats his bread and drinks his water, he portrays the hunger and thirst and spiritual situation that will be in Jerusalem through Nebuchadnezzar's siege. That situation will be there even afterward, when only a few are left in the city (verse 19).

They will take to themselves the meager rations of bread and water under constant threat and stress. "Anxiety" and "horror" point to the fear that will characterize the time ahead. The cause of this situation is the violence that prevails in the city. Everyone is out for their own benefit and seeks it at the expense of others. The result is the laying waste of the inhabited cities and the turning of the land into a desolation (verse 20). Thus it will become known that He is the LORD, because they have not been willing to listen to Him in any other way.

### **Eze 12:21-28 | Contempt of True Prophecy**

*21 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 22 "Son of man, what is this proverb you [people] have concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The days are long and every vision fails'? 23 Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will make this proverb cease so that they will no longer use it as a proverb in Israel." But tell them, "The days draw near as well as the fulfillment of every vision. 24 For there will no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25 For I the LORD will speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, for in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it," declares the Lord GOD.'" 26 Furthermore, the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 27 "Son of man, behold, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees is for many years [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. Whatever word I speak will be performed,"'" declares the Lord GOD.*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel again as "son of man" (verses 21-22). The LORD points him to the reaction of His people who are in

“the land of Israel” to the prophecies He has spoken. They respond with rejection, saying that the prophecy will not be fulfilled (Jer 17:15; Amos 6:3; Isa 5:19). The days go on and on and nothing of what has been announced happens. They just don’t believe that what the prophets have foretold to them in the Name of the LORD is going to happen.

Ezekiel must tell them, in the Name of the Lord GOD, that He will cause their mocking to cease (verse 23; cf. 2Pet 3:3-4). They won’t be laughing for long. The days announced and the fulfillment of every vision draw near. The time of the fulfillment of the prophetic word is near. Then it will be over with all lie prophecy which is essentially “flattering divination”, or demonic activity (verse 24). During the life of the lying prophets, God will fulfill His word and He will punish the rebellious house (verse 25). Then the lying prophets will be openly belied. The LORD will speak and His speaking is the guarantee that it will happen.

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel one more time about the attitude of the people toward prophecy (verses 26-27). There are also those of the house of Israel who say that it will be a long time before what the LORD has foretold will happen. This is a different attitude from the previous category of people. They do not deny the prophecy, but they put off its fulfillment. The prophecy has no effect on their lives. They think it will take a while. They don’t let God’s Word upset them and lead them to repentance, but continue with their wicked lives (Ecc 8:11). They too are told that none of the LORD’s words will be delayed any longer (verse 28). The word that the LORD has spoken will be fulfilled.

For us, the danger of the second attitude is also great. We do believe in what God’s Word says about the future, but the prophecy has little effect on our lives. There is an urgent need to engage with the prophecy of God’s Word so that we see that the coming of Christ is near. When we engage in prophecy, the morning star rises in our hearts (2Pet 1:19) and we know that “the Sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2), that is the Lord Jesus, will soon appear.

It will also separate us from the world and its things. The world is full of idolatry, wickedness and immorality. Judgment cannot be long in coming.

Let us not be like the evil slave who says in his heart: “My master is not coming for a long time”, and then starts behaving evil (Mt 24:48-51). Let us look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus as people who are waiting for their Lord and whose lamps are burning and shining a bright light (Lk 12:35-36).

## Ezekiel 13

### Introduction

Ezekiel has announced in the previous chapters the judgment of the LORD on Jerusalem, the leaders and the king. Now he addresses the false prophets in Jerusalem. Jeremiah also spoke frequently against the false prophets (Jer 23:13-15,21-22). The message of the false prophets in Jerusalem that flourished for so long in Judah has blown over to Babylon and flourished among the exiles as well. This chapter is one of those important chapters in the Old Testament that deal with false prophecy and puts this false prophecy in a clear light.

### Eze 13:1-16 | Judgment on the False Prophets

*1 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, 'Listen to the word of the LORD! 3 Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. 4 O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins. 5 You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the LORD. 6 They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, 'The LORD declares,' when the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of [their] word. 7 Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said, 'The LORD declares,' but it is not I who have spoken?"'" 8 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you," declares the Lord GOD. 9 "So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord GOD. 10 It is definitely because they have misled My people by saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace. And when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash; 11 [so] tell those who*

*plaster [it] over with whitewash, that it will fall. A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall; and a violent wind will break out. 12 Behold, when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked, 'Where is the plaster with which you plastered [it]?'” 13 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, “I will make a violent wind break out in My wrath. There will also be in My anger a flooding rain and hailstones to consume [it] in wrath. 14 So I will tear down the wall which you plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation is laid bare; and when it falls, you will be consumed in its midst. And you will know that I am the LORD. 15 Thus I will spend My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it over with whitewash; and I will say to you, ‘The wall is gone and its plasterers are gone, 16 [along with] the prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace,’ declares the Lord GOD.*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel again (verse 1). The LORD calls him “son of man” again (verse 2). He is commanded to call the false prophets, who prophesy according from their own inspiration – literally “from their own heart” (cf. Isa 59:13) – to listen to the word of the LORD for them. These prophets are not called ‘the prophets of the LORD’, but are sarcastically referred to as “the prophets of Israel”. They are the spiritual leaders to whom the rebellious people love to listen. However, their message has no higher authority than their own heart. They can be compared to the false teachers in our day (2Pet 2:1-2).

The word that follows unmasks these prophets and they hear harsh judgment pronounced on them. The “woe” sounds over those whom the LORD calls “foolish prophets” (verse 3). A fool is one who says in his heart: “There is no God” (Psa 14:1b). Such a person is an arrogant person who acts unscrupulously. These prophets are foolish and act without regard to God. They are also not following the Spirit of God, but their own spirit. They have seen nothing of the word of the LORD and yet they prophesy in His Name.

The LORD speaks to Israel of those foolish prophets as “your prophets” (verse 4). They are not His prophets, but those of the people (cf. Lam 2:14). He compares those prophets to the wily foxes who search among the ruins for something of their liking (cf. Lam 5:18; Song 2:15; Lk 13:32). Foxes make

burrows in the ruins and undermine the foundations, making the ruins even bigger. Thus the false prophet undermines the foundations of the life of God's people. He is the cause of the ruin that God's people have become and is constantly making it bigger.

False prophets have not gone up into the breaches (verse 5), which speaks of intercession and restoration (Eze 22:30; Psa 106:23; Isa 58:12b). Nor did they provide a wall to protect them. They have not acted for the benefit of the people, but have worked and still seek the calamity of the people. Therefore, the house of Israel cannot stand "on the day of the LORD", which is the day when Jerusalem is taken by the enemy. This refers to the upcoming conquest by the armies of Babylon, but also to the destruction of Jerusalem in the end time.

What these false prophets are doing is passing on their own fantasies which are falsehood and lying divination. They say that they received these visions from the LORD (verse 6), although they know very well that the LORD did not send them. Yet they believe that their word will come true. It is a great deception of themselves and of God's people.

The LORD once again holds them up as being engaged in false prophecy whereby they say that the LORD has spoken, when He has not spoken (verse 7). This attitude is a great insult to Him. Words are being put into His mouth that He has not spoken. To do such a thing is reprehensible. What would we say if people passed on words that we would have said, when we did not say them? Isn't that shocking?

The Lord GOD (*Adonai Yahweh*) will repay them for speaking false things and for having seen lies (verse 8). These sins He cannot leave unpunished. He will turn His hand in judgment against the false prophets because of their false visions and their lying divinations (verse 9). They will have "no place in the council" of His people, that is, the true Israel.

The LORD knows exactly who belong to the counsel of His people, for they are all written down "in the register of the house of Israel" – cf. "the book of life" (Exo 32:32; Psa 69:28; Isa 4:3; Dan 12:1; Lk 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 20:12; 21:27; Mal 3:16). The names of these people are not in it (cf. Rev 13:8). Therefore, they miss the ultimate blessing of the land. They will

never return to the land, nor will they ever enter the land, not even in the resurrection. When they – removed from all blessing – find themselves under the eternal judgment of God, they will recognize that He is the LORD (Phil 2:10).

The false prophets have led the people astray with their nice talk of peace (verse 10). There is no peace at all. How can there be peace when the people of Jerusalem live in rebellion against the LORD? But the pretty talk of the false prophets works. People think they can feel safe because of the words of the false prophets which seem like a protective wall. However, it is a shaky wall.

The listeners of the prophets do not see this, because that wall is plastered with whitewash so that it still appears strong. With fine-sounding words the false prophets cover up all the iniquity of the people: It is not all that bad; they need not worry; peace will surely come (cf. Deu 29:19-20; Jer 6:14; 8:11). And this, while calamity is imminent and also announced by the true prophets of God.

The false prophets are “like whitewashed tombs” (Mt 23:27). Ezekiel must tell these whitewash specialists that the wall will fall down (verse 11). For there will come “a flooding rain” with “hailstones and a violent wind”. Rain, hail and storm are symbols of the judgment (cf. Job 38:22-23; Isa 29:6) that the Babylonians will bring on the city. Then their self-made wall of fancy talk will fall down. Then it will be said to them: ‘Where are your nice talks now?’ (verse 12).

The LORD declares that the violent wind that breaks out comes from Him in His wrath on them (verse 13). His wrath on them is behind the all-splashing rain. The hailstones are an expression of His wrath. This violence of the enemy will lead to a devastating end of the city. These are not pretty talk, but this is raw reality. The wall with its plaster will be brought down to the ground (verse 14). The words of the false prophets turn out to have been hot air. All so-called protection disappears. The city is laid in ruins and in the midst of it lie the bodies of the fallen false prophets. Thus the false prophets will know that He is the LORD, Who does what He says.

Here we see the tremendous contrast between the words of the false prophets and the words of the LORD. He will execute His wrath against all bluster about security and covering up iniquity (verse 15). Then He will point to the wall and its plasterers and show that they are no more. So true are His words. How utterly opposed these words are to all the falsehoods of the false prophets of Israel who have prophesied about Jerusalem that there will be peace, but have done so from their imagination, for there is no peace at all (verse 16). Only what the Lord GOD speaks is reliable. The words of God are trustworthy and come true in every detail.

### **Eze 13:17-23 | Judgment on the False Prophetesses**

*17 "Now you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who are prophesying from their own inspiration. Prophesy against them 18 and say, "Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe to the women who sew [magic] bands on all wrists and make veils for the heads of [persons] of every stature to hunt down lives! Will you hunt down the lives of My people, but preserve the lives [of others] for yourselves? 19 For handfuls of barley and fragments of bread, you have profaned Me to My people to put to death some who should not die and to keep others alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies."'" 20 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against your [magic] bands by which you hunt lives there as birds and I will tear them from your arms; and I will let them go, even those lives whom you hunt as birds. 21 I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hands, and they will no longer be in your hands to be hunted; and you will know that I am the LORD. 22 Because you disheartened the righteous with falsehood when I did not cause him grief, but have encouraged the wicked not to turn from his wicked way [and] preserve his life, 23 therefore, you women will no longer see false visions or practice divination, and I will deliver My people out of your hand. Thus you will know that I am the LORD."*

Besides false prophets, there are also false prophetesses. About them also comes a word from the LORD to Ezekiel (verse 17). They are women of the people to whom Ezekiel belongs, "the daughters of your people", who also speak from their own inspiration (cf. verse 2). He is to set his face against them and prophesy against them. These women are engaged in sorcery (verse 18). With them there is no false appeal to the Name of the

LORD with a statement like “the LORD declares”, but an outright preaching and practice of apostasy.

Woe is also pronounced upon them, as well as upon their male colleagues (verse 3). Their business is sewing “magic bands” around “all wrists” and making large and small “veils” for large and small heads. They know exactly who fits what. The ‘outfit’ they offer is supposed to provide protection from evil spirits.

What happens in reality is that with their demonic activities they entangle souls in satan’s nets and lead them on the road to destruction. The magic bands on the wrists act like chains by which a prisoner is bound and deprived of his freedom. The veil speaks of being under the power of another, belonging to someone else (Gen 24:65). This is how these demonically controlled women capture the souls of God’s people. Let them not think that they will preserve their own souls in life.

Their demonic pursuits profane the LORD to His people (verse 19). The prophetesses don’t let themselves pay fat for it either. For their obscure services they ask for only a few hands of barley and a few fragments of bread. It is a time of scarcity and everyone should be able to benefit from their ‘gift’, they think. That way, at least they have a nice supply of food. God is disgusted with them because they turn justice upside down. They lie to the people in the most terrible way. And the people listen. The lying prophets stand guilty because of their lies, and the people stand guilty because they listen to those lies. Every member of God’s people must reject the lie and seek the truth.

The work of these women results in some put to death who should not die and others being kept alive who should not live. The true prophets threaten the wicked with God’s judgment and comfort the righteous with His gracious promises. The false prophets act just the other way around. They are bent on destroying the righteous by leading them away from the straight path and keeping the souls of the wicked alive by intoxicating them with lies.

The Lord GOD will judge the lying prophets (verse 20). He will tear off their magic bands from their arms. Those bands are like shackles. They

are chains with which people are caught as if they were birds. The souls caught by them the LORD will set free by breaking their sorceries. The veils, by which sight is taken away, He will tear (verse 21), so that they may see clearly. Thus He will rescue His people from their hand, in which they were a prey. Then those women will know that He is the LORD. He is the almighty Conqueror over all the powers of darkness.

Ties to the occult must be severed, or true freedom will never come. As long as someone maintains something of the occult in his life, he remains a prey to satan. Only God can break those bonds and give clear vision of Who He is. He wants to do that with every person who turns to Him.

The false prophetesses have acted entirely contrary to the heart of God (verse 22). They have grieved the heart of the righteous, which is set on Him, by telling lies. The sorrow that this means for them does not come from Him. The heart of the righteous, which shares in the feelings of God, is also grieved because the false prophetesses have encouraged the wicked in his wickedness, so that he does not repent of his evil way and God keeps him alive.

Spreading lies causes sadness in those who want to live according to the will of the Lord for the lie itself and for the effect of the lie in those who believe and follow the lie. God wants to save people, but lie prophetesses are out to destroy people. They allow themselves to be used by the father of lies who is a murderer of people from the beginning (Jn 8:44).

God will put a stop to these dark practices and judge the practitioners of this occultism (verse 23). False visions and divination He will eradicate by the judgment on its practitioners. Thus, He will rescue His people from the hand of these people. By this the prophets will know that He is the LORD. He is proving Himself to be the LORD in carrying out the judgment He has promised.

## Ezekiel 14

### **Eze 14:1-11 | Punishment of the Idolaters**

*1 Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me. 2 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 3 "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all? 4 Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and [then] comes to the prophet, I the LORD will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols, 5 in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols.'" 6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations. 7 For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and [then] comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the LORD will be brought to answer him in My own person. 8 I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the LORD. 9 "But if the prophet is prevailed upon to speak a word, it is I, the LORD, who have prevailed upon that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel. 10 They will bear [the punishment of] their iniquity; as the iniquity of the inquirer is, so the iniquity of the prophet will be, 11 in order that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me and no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions. Thus they will be My people, and I shall be their God,"' declares the Lord GOD."*

Ezekiel is visited by a delegation of elders of Israel (verse 1; cf. Eze 8:1; 20:1). They come to seek counsel of the LORD through him. They sit down before him, at his feet, an attitude that indicates they recognize him as a true prophet of God and want to listen to him. Before any of these elders even say a word, God Himself speaks to Ezekiel (verse 2). He knows their

hypocrisy and tells Ezekiel what He sees in the hearts of the elders (cf. Eze 8:12; Mt 15:19).

He sees that the hearts of these people are full of “idols” literally “stink gods” that they themselves have set up in their hearts (verse 3). Several times He says that their hearts are full of those stink gods. Possibly they are not openly serving the idols, but are cherishing them in their hearts. By doing so, they have set before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. This inner idolatry is the cause of their misery.

Even today there is much sneaky idolatry, inner bondage to sins that are secretly cherished. When we think of inner bondage, we can think of addiction to the ‘social media’, of the internet and smartphone use. This addiction is justified by ‘needing’ it, but studies have shown that many can no longer live without social media. Every person who claims to be a child of God would do well to ask himself honestly before the Lord whether this kind of hypocrisy is also present in him.

Now these elders addicted to idolatry come to the LORD to consult Him. They come to Him just as they go to their idols which they cherish in their hearts while consulting Him. But will He allow Himself to be consulted by those who live in hypocrisy in this way? This double-mindedness He abhors (Mt 6:22-24; Jam 4:8). He is entitled to their undivided reverence.

Ezekiel is to pass on to them the word of the LORD (verse 4). The answer is general: it applies to “any man of the house of Israel” who commits this hidden idolatry. This idolatry is a stumbling block over which they fall and by which they close the way to God to themselves. A person who comes to God while clinging to the multitude of his stink gods can count on a personal response from God. That response is not a word from the prophet, but a direct act of God Himself. God will respond by an act of judgment.

How dare such a person appear in the presence of the Holy One! The LORD will “lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel”, where the stink gods dwell (verse 5). They do come to Him, but because of their stink gods they are estranged from Him. They no longer know Him and He can no longer acknowledge them.

Yet the LORD in His grace still speaks of an opportunity to repent (verse 6). Then they must turn away from their stink gods, which means to condemn and reject them. They must also turn their faces away from all their abominations, which is to stop all their idolatrous practices that they secretly engage in. True repentance is self-judgment, confession of evil and ceasing to do evil.

The word about the stink gods in the heart and the stumbling block that each puts right before his face applies to both the born Israelite and the immigrant who stays in their midst (verse 7). Whoever comes to the prophet with his stink gods in his heart to consult God through him will receive the appropriate answer from God. He will have to deal with God Himself, Who will judge him (verse 8). This will happen in a way that people will make a proverb out of it. Thus that man will be eradicated from God's people and he will live on in memory through the proverb. That will be connected with the testimony of the LORD that He is truly the LORD.

A prophet can be prevailed upon by these people, with stink gods in their hearts (verse 9). The key for him is to live close to the LORD in order not to be prevailed upon (cf. Jos 9:9-15; 1Kgs 14:1-5; Acts 5:1-5,7-9). The LORD will make it clear what needs to be done. If people come to a false prophet to consult the LORD through him, those people will be prevailed upon by the LORD Himself. Then He will give them over to "a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false" (2Thes 2:11; 1Kgs 22:23) and to their "depraved mind" (Rom 1:28). Evil does not come from God (Jam 1:13), but He in His wisdom and power can use it to accomplish His purpose (Job 12:16).

He will judge the false prophet and eradicate him from the midst of His people. He cannot let any deception go unpunished. The prophet will bear his iniquity as well as the inquirer (verse 10). One (the prophet) has put his own views and the other (the inquirer) has put his own lusts above the truth of God and thus despises God and His truth.

The purpose of all God's punishments is that the evil will be removed and the remaining people – that is then His entire people – will not stray from Him again (verse 11). When they no longer stray from Him and also

“no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions”, He can again recognize them as His people. Then the connection between Him and His people is restored; they will be His people and He shall be their God. That situation is what He desires.

Here a ray of hope lights up in Ezekiel’s otherwise so menacing message. He cannot leave out the foreshadowing of judgments, but he also sees the silver lining around the dark, threatening clouds. In the end, some good will come out of it as well. God’s purposes will not be undone by the destruction of earthly Jerusalem.

### **Eze 14:12-23 | Four Severe Judgments and Three Righteous Men**

*12 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 13 “Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it and cut off from it both man and beast, 14 even [though] these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their [own] righteousness they could [only] deliver themselves,” declares the Lord GOD. 15 “If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts, 16 [though] these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either [their] sons or [their] daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate. 17 Or [if] I should bring a sword on that country and say, ‘Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,’ 18 even [though] these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either [their] sons or [their] daughters, but they alone would be delivered. 19 Or [if] I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it to cut off man and beast from it, 20 even [though] Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either [their] son or [their] daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.” 21 For thus says the Lord GOD, “How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague to cut off man and beast from it! 22 Yet, behold, survivors will be left in it who will be brought out, [both] sons and daughters. Behold, they are going to come forth to you*

*and you will see their conduct and actions; then you will be comforted for the calamity which I have brought against Jerusalem for everything which I have brought upon it. 23 Then they will comfort you when you see their conduct and actions, for you will know that I have not done in vain whatever I did to it," declares the Lord GOD.*

A new word from the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 12). Very generally the LORD speaks of "a country" (verse 13). So it does not refer only to Israel, although it is later applied again specifically to Israel and also the words "committing unfaithfulness" does remind one strongly of Israel. Nevertheless, God has a right that every nation should fear and serve Him. His judgments are therefore general. He stretches out His hand against every nation that does not reckon with Him.

In His judgment on unfaithfulness to Him, He uses four means, which He calls "My four severe judgments" later, in verse 21. The number four indicates dominion over the earth (cf. "the fourth day", Gen 1:14-19). Every land, everywhere on earth in each of the four winds, is under the dominion of God. The four means He uses to judge belong to the earth.

The first judgment is a "famine". He will send it in countries that have cast Him aside. As a result, He will wipe out man and beast there through this plague. There is, however, the possibility of escaping this judgment, namely through personal repentance and doing righteousness (verse 14). The LORD points to three outstanding men, Noah, Daniel and Job, who despite their righteousness would still not be able to deliver their land from this judgment (cf. Jer 15:1-4). By their righteousness, they could only deliver themselves.

Two of these three men have been in very critical situations; the third is still living in it. Noah has lived in a world full of corruption and violence (Gen 6:6,13). Daniel lives in an environment that has sought to tempt him to give in to the lusts of the flesh and thus deny the faith of the fathers, the faith in the LORD, the God of Israel (Dan 1:5-8). Job has been the direct target of satan's fiercest attacks (Job 1:8-12; 2:1-7). We see in them victors over the world (Noah), the flesh (Daniel) and satan (Job). But they delivered only themselves, without being able to change the situation around them.

Each is delivered only by a life of righteousness, which can only be lived if there is repentance to and faith in God.

Among the exiles there is a hope that God will spare the people who have fallen into idolatry for the sake of a few God-fearing people who are sparingly found in Jerusalem. After all, He would also have spared Sodom if ten righteous people had been found there (Gen 18:32). The LORD smashes that completely unjustified hope. There is no ground for thinking such a thing. The men He mentions, who are held in high regard by Him because of their righteousness and godliness, if they lived in the threatened land, they would deliver only themselves, but no one else. No one should hide behind the fact that he has a praying mother and therefore it will be all right with him, while he continues to live in sin.

That these three men are mentioned also speaks to the fact that these judgments are not just on Israel. Noah and Job are not Israelites, Daniel is, but he lived most of his life in exile outside of Israel. These three men did manage to do something for others. Noah delivered his home (Gen 6:18) and Daniel and Job their friends (Dan 2:17-18; Job 42:7-10). That great has been their righteousness before God and men (Noah), their intercession with the mighty of the earth, Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel), and their intercession for friends with God (Job).

This does not mean that the righteousness of these three men for their families and friends also meant the salvation of the souls of their families and friends before God. Each must come before God with his own sins and confess them. Only the Lord Jesus suffered substitutionary for others. On the basis of His work, Noah, Daniel and Job also received righteousness before God.

The second judgment God uses is that of the "wild beasts" He allows to pass through the land (verse 15). Those wild beasts will rob the people of children and make the land depopulated and desolate. No one will dare to cultivate the land or pass through it for fear of the wild beasts. Even in this judgment, these three excellent men, if they had been in their midst, would not have been able to provide relief (verse 16). The sons and daughters will

die and the land will become desolate, while only these three men would be delivered.

The third judgment is that of “the sword” (verse 17). God will also be able to command the sword to pass through the land, such as in the form of war. As a result, man and beast will be cut off by Him. Again, outstanding believers like the three men mentioned above would not be able to help them escape this judgment (verse 18). They would not be able to deliver sons and daughters. They themselves alone would be delivered.

The fourth judgment is that of the deadly disease the “plague” (verse 19). Of this God says that He pours out His wrath in blood on them. Man and beast are killed by it. Noah, Daniel and Job also would not have been able to reverse this plague if they lived in the midst of the people (verse 20). They would not have been able to deliver any descendants of the people from God’s wrath. The only thing they could deliver is their own lives and that is because of their righteous lives.

There is only one righteous One Who by His righteousness delivered not only His own life, but also the lives of countless others. The Lord Jesus is the Just Who suffered for unjust people so that He might bring them to God (1Pet 3:18a). He unites in Himself all the excellencies of the three righteous men mentioned above. He is able to deliver sons and daughters and bring them to glory (Heb 2:10).

God mentions the judgments again, calling them “My four severe judgments” (verse 21). He sends all four of them “against Jerusalem”. He now specifically mentions Jerusalem and no longer generally “a country” (verse 13). He will cut off man and beast from Jerusalem. Yet immediately afterwards He speaks of “survivors”, literally “escaped ones” (verse 22). He introduces this with the word “behold”. Not all the inhabitants of Jerusalem will perish. There are those, the escaped ones, who “will be left in it”. These will be taken out of Jerusalem and “are going to come forth to you”, that is, they will be taken to Babylon, where Ezekiel and his fellow exiles are now.

When they get there, they will tell the exiles about “their conduct and actions”. As a result, the exiles will be “comforted” (verse 23). The comfort is

in the fact that what the LORD has brought upon Jerusalem is the fulfillment of His word. He could not have acted otherwise than He did and He did what He said He would do. They will be at peace with God's judgment on Jerusalem and recognize that the judgment is deserved. It is always a comfort to remember that the Lord fulfills His Word.

## Ezekiel 15

### **Introduction**

The vindication of God's judgment against Judah continues in Ezekiel 15-17, but the nature of the defense changes. Ezekiel uses parables in these chapters to paint the ingratitude, sin, and rebellion of God's people. He describes

1. the useless vine (Ezekiel 15:1-8);
2. the faithless woman (Ezekiel 16:1-43);
3. the deeply sunken sister (Ezekiel 16:44-63);
4. the lowly vine (Ezekiel 17:1-21);
5. the stately cedar (Ezekiel 17:22-24).

Ezekiel 15 deals with the opinion that prevails among the people that it is impossible that the LORD will abandon them, His chosen people. They believe that their election is based on a preference the LORD has for them because they are better than other nations. For this reason, they do not believe Ezekiel's message. Therefore, Ezekiel must speak from the LORD the parable of the useless vine. They must remember well that they cannot be God's pleasure if they do not bear fruit.

The picture of the vine is perfectly suited to illustrate that message. These people think that because of their birth they are branches of the true vine that can never be destroyed. Ezekiel uses the wild vine to show how totally unfounded this thought is.

Later, the great Son of Man will also use the parable of the vine to explain its true purpose (Jn 15:1-2). He shows that the only way by which anyone can bear fruit is by having fellowship with Him (Jn 15:4). This applies both personally and to Israel and the church.

## Eze 15:1-5 | The Useless Wood of the Vine

*1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine [better] than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest? 3 Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can [men] take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel? 4 If it has been put into the fire for fuel, [and] the fire has consumed both of its ends and its middle part has been charred, is it [then] useful for anything? 5 Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it still be made into anything!*

The word comes to Ezekiel again (verse 1). Ezekiel is again addressed as "son of man" (verse 2). The LORD asks him some questions about the wood of the vine. The first question is what the excellence of that wood over other wood that is a branch is. The trees of the forest represent the nations (Isa 10:33-34). Compared to the nations, Israel is nothing more than a vine.

The second question is whether from the wood of a vine can be taken something of use to someone, such as to take a peg to hang something on (verse 3; cf. Isa 22:23-25; Zec 10:4). To ask the question is to answer it. The wood of the vine is ugly wood and useless for taking anything useful from it.

The only thing the wood of the vine is still useful for is to be used as fuel. If the fire has consumed a vine on both sides and there is still a small middle piece left, that middle piece is charred (verse 4). Can that still be used for something useful? If the plain wood is already useless for nothing, then wood that has been in the fire can no longer be used for anything at all (verse 5).

The value of the vine is in the fruit that should be on it, but that is not spoken of here. By the vine is meant, as usual, Israel (Psa 80:9-17; Jer 2:21; Hos 10:1; 14:8). God has expected fruit from Israel. That fruit is that they will honor Him as a royal priesthood and a holy nation (Exo 19:5-6). But Israel has refused to give Him His fruit (Isa 5:1-7; Mt 21:33-41).

To God, Israel has no value in itself. Just as the wood of the vine is not worth more than other wood, Israel is not worth more than the other na-

tions. He has chosen them in His generous love to be His people to be served and glorified by them and through them to make His Name great on earth (Deu 7:7-8).

### **Eze 15:6-8 | The Application of the Parable**

*6 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'As 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 set My face against them. [Though] they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I set My face against them. 8 Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,' declares the Lord GOD.*

The value of the vine to the LORD lies in bearing fruit for Him, and Israel has guiltily failed to do that. Therefore, He gives up the inhabitants of Jerusalem as fuel to the fire (verse 6). He has already given up "both of its ends" (verse 4) to the fire. Here we can think of the carrying away of the ten tribes in 722 BC and a transport of some distinguished people from the two tribes around 606 BC.

The charred middle part (verse 3) are the inhabitants who remained in the middle of Jerusalem. They escaped the one fire, but the LORD turns His face against them and will also burn that middle part with fire (verse 7). By this they will know that He is the LORD.

This will happen when Nebuchadnezzar takes the city and completely destroys it (verse 8). The cause of this fire is that they have "acted unfaithfully". They have trampled on the faithfulness they solemnly promised by saying they will do all that the LORD has commanded. Marital unfaithfulness is one of the most shocking things that can happen to a person. Israel has not been unfaithful just once, but their entire history is one of unfaithfulness and deceit.

We are also unfaithful when our interest is in the world and worldly things. That is a spiritual marital unfaithfulness. We then do not answer the purpose, that we are here to bear fruit for God. We are not in this world to live after our own desires and ideas. The Son created all things for Himself (Col 1:16), including us. Therefore, we might no longer live for ourselves,

but for Him Who died and rose again on our behalf (2Cor 5:15). The Lord Jesus says to us: “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and [that] your fruit would remain” (Jn 15:16a).

## Ezekiel 16

### **Introduction**

After explaining the symbol of the vine, the LORD speaks a new parable which Ezekiel is to pass on to the people. This parable covers the entire history of Jerusalem: its origin, rise, beauty and glory, apostasy and judgment, salvation and final blessing. It is a comprehensive explanation of the parable of the short previous chapter.

This chapter is best read in one breath, for it is one story. It contains a gripping and realistic description of an extraordinary nature, some of the details of which may seem strange to us. We see the repulsive picture of a prostitute. However, there is no picture that more clearly captures the reality of the city chosen by God that turns away from the one true God despite its exceptional privileges. The LORD presents this picture to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for this very reason, so that they will recognize how repulsive the sin of unfaithfulness is in His sight.

### **Eze 16:1-7 | Origin of Jerusalem**

*1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations 3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem, "Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. 4 As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. 5 No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. 6 "When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you [while you were] in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you [while you were] in your blood, 'Live!' 7 I made you numerous like plants of the field. Then you grew up, became tall and reached the age for fine ornaments; [your] breasts were formed and your hair had grown. Yet you were naked and bare.*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). The LORD addresses him as “son of man” and commands him to make known to Jerusalem her abominations (verse 2). The abominations refer to the idolatry that Jerusalem has committed and is committing and that she must come to see as the LORD sees it, that is as abominations.

The origin of the city is around the year 3000 BC in the land of the Canaanites, the habitat of the Amorites and Hittites (verse 3; Gen 10:15-16). The name of the city was originally Jebus (Jdg 19:10; 1Chr 11:4). The city is reminded of its heathen roots. By her very nature, the city is distinguished in nothing from the heathen and from her inception she has been under the strong influence of the wicked culture of Canaan.

In the time of her beginning, there is nothing attractive in the city (verse 4). On the contrary. She resembles an unwanted child who does not seem worthy of life. The not cutting of the navel cord indicates the certain death for the child. The Hittite mother apparently does not consider it worthwhile to give any care to the child at all; the child is not worth the water for cleansing. It is as worthless as the vine of the previous chapter. Even the rubbing with salt as an idolatrous ritual to protect against evil powers and the wrapping in cloths to protect against the cold are omitted.

No one looks at the city, no one wants to take any care of her (verse 5). No one who looks at it gets a sense of pity to take care of the city. It is a worthless city, which only inspires disgust in others. All one does with the city is throw her out into the open field. The child is not even a foundling. That is how little value the life of the city has in the eyes of others from the moment of her birth. Instead of the attractiveness of what is newborn, there is disgust, and instead of compassion for what is defenseless, there is contempt and rejection. Applied to the history of the people of Israel, this possibly refers to the period of slavery of the people in Egypt.

Then the LORD passes by (verse 6). He seems to be an “accidental” Passerby (compare the Good Samaritan, Lk 10:33). When He sees the child and sees its condition, how it is squirming in its blood and thus dying, He speaks that life-giving word: “Live!” While with the blood the life flows out of the child, He gives life. The wonder of unexpected salvation is re-

peated with emphasis. The child, forsaken by the parents and given up to death, is accepted by the LORD. He gives it the ability to live. He calls it from death to life, as it were. Applied to the history of Israel, we may have here an allusion to the redemption from Egypt (cf. Exo 2:25; 3:7).

Because of the LORD's great care, which is first so withheld from the child, it grows up like plants of the field (verse 7). It comes to great bloom and beauty. Thus, the once despised city grows up into one that is compared to a beautiful, marriageable woman, which is indicated by the formed breasts. The hair grows and becomes long, which speaks of dependence. She is dependent on her Savior for everything. She herself possesses nothing; she is naked and bare. Thus Israel was completely dependent on the LORD in Egypt and in the wilderness.

#### **Eze 16:8-14 | Rise of Jerusalem**

*8 "Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine," declares the Lord GOD. 9 "Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. 10 I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk. 11 I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck. 12 I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. 13 Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. 14 Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you," declares the Lord GOD.*

When the LORD passes by the second time, the castaway child whom He has given life out of *pity* also becomes an object of His *love* (verse 8). The LORD does not remain her Foster Father, but becomes her Husband. His heart goes out to Jerusalem. In addition to care, He provides the city with protection and covering, of which the "skirt" or "wing" speaks (Rth 3:9; Mt 23:37). Finally, He brings her into the closest relationship with Himself.

He establishes a covenant with her and thus she becomes His possession. All this He ratifies with an oath. In the history of Israel we see this at Sinai. This covenant is also expressed with the picture of a marriage (Isa 54:5; Jer 2:2; Hos 2:16,19).

Then He continues to make her beautiful (verses 9-13). We see this happening from the time David conquers the city of Jerusalem (1049 BC) and makes the city the royal capital. That is the time of love. The LORD chooses this city and grants it extraordinary glory.

He bathes her with water to wash off her blood from her (verse 9). Thus she is cleansed from the past. Then He anoints her with oil, expressing the great value she has for Him (cf. Jn 12:3). When we think of bathing and anointing we can also think of preparing a bride for marriage (cf. Rth 3:3; Est 2:12).

Then He puts beautiful clothing on her, the castaway foundling (verse 10; cf. Psa 45:13-14a). He does not give her this clothing to put on herself, but *He* clothes her. We can think here of all the possible privileges the LORD has given the city. These privileges are like “porpoise skin”, untouchable for corruption. The clothes of “fine linen and ... silk” shows the refined and precious nature of her privileges.

After the clothes comes the jewelry (verses 11-12). They are the ornaments of a bride (cf. Gen 24:22). The “beautiful crown” is the bride’s crown, which also shows the royal highness to which she is exalted. Next, the LORD says as it were that she may look in the mirror and then says: “Thus you were adorned” (verse 13). He points her to the gold and silver, the fine linen and silk with which He has clothed her. It must have been a breathtaking sight for her, who had been so rejected and miserable, to see what He had done to her and made of her.

In addition, He gives her the most precious food, the best nourishment for her growth (Deu 32:13-14). The land where she is is a land flowing with milk and honey. Of that food she can enjoy to the fullest. This healthy food also contributes to the development of her beauty. She becomes “exceedingly beautiful”. The LORD has done everything possible to make this despised woman someone suitable for kingship.

The city's fame extends beyond her national borders (verse 14). The surrounding nations speak of her beauty with admiration. That beauty is not her own, but that of the LORD. He has laid His glory upon her. We see this in the time of Solomon, when the rumor about Solomon "concerning the name of the LORD" is heard as far away as the distant regions (1Kgs 10:1).

### **Eze 16:15-22 | Decay of Jerusalem**

*15 "But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be [willing]. 16 You took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors and played the harlot on them, which should never come about nor happen. 17 You also took your beautiful jewels [made] of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them. 18 Then you took your embroidered cloth and covered them, and offered My oil and My incense before them. 19 Also My bread which I gave you, fine flour, oil and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them for a soothing aroma; so it happened," declares the Lord GOD. 20 "Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? 21 You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through [the fire]. 22 Besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood.*

Then comes the dramatic change introduced by the word "but" (verse 15). There is a long tirade about the terrible ingratitude she has shown toward the LORD for all the goodness with which He has favored her. After all the benefits and privileges granted, the time comes when she forgets from Whom she has received all that. She begins to rely on her beauty and forgets Him Who granted her that beauty, to Whom she owes it (Deu 32:15).

In her pride and haughtiness she becomes unfaithful to Him and starts acting lewdly, she starts playing the harlot. How deeply she sinks! To every one who passes by, that is, to every people with whom she comes into contact, she pours out her harlotry. Her beauty, which should be only for the LORD, she gives away to strangers. We see that this development begins

as early as the days of Solomon. Solomon, with his love for many women, also brings the gods of those women into his home (1Kgs 11:1-8).

What Jerusalem has received from the LORD as an adornment for herself is used to adorn the places where she practices her idolatrous harlotry (verse 16). She acts like the harlots, who are also used to decorate their beds to entice men into fornication (Pro 7:15-17). Her behavior is unparalleled. Here the saying applies that the decay of the best is the worst decay. We hear the grief in the voice of the LORD when He says how she used the beautiful jewels of gold and silver that He had given her to make idols out of them and to bow down before them and thus play the harlot with them (verse 17).

Another part of the beautiful clothing given to her by the LORD she uses to adorn her idols (verse 18; Jer 10:9). In front of these adorned idols she then places "My oil and My incense". The LORD is set aside, banished, grossly insulted. By thus dealing with all that He has given her in His mercy and His love, no affront is spared Him. Even the food which He has given her and by which she has become so beautiful is offered as a soothing aroma to the idols of the heathen (verse 19). In the words "so it happened", we hear how deeply the LORD feels grieved.

As if all this abominable harlotry were not enough, she also brings her children, whom she gave birth to Him, as sacrifices to the idols (verse 20). The children who belong to Him by virtue of the covenant (Deu 14:1; Isa 1:2) are taken from Him. They are slaughtered and then offered as burnt offerings (verse 21; 2Kgs 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; Psa 106:37; Jer 32:35).

No parent couple has an absolute right to their children. God gives life and it belongs to Him. Countless parents, however, do not care about God. Even in Christian families, parents often do not think about the fact that they have been given their children to raise them for God (Eph 6:4). Many parents want their children to live up to *their* ideals so they can show them off. They do not realize that they are sacrificing their children to modern idols in this way.

In committing all these abominations and harlotries, Jerusalem did not think back to her past, what she had been like, and thus not at all to what

the LORD did to her afterwards (verse 22). Literally everything Jerusalem owes to the LORD. He, when she lay utterly helpless, naked and bare and squirming in her blood, took care of her with an everlasting love. He saved her from that misery. But she totally forgot about all the benefits.

Are we not also often forgetful? If we forget where we come from and what the Lord has done with us, we will be able to fall into the grossest sins and greatest abominations. This is why it is so important that we say with our hearts: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits" (Psa 103:2).

### **Eze 16:23-29 | Jerusalem Continues to Sin**

23 "Then it came about after all your wickedness ('Woe, woe to you!' declares the Lord GOD), 24 that you built yourself a shrine and made yourself a high place in every square. 25 You built yourself a high place at the top of every street and made your beauty abominable, and you spread your legs to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry. 26 You also played the harlot with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and multiplied your harlotry to make Me angry. 27 Behold now, I have stretched out My hand against you and diminished your rations. And I delivered you up to the desire of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who are ashamed of your lewd conduct. 28 Moreover, you played the harlot with the Assyrians because you were not satisfied; you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. 29 You also multiplied your harlotry with the land of merchants, Chaldea, yet even with this you were not satisfied.'""

The evil that Jerusalem practices knows no end (verse 23). The Lord GOD (*Adonai Yahweh*) pronounces a twofold "woe" over it, so abominable is it to Him. Jerusalem continues idolatry and builds a shrine for herself and makes high place for herself in every square (verse 24). She not only uses already existing high places, but adds new ones at will.

High places are built at the tops of every street, in order to shamelessly indulge in fornication in a spiritual sense (verse 25). Jerusalem is an attractive trading partner, which abominably abuses her attractiveness to establish relations with other peoples. She goes deep into corruption to

curry favor with others. She also goes wide into corruption, for from her harlotries she excludes no one.

The LORD lists some of the main harlotries. Jerusalem plays the harlot “with the Egyptians”, that is, she adopts the gods of the Egyptians and serves them (verse 26). This started in the time of King Solomon. Possibly this also refers to the political movement in Israel that took refuge in Egypt and imitated Egyptian customs. The heavily built stature of the Egyptians may have been something for Jerusalem to envy. This is how she wants to look and impress. Jerusalem is importing Egyptian culture, as it were. That is a slap in the face to the LORD, Who wants to dwell in Jerusalem and has redeemed His people from Egypt. Jerusalem provokes Him to anger with her penchant for Egypt.

We, too, must realize that we dishonor the Lord greatly when we give things of the world a place in our lives again. He has rescued us “from this present evil age” (Gal 1:4). How would we somehow seek again that from which He has rescued us and make room in our lives to seek our support from it? We are then like a dog that has returned to its own vomit or a sow that, after washing, returns to the mire to wallow in it again (2Pet 2:22). If we do so, we provoke Him to anger and He will have to discipline us. “If we are faithless, He remains faithful” (2Tim 2:13), meaning faithful to Himself, which means that He will stand against us in His faithfulness if we go a way of unfaithfulness.

The LORD stretches out His hand in judgment against Jerusalem and diminishes her portion of food by allowing the enemy to gain control of the land and consequently of the harvest (verse 27). In the time of the judges, it is primarily the Philistines whom the LORD uses to discipline His people (Jdg 10:7; 15:11; 1Sam 4:1-10). They are Israel’s hereditary enemies at that time and still are. Even they are ashamed of Jerusalem’s lewd conduct. By “the daughters of the Philistines” are meant the cities of the Philistines.

After yielding to the idolatry of Egypt, Jerusalem plays the harlot “with the Assyrians”, that is, she embraces the idols of Assyria (verse 28). These idols are brought into Jerusalem by King Ahaz and King Manasseh (2Kgs 16:7; 21:3). Jerusalem is truly insatiable in her desire for idolatry. Playing

the harlot with the Assyrians also refers to the party seeking political and military support from the king of Assyria (2Chr 28:16; Hos 5:13; 7:11).

After Assyria has fallen away as a world power and Babylon holds the world power, Jerusalem seeks trade relations with Chaldea, which is Babylon (verse 29). That opens the door for the entry of Babylonian idolatry. And it sounds like a horrible refrain, that even by this she is not satisfied with idolatry.

### **Eze 16:30-34 | Jerusalem, a Special Harlot**

*30 "How languishing is your heart," declares the Lord GOD, "while you do all these things, the actions of a bold-faced harlot. 31 When you built your shrine at the beginning of every street and made your high place in every square, in disdain for money, you were not like a harlot. 32 You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband! 33 Men give gifts to all harlots, but you give your gifts to all your lovers to bribe them to come to you from every direction for your harlotries. 34 Thus you are different from those women in your harlotries, in that no one plays the harlot as you do, because you give money and no money is given you; thus you are different."*

The heart of Jerusalem has been utterly captured by harlotry (verse 30). She has become the most shameless of all harlots. She has shamelessly pursued all the gods of the nations and has bowed down before them at every street and square. There she stands with her harlot's wages in her hand (verse 31). In doing so, she is not even a real harlot who has received money for her disgusting act. She is a woman who is all about playing the harlot, about committing adultery. It is like a woman who offers herself to strange men out of pure lust. It is supreme unfaithfulness to her own Husband, the LORD (verse 32).

Her harlotry is worse than that of an unmarried person because she despises the solemnly promised faithfulness. Jerusalem's harlotry is all the more heinous because the people belong to the LORD by virtue of their covenant with Him and are bound to serve Him alone. On top of that, the LORD has His dwelling place in this city. There is no other place on earth

at that time where people can sacrifice Him than in the temple in Jerusalem.

The gift of a harlot she has in her hand are to be paid to anyone who wants to commit harlotry with her (verse 33). She not only disdains the wages of a harlot, but pays out a reward or gives a gift to any idol she sees. She makes costly sacrifices to foreign gods and pays tribute to foreign peoples to secure their support (verse 34). In doing so, she has become the opposite of a “normal” harlot who gets paid for her disgusting services and has sunk deeper than this already deeply sunk woman.

### **Eze 16:35-43 | Jerusalem Judged by Her Lovers**

*35 Therefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD. 36 Thus says the Lord GOD, “Because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your harlotries with your lovers and with all your detestable idols, and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to idols, 37 therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, even all those whom you loved [and] all those whom you hated. So I will gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness. 38 Thus I will judge you like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I will bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy. 39 I will also give you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare. 40 They will incite a crowd against you and they will stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. 41 They will burn your houses with fire and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women. Then I will stop you from playing the harlot, and you will also no longer pay your lovers. 42 So I will calm My fury against you and My jealousy will depart from you, and I will be pacified and angry no more. 43 Because you have not remembered the days of your youth but have enraged Me by all these things, behold, I in turn will bring your conduct down on your own head,” declares the Lord GOD, “so that you will not commit this lewdness on top of all your [other] abominations.*

The word of the LORD comes to the city (verse 35). The LORD addresses her by the name she deserves, that of “harlot”. Then He pronounces

His judgment. First He gives another brief list of her disgusting deeds that necessitate this judgment (verse 36). They are the sins of fornication and human sacrifice. He will gather together her lovers, the nations with whom Jerusalem allied and from whom she served idols, and also all who remained or became her enemies again (verse 37).

It will become a great army of enemies that will move against her to humiliate her deeply. The enemies will deal with her as with harlots and adulteresses who are put to shame in nakedness (verse 38). "The blood of wrath" means that Jerusalem will be punished with death. She has shed blood by bringing human sacrifices and for this her blood will be shed (Gen 9:6). In the wake of adultery, idolatry, she committed murder. Adultery and murder often go hand in hand. We even see it with King David, who, after his adultery with Bathsheba, has her husband Uriah murdered.

The LORD's "jealousy", that is His jealousy caused by the adultery, the breaking of the covenant, will repay their unfaithfulness and murders. He will give the city into the power of the nations whose idols she has served (verse 39). He will deliver her to the Babylonians. In this world empire all the other nations conquered by Babylon are represented. They will strip the city of clothes and jewelry and leave her naked and bare, that is broken down to the ground. Thus she will become again as before, in the time of her origin, when the LORD found her (verses 4-6; cf. Hos 2:3a).

The enemies will come against Judah and Jerusalem as a mob and will cause death and destruction around them (verse 40). The stoning she will suffer is a punishment for adulterous women (Jn 8:4-5a; Deu 22:21). That stoning will literally take place when the inhabitants of the city are buried and crushed under the falling rubble during the siege and capture. The houses they will burn (verse 41).

"Many women" will see it happen before their eyes as a deterrent example not to play the harlot. The "many women" are a picture of cities and nations that will see the destruction of Jerusalem. Then harlotry will be wiped out. There will be no more desire to play the harlot. No one will want to have anything to do with her anymore. The attractiveness of the city has changed to repulsiveness. The city is also so destitute that it can no

longer pay a harlot's wages and therefore can no longer buy lovers. Then the fury of the LORD will rest upon them and He will be pacified and angry no more (verse 42). His anger has calmed down.

So we find mentioned in the preceding verses three punishments that a harlot can receive in Israel and that are applied to Jerusalem.

1. First, she will be left naked and bare and thus exposed to the reproach of the bystanders (verse 39).
2. Next, she is stoned to death (verse 40).
3. Finally, she is burned with fire (verse 41).

Once again the LORD explains why He must do all this to her (verse 43). He has brought her way of wandering and infidelity down on her own head. She has not remembered the days of her youth, when He so took care of her, nor served Him with gratitude. Instead, she has appalled Him, deeply shaken Him. His acts of judgment are for the purpose that she will cease from her abominations, that is her idolatry, and that she will no longer behave shamefully.

### **Eze 16:44-52 | Jerusalem Compared to Her 'Sisters'**

*44 "Behold, everyone who quotes proverbs will quote [this] proverb concerning you, saying, 'Like mother, like daughter.' 45 You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and children. You are also the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. 46 Now your older sister is Samaria, who lives north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lives south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. 47 Yet you have not merely walked in their ways or done according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you acted more corruptly in all your conduct than they. 48 As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "Sodom, your sister 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 arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. 50 Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw [it]. 51 Fur-*

*thermore, Samaria did not commit half of your sins, for you have multiplied your abominations more than they. Thus you have made your sisters appear righteous by all your abominations which you have committed. 52 Also bear your disgrace in that you have made judgment favorable for your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. Yes, be also ashamed and bear your disgrace, in that you made your sisters appear righteous.*

The LORD continues to hold out to Jerusalem her sins. He uses a proverb to make it clear that she is no better than the heathen mother from whom the city descended (verse 44). The mother is an unfaithful woman who has no natural love for her husband and her children (verse 45). So is Jerusalem. In doing so, she is also a sister to her sisters, who loath natural love in the same way. The expression “sisters” refers to the cities of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom. The heathen origin lies in the connection between the Hittites and the Amorites. Jerusalem is as idolatrous as these heathen peoples.

The LORD points Jerusalem to Samaria and calls that city the “older sister” of Jerusalem (verse 46). By Samaria is meant the whole area of the ten tribes realm which is much larger than that of Judah. Its location is north of Jerusalem. Her other sister, Sodom, is “younger” than Jerusalem. Sodom lives south of Jerusalem. That city is called “younger” because it has a smaller territory. By “her daughters” are meant the surrounding cities of Samaria and Sodom.

Then the LORD points out the ways these cities have gone (verse 47). Jerusalem knows well what happened to Samaria and Sodom because of their apostasy from the LORD: they are ruined. Jerusalem, however, did not let herself be warned, but rather acted more corruptly than they. Jerusalem surpassed both the other cities in their sins (cf. Mt 11:23-24; 2Chr 33:9; Jer 3:11; Lk 10:12). With an oath swearing, the LORD confirms His observation that Sodom and its inhabitants have not sinned as greatly as Jerusalem (verse 48).

To prove this, the LORD lists the heinous sins of Sodom (verses 49-50). This enumeration shows that the sins of Sodom did not consist only of the

heinous sexual sins of which the city was full (Gen 18:20-21; 19:4-5). God richly blessed Sodom with natural prosperity (Gen 13:10). But instead of thanking Him for it, she has been full of herself, full of selfishness, as the Lord Jesus also says (Lk 17:28).

Sodom has been a perfectly ordered constitutional state, with freedom of trade and movement, with food and drink for all. However, she has thought only of herself and not of others. Everything has served to satisfy her own pleasures. That has been the breeding ground for all the lewdness and abominations to develop and be indulged before God. That is why God turned the city upside down as soon as He had “seen it” (verse 50; Gen 18:21; 19:24-25). Yet that city was not guilty of marriage violation, as was Jerusalem.

What we see in Sodom we also see in our time. Everything revolves around prosperity. Everyone must become richer and richer, have more and more to spend, be able to enjoy themselves more and more. This greed is sometimes disguised with some money for developing countries, but that does not take away the sting of unbridled pleasure-seeking. On this soil, sexual pleasure-seeking is rampant, rejecting all God-ordained boundaries with the utmost contempt.

The LORD then turns Jerusalem’s gaze to Samaria (verse 51). That city has not done half the sins of Jerusalem. For all the abominations Jerusalem has committed, her sisters Sodom and Samaria appear righteous. That is putting it very strongly. This is done to make clear to Jerusalem the enormous guilt she has brought upon herself because of her wicked behavior. Of course, it does not mean that it reduces the guilt of Sodom and Samaria. The point is that their guilt seems small compared to Jerusalem’s.

Sodom and Samaria received their deserved punishment for a smaller debt than that of Jerusalem. Therefore, Jerusalem will certainly bear her shame (verse 52). The city has also arrogated in pride a judgment about Sodom and Samaria, and in doing so has been completely blind to her own heinous sins. Once again the LORD says that her own sins are so heinous that Sodom and Samaria appear righteous in comparison. He calls on the city to be ashamed and to bear her disgrace.

**Eze 16:53-59 | Promise of Restoration**

*53 “Nevertheless, I will restore their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and along with them your own captivity, 54 in order that you may bear your humiliation and feel ashamed for all that you have done when you become a consolation to them. 55 Your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to their former state, and you with your daughters will [also] return to your former state. 56 As [the name of] your sister Sodom was not heard from your lips in your day of pride, 57 before your wickedness was uncovered, so now you have become the reproach of the daughters of Edom and of all who are around her, of the daughters of the Philistines—those surrounding [you] who despise you. 58 You have borne [the penalty of] your lewdness and abominations,” the LORD declares. 59 For thus says the Lord GOD, “I will also do with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath by breaking the covenant.*

Then suddenly here is talk of a restoration that the LORD will give (verse 53). He will restore the captivity of Sodom and the neighboring cities and Samaria and the cities around it and Jerusalem. How great is God’s grace! To Jerusalem’s shame, this restoration will happen first with Sodom and Samaria (verse 54). The consolation spoken of here is also to the shame of Jerusalem, for it is the consolation of Sodom and Samaria that their wickedness has been less terrible than that of Jerusalem.

The LORD will restore these three cities with their inhabitants and associated towns to their previous state, which is the state of the time before committing their abominations (verse 55). In her pride, Jerusalem did not even want to mention the name of Sodom (verse 56). That happened during the time when Jerusalem’s sin had not yet become fully manifest (verse 57). But that sin has now come clearly to light. As a result, Jerusalem herself is now an object of reproach of the nations around her. Her disgraceful behavior and her abominations will weigh on her (verse 58).

All this happens to Jerusalem because she has despised the oath by which she committed herself to the LORD (verse 59). What Jerusalem has done toward the LORD, He will now do toward the city. He will also break His covenant with Jerusalem and cast her down in reproach and disgrace.

That verse 55 speaks of a restoration of Sodom raises the question of how that could happen. After all, Sodom has been completely overturned. Not a single Sodomite survived and the area of Sodom became an eternal wasteland (Deu 29:23; Isa 1:9; Jer 49:18; 2Pet 2:6; Jude 1:7). So what about the restoration of which the LORD speaks here? To this question the commentaries do not give an unequivocal answer.

The well-known German Scripture commentator Keil assumes that this verse speaks of the literal Sodom. Only he does not see in this a restoration on earth, but he sees the fulfillment of this prophecy in eternity. However, in light of what we read in the letter of Jude, that cannot be the explanation (Jude 1:7). There it says: "Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire." Keil's statement even goes in the direction of the false doctrine of the universal atonement. Adherents of that false doctrine therefore use this verse as an argument for their false doctrine. This has come to my attention in an exchange of letters I had with an adherent of this doctrine.

From the various explanations, the following statement appeals to me the most and I submit it to the reader for consideration. We can think here of Sodom in terms of Lot and his descendants. Lot and his daughters were the only ones who did not ultimately perish in the judgment that God brought upon Sodom. Lot's posterity, which he fathered with his daughters, consists of Ammon and Moab (Gen 19:30-38). The restoration, according to this statement, will actually take place in the restoration of Ammon and Moab (Jer 48:47; 49:6).

### **Eze 16:60-63 | The New Covenant With Jerusalem**

*60 "Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. 61 Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, [both] your older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant. 62 Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, 63 so that you may remember and*

*be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done," the Lord GOD declares.*

In His unshakable faithfulness, which is in such sharp contrast to Jerusalem's unfaithfulness, the LORD will remember His covenant with them in the days of their youth (verse 60). He will make a new covenant and fulfill it Himself (Jer 31:31-34; 32:40; Heb 8:6-13). Because it is a one-sided covenant and depends only on His faithfulness, it is "an everlasting covenant". It cannot be broken, for He cannot become unfaithful. Its blessing will come to Jerusalem because He will grant her forgiveness and new life that longs to be obedient to Him.

In order to enjoy the blessings of this covenant, Jerusalem will repent and return (verse 61). She will be deeply ashamed of her sins and the ways she has gone. In that realization, she will receive other nations and no longer look down on them with contempt. Jerusalem will be a mother and receive other nations as daughters. Those nations are given to her by the LORD. He does not do this on the basis of His first covenant with her that was so shamefully broken by her. He does so by virtue of the new covenant He will make with her (verse 62). By this she will know that He is the LORD.

His dealing in grace with her on the basis of the new covenant will cause shame in her (verse 63). She will realize that it is undeserved and not put on a big mouth because she will remember the reproach that has come upon her because of her sins. At the same time, all doubt about her being received by the LORD will be gone, because He will have made atonement for all that she has done wrong. How impressive is the word "all". What that all means, we see in this chapter. All of it, without exception, is included in the atonement.

This reconciliation and this glorious end of Jerusalem can only be because the Lord Jesus gave His precious blood. God acts on the basis of what He, His Son, has done. He has fulfilled all the conditions of the new covenant and therefore the blessing for God's people can come at last. In the face of so much sin listed at length in this chapter, there is the all-transcending work of Christ to Whom all glory is for all eternity.

This history may also speak to us. Our origin and behavior (verses 3-4) are not worthy of love. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:4-5a). How do we respond to this love that has been shown to us?

## Ezekiel 17

### Introduction

This chapter is a transitional chapter. The previous chapter deals with the common responsibility of Jerusalem. The next chapter is about personal responsibility. This chapter is about Zedekiah, the king of Judah. He is the representative of the people, while also being personally responsible to God.

Zedekiah, the present leader in Jerusalem, is contrasted with the future Son of David Who will lead God's people. The former is compared to a low vine (verses 2-21), the latter to a stately cedar (verses 22-24).

### Eze 17:1-10 | Parable of the Two Eagles

*1 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, propound a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel, 3 saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "A great eagle with great wings, long pinions and a full plumage of many colors came to Lebanon and took away the top of the cedar. 4 He plucked off the topmost of its young twigs and brought it to a land of merchants; he set it in a city of traders. 5 He also took some of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed [it] beside abundant waters; he set it [like] a willow. 6 Then it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine with its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and yielded shoots and sent out branches. 7 "But there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and sent out its branches toward him from the beds where it was planted, that he might water it. 8 It was planted in good soil beside abundant waters, that it might yield branches and bear fruit [and] become a splendid 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 sprouting leaves wither? And neither by great strength nor by many people can it be raised from its roots [again]. 10 Behold, though it is planted, will it thrive? Will it not com-*

*pletely wither as soon as the east wind strikes it—wither on the beds where it grew?”“*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1), where the LORD addresses him again as “son of man” (verse 2). Ezekiel is to propound a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel. A riddle is an obscure statement; it is something said in an indirect way that requires an explanation. A parable is the presentation of a spiritual truth by tangible images. The parable is a riddle explained by the LORD Himself (verses 11-21). Parables and riddles are used to attract attention and provoke thought in the hearers.

The great, beautiful eagle (verse 3) represents Nebuchadnezzar (verse 12), who is king of kings, as the eagle is king of birds. His great wings and long pinions indicate great power and dominion over a vast territory. The multicolored nature refers to the diversity of the peoples he has subjected to him. Lebanon, to which the eagle comes, represents Jerusalem because the palace and temple are made of cedar from Lebanon. David and Solomon used much cedar wood for their buildings; Solomon made cedars abundant in Jerusalem (1Kgs 10:27; 2Chr 1:15).

The “cedar” is a picture of the house of David. The “crown of a cedar” represents Jehoiachin, the grandson of Josiah, the last descendant of the royal line. He is “the topmost” (verse 4). Together with “its young twigs”, that is, with a few more of the considerable ones, Jehoiachin is taken to “a land of merchants” – that is, the land of the Chaldeans – and to “a city of traders” – that is, Babylon (Eze 16:29; 2Kgs 24:8-16).

Then the eagle takes “some of the seed of the land” and plants it in “in fertile soil”, that is, he appoints Zedekiah as king over fertile Judah (verse 5a; 2Kgs 24:17). Through the kindness of the king of Babylon, the kingdom is able to develop well for some time under Zedekiah (verses 5b-6). He does grow wide, but it remains “under it”, that is, subordinate.

Instead of submitting to the rule of Babylon, Zedekiah wants to shake off the yoke of Babylon (2Kgs 24:20b). For this purpose he turns to “another great eagle”, that is Egypt (verse 7; verse 15). From him he expects his help, through him he wants to become great and strong and not through

the king of Babylon, through whom he has become “a splendid vine” after all (verse 8).

The LORD pronounces His judgment on it (verse 9). Zedekiah’s efforts to use his roots to draw his life force from the other great eagle will bring nothing. On the contrary, from him his roots will be pulled out, that is, he will lose his independence and his posterity. Also everything that is still beautiful, all his princes, will wither away with Zedekiah. It will not take much strength or a numerous people to strip him of all his glory. The east wind (verse 10), that is the king of Babylon, will judge him, while Egypt will be unable to give him any help (Jer 37:5-10). Jerusalem will be destroyed and Zedekiah dethroned.

### **Eze 17:11-21 | Explanation of the Parable**

*11 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 12 “Say now to the rebellious house, ‘Do you not know what these things [mean]?’ Say, ‘Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took its king and princes and brought them to him in Babylon. 13 He took one of the royal family and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land, 14 that the kingdom might be in subjection, not exalting itself, [but] keeping his covenant that it might continue. 15 But he rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt that they might give him horses and many troops. Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Can he indeed break the covenant and escape? 16 As I live,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die. 17 Pharaoh with [his] mighty army and great company will not help him in the war, when they cast up ramps and build siege walls to cut off many lives. 18 Now he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and behold, he pledged his allegiance, yet did all these things; he shall not escape.’” 19 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, “As I live, surely My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke, I will inflict on his head. 20 I will spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. Then I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there [regarding] the unfaithful act which he has committed against Me. 21 All*

*the choice men in all his troops will fall by the sword, and the survivors will be scattered to every wind; and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken."*

The word of the LORD comes again to Ezekiel (verse 11). Perhaps some time has passed after the telling of the parable. They have had time to think about it. Ezekiel is commanded to make known the solution of the riddle to "the rebellious house", that is, his fellow exiles (verse 12). Without reference to the pictures used, the LORD says that the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and captured its king and princes and brought them to him in Babylon (verses 3-4). Then he took someone from the royal family, that is Zedekiah, and made him king (verse 13; verses 5-6). He made a covenant with him which he made him ratify with an oath (2Chr 36:13).

Nebuchadnezzar removes all who might have some influence to start a revolt. This leaves an insignificant, powerless kingdom (verse 14). It is made easy, as it were, for Zedekiah to keep the covenant he made with Nebuchadnezzar. By remaining faithful to the covenant, Judah can still continue to exist.

Yet Zedekiah rebels, for he refuses to bow under God's discipline (verse 15). He seeks contact with Egypt to help him throw off the yoke of Babylon by sending him horses and many soldiers. The LORD responds, as it were with the utmost astonishment at such audacity, with three questions: "Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Can he indeed break the covenant and escape?" The answer lies in the questions. He will not succeed in his purpose. He will not escape judgment because he does such things. He will not escape punishment, a punishment he deserves because of breaking his covenant that he made with the king of Babylon.

The LORD swears that Zedekiah will die in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's dwelling place (verse 16). He mentions as the reason that Zedekiah has broken his oath that he made to Nebuchadnezzar to ratify the covenant made with him. The help Zedekiah has enlisted from Egypt will have no effect (verse 17). Nebuchadnezzar will carry out his siege of Jerusalem without any opposition from Egypt. Once again, the LORD says that Zedekiah and Jerusalem suffer this judgment because they have shamelessly broken the covenant with Nebuchadnezzar that was ratified by an oath

(verse 18; 2Chr 36:13a). Zedekiah pledged his allegiance, but has not kept his oath. Therefore, he will not escape the just judgment of the LORD.

The LORD will bring Zedekiah's unfaithful dealings down on his head (verse 19). He speaks of it as the breaking of His covenant. Zedekiah had made the covenant as a representative of the LORD. By breaking it he has cast reproach on the Name of the LORD. Therefore, the LORD will spread His net over him and take him captive to Babylon (verse 20). The LORD uses Nebuchadnezzar as His "net" to execute His judgment on Zedekiah. Once again, He points out that Zedekiah's unfaithful act, his breach of word, was not committed primarily against Nebuchadnezzar but against Him, the LORD God.

By sending ambassadors to Egypt, he has despised the oath and broken the covenant. The LORD says of this "My oath" and "My covenant". Such rebellion brings not only the displeasure of Babylon upon him, but also the punishment of the LORD. It indicates that agreements and commitments made by professors of God's Name are as binding as if they were made with God in person. What applies here to nations, we must also apply to social and personal relationships. Breaking a treaty, a contract, a promise, or any other kind of covenant involves harming both God and the person.

Judgment will strike not only Zedekiah, but also all those who supported him in his unfaithfulness (verse 21). His troops may have fled, but they will not escape God's judgment which He will execute by the sword of the enemies. The captured followers of Zedekiah will be removed from the land and scattered to all corners of the earth. Thus it will become clear that the LORD Himself has said it. What is said here has been fulfilled to the letter (2Kgs 25:3-7).

### **Eze 17:22-24 | The Tender Twig of the LORD**

*22 Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take [a sprig] from the lofty top of the cedar and set [it] out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant [it] on a high and lofty mountain. 23 On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will*

*nest in the shade of its branches. 24 All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform [it]."*

After removing the unfaithful twig from the house of David, the LORD goes to work on behalf of His promises. He Himself will take a twig (verse 22). That He will plant as a shoot on a high and exalted mountain, which is Zion. Zion is high and exalted in the sight of the LORD because He has chosen it for His dwelling place (Psa 48:2; 68:16; 87:1-2; Isa 2:2; 11:9). The young, tender shoot is the Messiah, Christ, from the house of David (cf. Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5; Zec 6:12). He will be the new King of His people.

This twig will be tender and small at first, but will grow into a royal cedar (verse 23). Thus the Messiah will come as "a tender shoot", as a "root out of parched ground", without "[stately] form or majesty" (Isa 53:2). But "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (Lk 1:32-33). He will give protection to all kinds of birds, that is, here, to all those who are connected to heaven, who bow to His authority.

All the other nations, "all the trees of the field", will then know that He is the LORD (verse 24). They will know it in the first place because He has humbled the high tree – that is, proud, haughty Israel. In the second place, they will know it because He will exalt to great height the low tree – that is the humbled Israel, those who have confessed their guilt, the remnant, and above all the Messiah. All this will find its full fulfillment in the realm of peace. A foreshadowing of this is seen in the exaltation of Jehoiachin (2Kgs 25:27-30).

## Ezekiel 18

### Introduction

This chapter presents the general principle of personal responsibility, one of the great principles of Scripture. The principle of personal responsibility is the basis for God's actions. Before Him each person bears his own personal responsibility and on that basis He judges each person individually.

### Eze 18:1-20 | Responsibility of Each Generation

1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 "What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'? 3 As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. 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 will die. 5 "But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness, 6 and does not eat at the mountain [shrines] or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period— 7 if a man does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, [but] gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing, 8 if he does not lend [money] on interest or take increase, [if] he keeps his hand from iniquity [and] executes true justice between man and man, 9 [if] he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—he is righteous [and] will surely live," declares the Lord GOD. 10 "Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood and who does any of these things to a brother 11 (though he himself did not do any of these things), that is, he even eats at the mountain [shrines], and defiles his neighbor's wife, 12 oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore a pledge, but lifts up his eyes to the idols [and] commits abomination, 13 he lends [money] on interest and takes increase; will he live? He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his

own head. 14 "Now behold, he has a son who has observed all his father's sins which he committed, and observing does not do likewise. 15 He does not eat at the mountain [shrines] or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor's wife, 16 or oppress anyone, or retain a pledge, or commit robbery, [but] he gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing, 17 he keeps his hand from the poor, does not take interest or increase, [but] executes My ordinances, and walks in My statutes; he will not die for his father's iniquity, he will surely live. 18 As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed [his] brother and did what was not good among his people, behold, he will die for his iniquity. 19 "Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?' When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. 20 The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). In that word He points His people to a proverb that is in circulation in Ezekiel's day (verse 2; Jer 31:29-30; cf. Lam 5:7). It is about something the fathers do and of which the children bear the consequences. The fathers eat sour grapes and the children notice it on their own teeth. Unripe, sour grapes give the teeth a rough feeling. The children themselves do not eat the grapes and yet their teeth feel as if they did.

The meaning of this proverb is that they do not think it is fair that they suffer because of what their forefathers did. With this proverb, they shift the blame of the coming judgment away from them. They are not the guilty ones, they argue, but previous generations. They argue that the sins of the fathers are avenged on them. In doing so they in fact accuse the LORD of injustice.

In our time, this same view can be heard. If someone has committed a crime, the cause is sought in his upbringing or in his genes or in the environment in which he has come. This attitude is the automatism that is in man to pass the blame for his actions on to others. This shearing behavior is as old as man. We see this behavior with Adam blaming Eve and with

Eve blaming the serpent. But God condemns each of the three involved for their own sins.

No one is forced to imitate the bad behavior of parents or others. Man has a choice to do so or not. Furthermore, it is possible for every person to be freed from the burden of his past if he confesses his sins to God. Then God's forgiveness follows.

The LORD greatly resents this attitude on the part of the people of Israel and says to them under oath – “as I live” – that they will no longer use this proverb (verse 3). Vigorously He rejects the idea that one can shrug off personal responsibility. He shows in this section that He is righteous when He punishes, because He punishes each according to his own actions. The result will be that the people, when convinced of their own guilt, will abandon this senseless, unjustified self-justification.

The LORD begins by pointing out that every human life belongs to Him (verse 4; Job 12:10). Therefore, each person is personally responsible to Him. The life of the father belongs to the LORD and the life of the son belongs to Him. Although father and son are bound together as a family, each is personally responsible to God. Whether the father sins or the son: the one who sins will die, “for the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23a). There is no rejection of personal responsibility or passing on or inheriting blame.

The question may now be asked whether the foregoing is not contrary to what the law says that the LORD visits the sin of the fathers “on the third and the fourth generations” (Exo 20:5b). It clearly does not contradict each other. The connection in Exodus points to idolatry continuing through the generations. Children often persist in the sins of their parents. It is a serious word for parents. It is not a word for children to shift responsibility for their actions onto their parents or the environment. Children are punished because of their own sins. Moses also wrote that no one is put to death for the sins of another, but that the soul that sins must die (Deu 24:16).

The unbelief of parents certainly has a devastating effect on the upbringing of children, yet each remains personally responsible to God. Each generation must decide for itself which way to go: the way of faithfulness to and reverence for the Lord, or the way of self-will and rebellion against the

Lord. God will call each one to account in accordance with his responsibility.

The LORD gives Ezekiel several examples. He does so on the basis of three successive generations. We have examples of this in Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah:

1. The (grand)father who does righteousness (Hezekiah) will live (verses 5-9).
2. The violent son of the righteous (Manasseh) will die (verses 10-13).
3. The righteous (grand)son (Josiah), son of the violent father, will live, while his violent father will die (verses 14-18).

The righteous is the person who “practices justice and righteousness” (verse 5). What the justice and righteousness of the righteous consist of is broadly spelled out (verses 6-9). It is one who makes the commandments of the LORD the standard for his life and obediently acts accordingly. The LORD lists what characterizes such a person: he

- “does not eat at the mountain [shrines]” (verse 6) – this refers to the idolatries on the mountains (Eze 6:2,13; 16:16; 20:28; Jer 2:20; Hos 4:13);
- “does not lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel,” – he keeps himself according to the law far from the abominable idols Israel is serving (Exo 20:3);
- “defile his neighbor’s wife” – he keeps the seventh commandment and does not commit adultery (Exo 20:14; Deu 22:22);
- “does not approach a woman during her menstrual period” – he keeps the regulations regarding sexuality (Lev 15:24; 18:19; 20:18);
- “does not oppress anyone” (verse 7) – he does not abuse the weak social position of others to enrich himself at his or her expense (Exo 22:21-22; Deu 24:17);
- “restores to the debtor his pledge”, – he recognizes the right of his neighbor, despite the debt that one owes to him (Exo 22:25-26; Deu 24:12-13; Job 22:6; 24:3; Amos 2:8);

- “does not commit robbery” – he is not a thief or robber who robs his neighbor to increase his property (Exo 20:15; Lev 19:13);
- “gives his bread to the hungry” – instead of robbing others he gives bread where there is hunger (Deu 15:7-11; Isa 58:7; Jam 2:15-16);
- “covers the naked with clothing”, – instead of undressing someone he will provide him with what is needed to be warm (Isa 58:7; Jam 2:15-16);
- “does not lend [money] on interest” (verse 8) – the Israelite may only take interest from foreigners, not from fellow citizens (Exo 22:25; Lev 25:36-37; Deu 23:19-20; Pro 28:8);
- “does not take increase” – (Lev 25:37; Pro 28:8);
- “keeps his hand from iniquity” – here we can think of the use of false weights and measures in trade (Lev 19:35-36);
- “executes true justice between man and man” – there is no regard for any person in judging a dispute, but fair justice (Lev 19:15; Pro 16:10);
- “walks in My statutes” (verse 9) – such a person does not go his own way, but goes his way in obedience to the LORD, loving His statutes, meditating on them, rejoicing in them, and desiring to learn them (Lev 18:4; Psa 119:16);
- “walks in My ordinances so as to deal faithfully” – this is not just about an outward obedience, but it is acting in the right mind of the heart (verse 31).

The person who is called “righteous” is the person who is characterized by doing justice and righteousness and in that shows love for the LORD. That one “will surely live, declares the Lord GOD”. Such a person deserves life and will receive it. He will not perish by the judgments, no matter what his ancestors have done.

Verses 10-13 present the case where the righteous person of the previous verses has a son who is not righteous like his father (verse 10). We see this with Hezekiah, who is righteous, and his son Manasseh, who is not righteous. That son is a violent one, someone who sheds blood, someone

who despises the life of another. He does things that his father does none of, and doing just one of those things already makes him deserve death.

The LORD reminds that the father does not do all the things listed above (verse 11). Nor does the son stop at the one instance of wickedness, his act of violence. He piles sin upon sin. With the word “even” the LORD intensifies His abhorrence of the evil of the son who acts in such contrast to his father. He is the antithesis of his father, for he is one who

- “even eats at the mountain [shrines],”
- “and defiles his neighbor’s wife,”
- “oppresses the poor and needy,” (verse 12)
- “commits robbery,”
- “does not restore a pledge,”
- “but lifts up his eyes to the idols”
- “[and] commits abomination,”
- “lends [money] on interest and takes increase” (verse 13).

After this enumeration of atrocities, the LORD asks the people the question: “Will he live?” He does not wait for the answer, but gives it Himself: “He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head.” His father’s righteousness cannot save him. He alone bears the responsibility for his life in sin. It is clear: the children do not receive the bill for the crimes of their parents and they do not receive the reward for the righteousness of their parents.

It is possible that there are those who see their father’s sins and do not follow them (verse 14). We see this with the wicked Amon and his God-fearing son Josiah. A God-fearing son does not act according to the wicked example he has seen. And again the LORD lists the atrocities, but now in connection with one who does not do these atrocities, but does what the LORD has said:

- "He does not eat at the mountain [shrines] (verse 15),
- or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel,
- or defile his neighbor's wife,
- or oppress anyone, (verse 16)
- or retain a pledge,
- or commit robbery,
- [but] he gives his bread to the hungry and
- covers the naked with clothing,
- he keeps his hand from the poor, (verse 17)
- does not take interest or increase,
- [but] executes My ordinances,
- and walks in My statutes."

This son shows himself to be a righteous one and therefore "he will not die for his father's iniquity", but "he will surely live". But the father will die because of his iniquity (verse 18). And again the LORD lists what his iniquity consists of. The indictment is read again. It must penetrate deeply to the people that the evil deeds done by the person are the direct cause of his death. "The father" dies "because he

- practiced extortion,
- robbed [his] brother
- and did what was not good among his people".

It has been shown extensively and overwhelmingly that each person is personally responsible for his own actions. The LORD looks only at the person in question and his actions.

Yet there still appears to be a question, which they ask God: “Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity?” (verse 19a). This question is not sincere, but is a final attempt to get out from under their own responsibility. The question seems to be prompted by what the law says that the children bear the iniquity of the fathers (Exo 20:5b; see comments on verse 4).

By asking this question they are accusing God of injustice. God has clearly shown that they cannot shift the responsibility for their actions onto their fathers. Yet they do not want to recognize that they themselves are responsible for their behavior. If then they cannot blame their fathers, they are left with nothing but to blame God.

The answer God gives is the climax of this entire discourse on man’s personal responsibility. The conclusion is crystal clear: “When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself” (verses 19b-20). Wicked, evil people bear their own responsibility. They will bear the consequences of their wickedness. The same is true of the opposite, doing righteousness. He who does so also bear his own responsibility.

### **Eze 18:21-32 | Responsibility and Turning Away**

21 *“But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 22 All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. 23 Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord GOD, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? 24 “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he*

*has committed; for them he will die. 25 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right? 26 When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die. 27 Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. 28 Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 29 But the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right? 30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. 31 Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live."*

God always offers man the opportunity to turn or repent (verse 21), yes, He even commands it (Acts 17:30). An unrighteous person can become a righteous person at any time. True turning will be demonstrated by doing God's will. One who turns and does His will "shall surely live; he shall not die". That is how great God's grace is toward a repentant sinner. His grace is so great that He no longer even remembers against the converted sinner all the transgressions he has committed (verse 22).

God's forgiveness is complete. The converted wicked person will live "because of his righteousness which he has practiced". Living because of his righteousness does not mean that he deserves life by his righteous living. The starting point is his conversion. That is his first righteous act. Next, the new life that God gives produces righteous acts.

The opportunity God gives the wicked to turn has to do with the loving-kindness of the mind of God. He is truly not pleased with the death of the wicked (verse 23). He doesn't like to judge people (cf. 2Pet 3:9b). When an ungodly person turns away from his ungodly ways and lives, it is a joy to

His heart. That life is a life in fellowship with Him, in the full enjoyment of real life. Life is only life when it is lived from and together with Him.

The reverse can also be the case. It can happen that a righteous person turns away from doing righteousness and starts acting wickedly (verse 24). God will not let such a person live. That righteous person may have done so many righteous deeds, but they will not help him avoid judgment for even one atrocity. Judgment will come on him, and all his righteous deeds will be void, there is no longer any thought of them. Judgment will come on him because he has become unfaithful to the LORD and because of the sin he has committed.

The people dare to accuse the Lord (*Adonai*) of unrighteousness, of acting not right. They accuse Him of going down winding roads, of being fickle in His policy (verse 25). They mean that in the case of the wicked who turns, God does not take into account his past sins and leaves them unpunished, and in the case of the unfaithful righteous, He does not take into account his previous good deeds and does not reward them. They judge that He thus acts arbitrarily and does not apply right properly.

Surely this shows an unprecedented insolence on the part of the people. Indignant, God tells them to listen carefully. How dare they say it! They should look at their own ways, how they are full of injustice. It is a very bad trait of man to call God unjust in order to justify his own iniquity.

The LORD summarizes again what happens to the righteous who starts to do wrong (verse 26) and to the wicked who turns away from his wickedness (verses 27-28). God acts on the principle that He calls each person to account for his own actions. Thereby He proves that He views man as a fully responsible person who reaps what he sows (Gal 6:7).

By the way, what Ezekiel is presenting here is about natural life and death on earth – it is important to keep this in mind when considering the meaning of this chapter – not about eternal life or death. In the Old Testament, salvation for eternity depends on living faith in God and the Messiah. A person who is wicked cannot be saved by doing good works. He must turn and then can do good works.

In the other case, when someone does righteous deeds, keeps the law (see the summary in verses 5-9), such a person is also not saved by keeping the law. As long as he keeps the law, he extends his life on earth. A person is saved for eternity only by faith and not by works (Eph 2:8-9). Once one has turned to God with sincere repentance of his sins and received new life, he cannot perish (Rom 8:1,35-39; Jn 10:28-29).

Once again – and this proves their stubbornness – Israel accuses the Lord (*Adonai*) of not making His way right (verse 29). In response, God calls Israel to think about that one more time. Is it really the case that His ways are not right? Or is it rather that their own ways are not right? This gross accusation, which proves their total blindness, is the ground for His judgment (verse 30). Each one will be justly judged according to his ways. And then again that great mercy of God. He calls them even now to return to Him and repent of all their transgressions. If they do, they will stumble no more.

Yet let them cast away all their transgressions and begin to act from a new heart and a new spirit (verse 31). This presupposes a work of God in their inner being, yet it is presented here as a responsibility for man. It is up to man to show the desire to start living according to the will of God. This means first breaking with sin, in other words: confession of sins and conversion to God. This then means to start living from the new life. Why will they die?

The final verse is the repetition of the Lord God's impressive declaration that He is not pleased with the death of anyone who dies (verse 32). Therefore, in conclusion, the call to "repent" sounds one more time with the wonderful promise "and live". God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1Tim 2:4). He truly is "a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness" (Neh 9:17b).

## Ezekiel 19

### **Introduction**

This chapter is a lamentation (verse 1) that Ezekiel is to take up. With this he expresses God's sorrow for Jerusalem. The lamentation has two parts. In the first part (verses 2-9) the mother of the princes of Judah is compared to a lioness. It is about the fate of the last kings of Judah. In the second part (verses 10-14), the princes of Israel are represented in the familiar picture of a vine. In it we hear the lamentation over the fall of those princes.

### **Eze 19:1-9 | The Lioness**

*1 "As for you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel 2 and say,  
'What was your mother?*

*A lioness among lions!*

*She lay down among young lions,*

*She reared her cubs.*

*3 'When she brought up one of her cubs,*

*He became a lion,*

*And he learned to tear [his] prey;*

*He devoured men.*

*4 'Then nations heard about him;*

*He was captured in their pit,*

*And they brought him with hooks*

*To the land of Egypt.*

*5 'When she saw, as she waited,*

*[That] her hope was lost,*

*She took another of her cubs*

*And made him a young lion.*

*6 'And he walked about among the lions;*

*He became a young lion,*

*He learned to tear [his] prey;*

*He devoured men.*

7 *'He destroyed their fortified towers  
And laid waste their cities;  
And the land and its fullness were appalled  
Because of the sound of his roaring.*  
8 *'Then nations set against him  
On every side from [their] provinces,  
And they spread their net over him;  
He was captured in their pit.*  
9 *'They put him in a cage with hooks  
And brought him to the king of Babylon;  
They brought him in hunting nets  
So that his voice would be heard no more  
On the mountains of Israel.*

The lamentation is to be taken up “for the princes of Israel” by which is meant the kings Jehoahaz and Zedekiah (verse 1). They are indeed kings of Judah, but since Judah alone is left – and people from Israel also went to Judah over time – their kingship applies to all Israel.

The “mother”, the “lioness” (verse 2), represents the royal tribe of Judah. The Lord Jesus is “the Lion from the tribe of Judah” (Rev 5:5). In a direct sense, it is about Hamutal, the mother of Jehoahaz and Zedekiah (2Kgs 23:31; 24:18; Jer 13:18). “The lions” between which the “mother” lies are the nations surrounding Israel. “The young lions” are the princes of those nations. “Her cubs” are her sons Jehoahaz and Zedekiah. “One of her cubs” (verse 3) whom she reared and who becomes a young lion is Jehoahaz. His short reign is wicked (2Kgs 23:30-32). He is a bloodthirsty king, one who is guilty of violence. He exploits the people, he devours them.

The surrounding nations hear about him (verse 4). Following the imagery of how one catches lions – in pits camouflaged with branches – Pharaoh Neco captures Jehoahaz. Neco brings Jehoahaz as an exile to Egypt, where he dies (2Kgs 23:33-34; Jer 22:10-12).

“She”, the mother, Hamutal, takes Zedekiah, “another of her cubs”, and makes him king (verse 5). She does this after the capture and taking away of Jehoahaz. Zedekiah may have been made king by Nebuchadnezzar, but

it may have been done through the intercession of Hamutal. She puts all her hope in him. It is a great evil when we put our hope in something or someone other than the Lord. This chapter is the chapter of false hope.

This Zedekiah goes around proudly among the surrounding peoples (verse 6). He, the young lion, let not himself to be impressed by the other young lions. The same testimony sounds of him as of Jehoahaz (verse 3).

Zedekiah is also a morally reprehensible man who has sexual intercourse with widows (verse 7). His life bears the character of violence and destruction. His reign of terror, which is compared to the roar of a lion, paralyzes the land. Led by the king of Babylon, the surrounding nations come to him and take him captive (verse 8). Like Jehoahaz, he is imprisoned (verse 9). Jehoahaz goes into exile in Egypt and Zedekiah goes into exile in Babylon. Thus his voice, the roar of the lion Zedekiah, comes to an end.

#### **Eze 19:10-14 | The Withered Vine**

10 *'Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard,  
Planted by the waters;  
It was fruitful and full of branches  
Because of abundant waters.*

11 *'And it had strong branches [fit] for scepters of rulers,  
And its height was raised above the clouds  
So that it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches.*

12 *'But it was plucked up in fury;  
It was cast down to the ground;  
And the east wind dried up its fruit.  
Its strong branch was torn off  
So that it withered;  
The fire consumed it.*

13 *'And now it is planted in the wilderness,  
In a dry and thirsty land.*

14 *'And fire has gone out from [its] branch;  
It has consumed its shoots [and] fruit,  
So that there is not in it a strong branch,*

*“A scepter to rule.”*

*This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.*

In the second parable, Israel, “your mother”, is compared to a vine (verse 10; Jer 2:21). It is a lush vine. The “strong branches” recall mighty rulers who have reigned on the throne of David (verse 11). Zedekiah is the branch that rises up among the many branches. He is raised to the position of king above the princes of the house of David who surround him and shines in the midst of them. He seems to have a future because of the sons born to him, “the mass of his branches”.

However, the anger of the LORD kindles against him because of his wickedness (verse 12). Therefore, he is taken away with wrath from kingship. This is done by “the east wind”, which is the Babylonians, who are the instrument of the wrath of God. That “east wind” causes all the fruit of the vine to dry up, that is, all the prosperity of the land to disappear.

The remnant of Israel is “planted in the wilderness”, that is, it is taken away to Babylon, “a dry and thirsty land” (verse 13). Babylon is a fertile land at that time, but for the Israelite it is figuratively a land without fruit.

The fire that goes out from the branch (verse 14) is an allusion to Zedekiah’s rebellion. That fire, however, consumes himself and those under his influence, “its shoots [and] fruit”. The result is that it is over and done with the reign of the house of David: there is “not ... a strong branch” left in it.

Ezekiel sings this lamentation when judgment has not yet come upon Zedekiah. However, he sees in faith this end of the kingship and has deeply lamented over it. The course of events confirms his prophetic outlook and makes this lamentation in faith – “this is a lamentation” – become a lamentation about reality – “and has become a lamentation”.

## Ezekiel 20

### **Introduction**

Unlike the picture of the foundling child in Ezekiel 16 and the parable of Oholah and Oholibah in Ezekiel 23, here, in Ezekiel 20, we have a description of Israel's past with its ongoing rebellion against God in actual historical terms without the aid of pictures and parables. The chapter describes the main events of the past, beginning with slavery in Egypt and the exodus from it. Then the description moves through the experiences of the wilderness to life in Canaan ending with the scattering among the nations.

The final period of Israel's history – the scattering among the nations – is presented as a return to life in the wilderness, that is, the return to the period that preceded the settlement in the land of Canaan (verse 35). That God finally blesses the people anyway is not because of their faithfulness, for there is none, but because of His own Name (verse 44).

A recurring theme is the rebellion of the people against God during the various periods of their existence. This rebellion manifests itself in disobedience and unfaithfulness (verses 8,13,21,27). The periods are successively:

1. the Egyptian slavery (verses 5-9),
2. the wilderness journey (verses 10-26) and
3. the dwelling in the promised land (verses 27-29).

### **Eze 20:1-3 | The Elders Come to Consult the LORD**

*1 Now in the seventh year, in the fifth [month], on the tenth of the month, 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 saying, 3 "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Do you come to inquire of Me? As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I will not be inquired of by you.'"*

“In the seventh year”, that is, the seventh year after King Jehoiachin was taken away to Babylon (Eze 1:2), the year 591 BC, “certain of the elders of Israel” come again to Ezekiel to consult the LORD (verse 1; cf. Eze 8:1; 14:1-3). They had been with him before and heard from him the word of the LORD. What did they do with that word? They now sit down before Ezekiel again to hear from him the word of the LORD. Their desire to consult the LORD does not come from a heart that wants to devote itself undividedly to Him. They do not want to give up the idols.

It may be that they want to know how Jerusalem will fare. Now that so many months have passed after the ominous message of Ezekiel 8-11, they are given hope that the announced destruction will not occur after all. Also, three years have passed since Hananiah’s prophecy (Jer 28:1-3). Hananiah prophesied that the exiles from Babylon would return to Jerusalem with King Jehoiachin within two years, that is, no later than the sixth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile.

The LORD knows their motives and speaks to Ezekiel about it (verse 2). Ezekiel has to show the LORD’s amazement to the elders by repeating the question, indicating that He is indignant that they dare to come and consult Him (verse 3). It is as if the LORD is saying to them that He is amazed at this audacity. His answer is clear: He will not have Himself consulted by them. In the following verses He explains why not.

#### **Eze 20:4-9 | Israel’s Idolatry in Egypt**

*4 Will you judge them, will you judge them, son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers; 5 and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “On the day when I chose Israel and swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God, 6 on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands. 7 I said to them, ‘Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, 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; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved*

*to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish 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 by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.*

The LORD commands Ezekiel to hold a court hearing. He is to judge the elders of Israel (verse 4; cf. Eze 22:2; 23:36). Ezekiel here is a picture of the Lord Jesus Who has been given judgment by the Father (Jn 5:22).

The indictment runs until verse 29; from verse 30 the verdict follows. Ezekiel is to present the elders with their own history, a history of apostasy and of willful sin and thus of a taunting of the LORD. Ezekiel must first point out the great mercy of the LORD that He chose Israel during the time of their slavery in the land of Egypt (verse 5). In Egypt, Israel became a people, which it was not before that time.

God made Himself known to the people through Moses as the LORD (Exo 6:5-6). Twice it is mentioned in this verse that He has sworn on behalf of the people. He has sworn to them that He will lead them out of Egypt and bring them “into a land” that He “had selected for them” (verse 6). When the LORD selects a land, it must be the most beautiful land. He therefore calls it “the glory of all the lands”. In other places God speaks of “the pleasant land” and “the beautiful land” (Deu 8:7-10; Psa 106:24; Jer 3:19; 12:10; Eze 20:15; Dan 8:9; 11:16,41,45; Zec 7:14).

The sight of that “glorious land” should be enough to cast away “the detestable things”, “the stink gods of Egypt” (verse 7). Surely you are happy to surrender worthless things for something that would dwarf those worthless things and be able to make the worthless ones forget, aren’t you? Unfortunately, that is not how it went for Israel (verse 8). Disobedient as they are, they do not listen to God. They don’t take notice of all the good He does for them. They do not throw away the abominations and stink gods, but continue to look up to them in the expectation that they will help them (cf. Psa 25:15).

In response, God does have to pour out His wrath on them. He does so in Egypt, where they are already unfaithful to Him (Eze 23:3; Jos 24:14; Lev 17:7). Pharaoh has aggravated the affliction under which they are suffer-

ing. But the LORD has not completely given them up to judgment (verse 9). He acts for the sake of His Name when He leads His people out of Egypt. If He had already exterminated Israel in Egypt, the nations would have mocked Him for not being able to deliver them. He has chosen them to be His people, He has attached His Name to that people, and He has therefore spared them.

### **Eze 20:10-17 | Israel's Idolatry in the Wilderness**

*10 So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. 11 I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live. 12 Also I gave them My sabbaths to be 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 and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them. 14 But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, before whose sight I had brought them out. 15 Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands, 16 because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they even profaned My sabbaths, for their heart continually went after their idols. 17 Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them, and I did not cause their annihilation in the wilderness.*

Despite their idolatry in Egypt, God redeemed His people (verse 10). He has led them out of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. There, at Sinai, He gives them His law (verse 11). If they keep His law, they will live (Lev 18:5). Among the provisions of the law, the sabbath holds a special place (verse 12). The sabbath is the day of rest and God gives this day of rest as a special sign between Him and His people.

Through the sabbath, Israel is set apart from all the nations in a special way. The sabbath is the sign that the LORD sanctifies them, that is, He thereby sets them apart from the other nations to be His people (Exo 31:13-16). The exiles cannot keep many laws in Babylon because they have no

temple there. Laws they can keep, for example, are the food laws – Daniel did so (Dan 1:8) – and the sabbath.

However, the people show themselves unworthy of this special sign of their relationship with God and do not keep the sabbath (verse 13). After their disobedience in Egypt, their stay in the wilderness is also marked by disobedience. They scorn and violate the statutes and ordinances that the LORD has given for life. The book of Exodus and the book of Numbers provide many examples of this. The sabbaths, of which the LORD says again “My sabbaths” (verse 12), are profaned by them. This profanation is so great and gross that the LORD says He will pour out His wrath upon them and annihilate them.

The LORD must act for the sake of His Name (verse 14). His Name has been profaned by the people’s rebellion against Him. He cannot let their disobedience go unpunished. After all, He led Israel out of Egypt before the eyes of the nations to be His people. But they are not behaving as His people. Therefore, He must discipline them and put them to death, so that they will not come into the pleasant land, the glorious land, that He has given them (verse 15).

They have profaned Him, on the one hand, by rejecting His ordinances and profaning His sabbaths and, on the other hand, by attaching with their hearts to their stink gods (verse 16). Despite their continual deviation from Him, He spares them so that He does not totally destroy them in the wilderness (verse 17). As punishment for their deviation, the entire first generation of those He led out of Egypt must fall in the wilderness. However, He spares their children in order to fulfill to them His promises. Will they be better than their fathers who all perished?

### **Eze 20:18-26 | Idolatry of the Children in the Wilderness**

18 “I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers or keep their ordinances or defile yourselves with their idols. 19 I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them. 20 Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall 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, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, [if] a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness. 22 But I withdrew 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 Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them among the lands, 24 because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers. 25 I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live; 26 and I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through [the fire] so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am the LORD.”'*

After the old generation has fallen in the wilderness, the LORD addresses the word to their children (verse 18). He warns them not to follow the example of their fathers. He declares that He is the LORD their God and commands them to walk in His statutes and to keep His ordinances (verse 19). He commands them to sanctify His sabbaths, as He commanded their fathers (verse 20). Again, He speaks of the sabbath being a sign between Him and them and that by it they will know that He is the LORD their God.

Unfortunately, the children's response is no different than that of their fathers. The children also rebel against Him (verse 21; Num 25:1-9). There is no question with them, either, that they are faithfully observing His statutes and ordinances. And again the LORD points out that keeping those statutes and ordinances means life (Lev 18:5). He wants them to live. So they deliberately choose death by not caring about it. Instead of sanctifying the sabbaths they profane them. Thereby they arouse God's wrath. He says that in the wilderness He will accomplish His anger against them and kill them.

But God in His mercy withdraws His hand, which was stretched out against them in wrath, and does not annihilate them (verse 22). If He would kill them in the wilderness, His Name would be profaned before the eyes of

the nations. Those nations could then say that He was unable to lead the people He led out of Egypt before their eyes also through the wilderness. Therefore, He wants to act differently with His people. He already swears in the wilderness that He will scatter them among the nations in all kinds of lands (verse 23; Lev 26:33,39; Deu 28:36,64).

As the reason for this scattering, He mentions their disobedience to His ordinances, their rejection of His statutes, and the profaning of His sabbaths (verse 24). This all led them to follow the same stink gods that their fathers followed. They are no better than their fathers. In response, God gives them over to their own will (verse 25). They choose their own statutes to live by and God gives them up to it.

The meaning of the phrase that the LORD gives statutes that are not good and ordinances by which they can not live, is that He gives His people over to their own statutes and ordinances if they will not obey Him. He lets them go on their self-determined path. God punishes His people by allowing them to do what they like to do (Acts 7:42-43; Psa 81:11-12; Rom 1:24,26,28).

The gifts that the people offer to the idols, the LORD uses to pronounce them unclean (verse 26). They even sacrifice their children as gifts to the idols. On this, God's wrath must come in full measure. The end of such depraved heathen practices is national devastation.

Even today, countless children are sacrificed to idols. We can think of the countless abortions that have been and are being done. How many children have not been aborted because the parents see children as an impediment to their personal enjoyment? The same is true when parents show their children a life that is full of greed, which is idolatry (Col 3:5), causing the children to turn away from the Lord and His way.

### **Eze 20:27-29 | Israel's Idolatry in the Promised Land**

27 *“Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me by acting treacherously against Me. 28 When I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and*

*they offered there their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering. There also they made their soothing aroma and there they poured out their drink offerings. 29 Then I said to them, 'What is the high place to which you go?' So its name is called Bamah [or: High Place] to this day.'*

With the recalling of the people's idolatry in the wilderness and God's judgment on it, the story of the people's unfaithfulness is not over. All of God's efforts to bring the people to repentance the people have answered with new unfaithfulness. Ezekiel is commanded to bring that to the people's attention as well (verse 27). He is to tell them that they have blasphemed the LORD by acting treacherously against Him. They have taunted and insulted Him. The LORD now speaks of the time He brought His people into the land (verse 28).

He has sworn to bring them there. He did that in His faithfulness. However, there is no mention of any thanks from the people to Him for that. In their blindness, they think they are offering sacrifices to the LORD. But instead of worshiping Him in the manner prescribed by Him and in the place chosen by Him, they imitate the nations and bring "the provocation of their offering" to the idols in all sorts of places. In the term "the provocation of their offering" we hear the LORD's pain over their conduct.

He addresses the people by asking them why they keep going to that high place (verse 29). He asks, as it were: 'Is this the place where I want to be served?' In this way He wants to get them to think about their foolish ways and to repent. However, they are no longer approachable for their bad behavior. The high place has been given the name "Bamah", or "High Place", and bears it "to this day", that is, to the day that Ezekiel writes the book of Ezekiel. That name is thus a permanent reminder of their continued unfaithfulness. It indicates that the whole land, with its many high places, has become one great sacrificial place where sacrifices are made to idols.

The words "to this day" also apply in a spiritual sense. The high places in our lives are every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. They are the deliberations of the human mind. This symbol of unfaithfulness still exists and is cast down when Christ is given dominion in our lives. These lofty places are thrown down when we listen to the teaching

of Scripture. Then they are taken captive to the obedience of Christ (2Cor 10:4-5).

### **Eze 20:30-32 | The Verdict**

*30 Therefore, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and play the harlot after their detestable things? 31 When you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day. 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. 32 What comes into your mind will not come about, when you say: ‘We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands, serving wood and stone.’*

Starting in verse 30, the verdict follows. Remembering the continued unfaithfulness of the fathers and their children, Ezekiel has to let his contemporaries hear his warnings (verse 30). Past generations have forsaken the LORD. The present generation must be warned not to do so. Ezekiel is to call them to account for their behavior, for it is similar to that of their fathers. They are defiling themselves in the same way and like them are playing the harlot by indulging in abominable idolatry.

The exiles to whom Ezekiel addresses the word have continued to commit the sins their fathers committed and for which the LORD has punished them. Will He then allow Himself to be inquired of them when they deliver their children to idols and defile themselves in a repulsive manner with all their stink gods (verse 31)? They can absolutely forget about that!

Anything that has come to their minds, which they have imagined that it should happen that way, will certainly not come about (verse 32). God knows their true intentions. He knows that they are bent on being like the nations and like the tribes of the lands and serving wood and stone like them. They have sunk so low that they are giving up all the privileges of Israel to serve the idols of the nations in their place.

### **Eze 20:33-44 | Lawsuit and Restoration in the Future**

*33 “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. 34*

*I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with 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 and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD. 39 "As for you, O house of Israel," thus says the Lord GOD, "Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols. 40 For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I will accept them and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things. 41 As a soothing aroma I will accept you when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I will prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. 42 And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers. 43 There you will remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done. 44 Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD."*

Because the people are so determined to be like the nations and like the tribes of the lands (verse 32), the LORD must confront them in His government (verse 33). He cannot let such deliberateness go unpunished and will, by His strong hand and outstretched arm, make them experience His wrath. They may think they can forsake Him, but He will not relinquish His claims on His people.

Added to that, He will know how to find them among the nations and in the lands to which they are scattered (verse 34). Even there, in their exile, He maintains His claims on His people. He will lead them out of exile to

bring them into the wilderness of the nations. By this is meant His dealings with them in the time when they are delivered to the power of the nations. There He will enter into judgment with them (verse 35).

He will act with them just as He acted with their fathers in Egypt, the land that has been like a wilderness to them, a land of death (verse 36). He will act with them as a shepherd acts who passes his sheep under his rod at night to count them to see if one is missing and if there is not a stranger among them (verse 37). The law prescribes that every tenth sheep that passes under the rod, is for the LORD (Lev 27:32; Jer 33:13). The 'sheep' of His people selected in this way the LORD then brings back into the bond of the covenant He has made with them.

He will remove the rebellious and transgressors from His own sheep, bring them out of the land of their exile, and then judge them (verse 38). They will think they are on their way back to the promised land according to the word of the false prophets, but they will not reach that land. They will perish along the way.

The LORD tells the house of Israel to just continue serving their stink gods (verse 39). After all, they have no intention of listening to Him anyway. At the same time, He tells them not to profane His holy Name any more with those stink gods. The same goes for His holy mountain, Mount Zion (verse 40). On that mountain is the temple and there He wants to be served with sacrifices.

It is the high mountain of Israel, where "the whole house of Israel" will serve Him, no one excepted. This is the new Israel of twelve tribes, the remnant, which will be all Israel, for the apostate multitude will have been judged. In the sacrifices then brought to the LORD, He will be pleased. His people there will willingly answer His request to bring Him the very best of all their sanctified gifts.

The people have then returned to God in their entirety, and a soothing aroma goes out from them to Him, in which He delights (verse 41). He has brought them back to Himself. The stench of the stink gods has been driven out. Their forsaking Him is over. They have been gathered by Him

from the lands to which He had to scatter them as a result of their sins. The nations will see it and marvel at His ways with His people.

When they are back in the land, they will know that He is the LORD, the faithful God of the covenant, Who carries out His counsel right through all the deliberations of men (verse 42). The territory of Israel is the land about which He swore to their forefathers to give it to them. Then they will realize how much they have forsaken Him and wounded Him by despising what He has sought to give them (verse 43). They will loathe themselves. When we think about the history of Christianity and our personal history, it will also bring about a sense of loathing in us.

His people will be impressed again by Him, that He is the LORD, the God Who keeps and fulfills His promises. It will create in them a new admiration for His faithfulness (verse 44). They will be humbled by it and realize that all the blessings they may enjoy are due only to His faithfulness. For this course of action He has found a reason exclusively in His Name.

The same applies to us who belong to God's people in this age. With us, too, for the sake of His Name, He has not done according to our evil ways and depraved deeds, as it was with the house of Israel. All the blessing we may enjoy is due only to His faithfulness.

### **Eze 20:45-49 | The Fire of Judgment in the Negev**

*45 Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 46 "Son of man, set your face toward Teman, and speak out against the south and prophesy against the forest land of the Negev, 47 and say to the forest of the Negev, 'Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it will consume every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree; the blazing flame will not be quenched and the whole surface from south to north will be burned by it. 48 All flesh will 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 [just] speaking parables?'"*

In the Hebrew text, a new chapter begins with verse 45. It is a new prophecy, a new word from the LORD to Ezekiel (verse 45). Ezekiel, again called "son of man", is to set his face "toward Teman" or "toward the south".

“The south” is mentioned four times with three different words in Hebrew, including the word “Negev”, known from the wilderness in Israel (verse 46). The prophecy is about the southern land of Judah. The words “speak out” are also translated with “drop [words]” [Dutch translation and Darby translation]. The words to be spoken by Ezekiel are presented as a down pouring torrential rain. By “the forest land” the inhabitants of Judah are meant.

“The forest of the Negev” is commanded to listen to the word of LORD (verse 47). It is a word of judgment. The LORD says He will kindle a fire in them that will do a devastating work among young and old. By the green tree may also be meant the righteous and by the dry tree the wicked (cf. Lk 23:31). The righteous and the wicked both face this disciplinary rod of God. Not only did the wicked suffer under the discipline of God, but God-fearing men like Ezekiel and Daniel also suffered under it.

It will be impossible to block this devastating work. It will turn the entire land into a blackened field. This refers to what Nebuchadnezzar and his armies will do when they execute God’s judgments on Judah. Everyone will see that the real instigator of this fire is God Himself (verse 48). Because He kindles the fire, it will not be extinguishable. The destroyer is unstoppable. Any attempt to defend against it will come to nothing.

Ezekiel feels the burden of the words he must speak weigh heavily upon him (verse 49). He knows that his fellow exiles will not take him seriously. His words make no impression on them. They refuse to take them seriously and get rid of them by attributing his message to his imagination. He is seen by them as a chatterbox who comes with a self-made message that they do not want to understand. About this the prophet complains to the LORD, but he gets no answer.

## Ezekiel 21

### **Eze 21:1-7 | The People Are Massacred**

*1 And the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 “Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and speak against the sanctuaries and prophesy against the land of Israel; 3 and say to the land of Israel, “Thus says the LORD, “Behold, I am against you; and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off from you the righteous and the wicked. 4 Because I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore My sword will go forth from its sheath against all flesh from south [to] north. 5 Thus all flesh will know that I, the LORD, have drawn My sword out of its sheath. It will not return [to its sheath] again.”” 6 As for you, son of man, groan with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan in their sight. 7 And when they say to you, ‘Why do you groan?’ you shall say, ‘Because of the news that is coming; and every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it comes and it will happen,’ declares the Lord GOD.”*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He is commanded to set his face toward Jerusalem and to speak, or: let his words flow, against the sanctuaries (verse 2; cf. Eze 20:46). After the Negev in the previous verses (Eze 20:45-49), by which Judah is meant, it is now Jerusalem’s turn to hear words of judgment. Judgment is directed primarily against “the sanctuaries” by which, given the plural, is possibly meant the temple complex (cf. Lev 26:31; Mt 24:1). Ezekiel is also to prophesy against the whole land of Israel.

The whole land has so forsaken the LORD that He will cut off from it both the righteous and the wicked (verse 3). They are the green and the dry tree of the previous riddle (Eze 20:47). The fire, spoken of there, has now become a sword. The LORD will draw His sword out of its sheath to exercise the judgment. This refers to the carnage that will be wrought by Nebuchadnezzar, who is His sword.

The word ‘sword’ occurs no less than thirteen times in the following verses. This does show the severity and certainty of the judgment. It is also a

general judgment, for the sword will be against “all flesh” (cf. Eze 20:48), “from south [to] north” (verse 4), including the princes (verse 12). The judgment will be unstoppable (verse 5).

As Ezekiel lets his words flow, he must “groan with breaking heart [literally: loins] and bitter grief” (verse 6). The groaning must be so deep that he is like a broken man, like someone bent or huddled with his hands on his stomach because of an excruciating stomachache. Strength to walk is not there. He has to show this dejection because there is no hope of recovery from the pain. When the people ask him why he is doing this, he must say that he is weighed down by the burden the LORD is placing on him (verse 7).

The prophet is committed to his message and he is deeply burdened by it himself. The inner feelings and expressions that show this show that he does not bring his message with pleasure. The suffering he has to announce that will come upon his people affects him deeply.

If we have to admonish someone, we must have the right inner mind for it and give it the right expression. Do we also know the groaning because of the disasters that will befall the world and professing Christianity?

Just as the imminent suffering coming upon his people deprives him of all strength already now at its announcement, so it will be with those over whom the sword of God’s judgment will soon come. Ezekiel uses four expressions to describe the physical and spiritual reaction to the news of the fall Jerusalem:

1. “And every heart will melt (cf. Psa 22:14; Isa 13:7; Nah 2:10),
2. all hands will be feeble (cf. 2Sam 4:1; Isa 13:7; Jer 6:24; Eze 7:17),
3. every spirit will faint (cf. Isa 61:3) and
4. all knees will be weak [literally: flow] as water” (Eze 7:17).

When the news of the fall and destruction of Jerusalem comes, it will take away the courage of all who hear it. And it will surely come, for the LORD

has said so. This is what Ezekiel needs to show and let hear to the exiles with whom he is.

### **Eze 21:8-17 | The Sword Song**

*8 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 9 "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the LORD.' Say, 'A sword, a sword sharpened And also polished! 10 'Sharpened to make a slaughter, Polished to flash like lightning!' Or shall we rejoice, the rod of My son despising every tree? 11 It is given to be polished, that it may be handled; the sword is sharpened and polished, to give it 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 officials of Israel. They are delivered over to the sword with My people, therefore strike [your] thigh. 13 For [there is] a testing; and what if even the rod which despises will be no more?" declares the Lord GOD. 14 "You therefore, son of man, prophesy and clap [your] hands together; and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword for the slain. It is the sword for the great one slain, which surrounds them, 15 that [their] hearts may melt, and many fall at all their gates. I have given the glittering sword. Ah! It is made [for striking] like lightning, it is wrapped up [in readiness] for slaughter. 16 Show yourself sharp, go to the right; set yourself; go to the left, wherever your edge is appointed. 17 I will also clap My hands together, and I will appease My wrath; I, the LORD, have spoken."*

Again the word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 8). He is now commanded to prophesy about the sword, about the coming of the sword and what the sword will do (verse 9). He speaks in poetic language, in the form of a song, about the horrors that the sword will bring. He begins by describing the sword. The sword is mentioned twice in succession, because of the impression it makes. It is not a sword that hangs on the wall for decoration, but a sword that has been sharpened and polished for use.

The sword is sharpened to make a slaughter, and it is polished to make it shine when it is struck back and forth flashing (verse 10). It will come with the speed of lightning. At that sight, all joy disappears. It is, says the

LORD, the rod with which He must discipline His son Israel because he has despised every tree, which means every other rod of wood. God's people have been unwilling to listen to any discipline (cf. Deu 21:18-21).

God gave the sword to Nebuchadnezzar (verse 11). Nebuchadnezzar took it in his hand to carry out God's counsel. However, in doing so he has only pursued his own evil, cruel plans. Like "the slayer", he has acted with the sword given him by God. He has carried out the task given to him only to his own honor and pleasure.

That is why Ezekiel is commanded to cry out and wail (verse 12), because God's people are suffering so much. God is not indifferent to what people do to His people of their own accord, driven by murderous motives. He wants to punish His people, but those who are used by Him want to exterminate His people. That is what concerns Him. Here we see that God is not a cruel God, but uses everything to His ends, without in the slightest diminishing the responsibility of those whom He makes use of. The people and their officials have been given up to the sword. This is a matter to be intensely grieved over, of which the striking of the thigh is an expression (Jer 31:19a).

But what happens when this tried rod has also done its work and is taken away, the LORD asks (verse 13)? In order to avoid having no effect, the prophet must continue to prophesy (verse 14). He must clap his hands together as a sign of dismay. For the sword will come down on Judah with double strength, yes, with triple strength. It will come down in such fury upon the great ones, the forefathers of the people, that many will fall down mortally wounded. It will cause great fear. Many will be brought down and thus become a stumbling block to those who want to flee (verse 15). And when they come to the gate to go out of the city, they will run into the sword there and be killed. After all, the sword was polished for that purpose.

Then the sword is addressed (verse 16). The short sentences sound like sword strokes. The sword is under God's command, and the command is that the sword is to spread death and destruction in all directions, whichever way it turns. What Ezekiel has to do in verse 14, God Himself will also

do (verse 17) when His sword is busy sowing death and destruction. He will clap His hands together and bring His wrath down upon the people. He will appease His wrath through the judgment on the wicked and encourage the sword to destroy, until His wrath is stilled. He has spoken it and so it will happen.

### **Eze 21:18-23 | The Oracle of Nebuchadnezzar**

*18 The word of the LORD came to me saying, 19 "As for you, son of man, make two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come; both of them will go out of one land. And make a signpost; make it at the head of the way to the city. 20 You shall mark a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and to Judah into fortified Jerusalem. 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 household idols, he looks at the liver. 22 Into his right hand came the divination, 'Jerusalem,' to set battering rams, to open the mouth for slaughter, to lift up the voice with a battle cry, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up ramps, to build a siege wall. 23 And it will be to them like a false divination in their eyes; they have [sworn] solemn oaths. But he brings iniquity to remembrance, that they may be seized.*

Again the word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 18). He is commanded to make [or: set for himself] two ways (verse 19; cf. Eze 4:1). He has to set them "for himself". This indicates that he is to enter in the spirit of what is about to happen. In the same way, we are to be concerned with future events. We must be able to set them for ourselves, as it were, so that what is going to happen to Israel, Europe and the world becomes clear to us.

The ways that Ezekiel has to make or draw starts as one way, which later splits into two ways. It is the way that the sword will go to get into Judah. Now the name of him who holds the sword is also mentioned. It is the king of Babylon. The two ways go out from one land. At the place where the way splits into two ways, Ezekiel is to make a signpost. On it are two destinations. One way leads to Rabbah, the capital of the sons of Ammon; the other way leads to Judah with its fortified Jerusalem (verse 20). The way from Babylon to Rabbah and to Jerusalem is the same way until Damascus. At Damascus one must choose where to go.

Then the LORD tells Ezekiel why he should set out the way and the split into two ways. At the split, the king of Babylon will stop to consider which direction he will go (verse 21). Will he take the way to Rabbah or the one to Jerusalem? To determine his choice, he will use idolatrous methods of divination, as is customary for him, to reach a decision. He uses three methods. This does show how uncertain he finds a particular method. It is obvious to assume that by using three, he will take the path indicated by at least two methods.

The ‘shaking the arrows’ could mean that he takes two arrows and puts the name of a direction on each. He then shakes them and draws one. That is then the direction he will take. When consulting the “household idols” they seem to be teraphim or small household gods taken by the owner on a journey (Gen 31:19). To “look at the liver” is to examine the color and characteristics of the liver of a sacrificial animal. This form of divination is in use throughout the Babylonians at this time.

We see here that God knows all of Nebuchadnezzar’s deliberations and that He determines the outcome. He will cause the king of Babylon to go up to Jerusalem (verse 22). Nebuchadnezzar thinks his gods have given him counsel, but God determines his way. Nebuchadnezzar has his battle plan and his weapons ready to begin the siege of a strong fortress like Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem will experience this as a “false prophecy”, because they have promised allegiance to the king of Babylon after all (verse 23; Eze 17:16-18).

But their promises or oaths are worth nothing. Several times Zedekiah and the officials committed themselves with solemn oaths to remain faithful to the king of Babylon. But they have done so in order to deceive him, for secretly they have made agreements with Egypt (Eze 17:7,15,17; Jer 37:5; 46:17). It is precisely their unfaithfulness that is a reason for Nebuchadnezzar to go up against them. He will remind them of their own iniquity and seize and carry them away for it.

### **Eze 21:24-27 | The Last King**

24 *“Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because you have made your iniquity 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 will be seized with the hand. 25 And you, O slain, wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end,’ 26 thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Remove the turban and take off the crown; this [will] no longer [be] the same. Exalt that which is low and abase that which is high. 27 A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I will make it. This also will be no more until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it [to Him].’*

Judah itself ensures that their iniquity is remembered because they continue to sin (verse 24). There is no need for a prosecutor, for the people are indicting themselves with their sins that are becoming public. These are what cause them to be given over to the judgment of Nebuchadnezzar’s hard hand.

The great culprit is the “slain, wicked one, the prince of Israel”, by which Zedekiah is meant (verse 25). In its full application, this is about the antichrist. The day of reckoning has come because his iniquity has risen to its height. He will lose his kingship. The crown as a sign of it will be taken away from him (verse 26). The turban will also be taken away from him. The turban is an ornament of the high priest (Exo 28:4; 29:6; Lev 8:9). It is possible that he has assumed a priestly dignity.

There will be a complete change in his circumstances. This is done according to the principle that God exalts those who humble themselves and humbles those who exalt themselves (Lk 14:11). Those who bow down to His judgment that He brings on them through Nebuchadnezzar, He will exalt (cf. 2Kgs 25:27-30). Those who exalt themselves against that judgment, He will abandon to judgment, as Zedekiah will experience.

The three times repeated “a ruin” indicates the judgment on Jerusalem (verse 27). That city will become an unprecedented ruin. That it is repeated three times indicates that judgment will be irrevocable and extremely forceful.

However, the destruction of Jerusalem and the dethroning of Zedekiah – and the future dethroning of the antichrist – will not be the end. God will change this state of affairs as well. The prophecy of doom ends with a

promise. God will give the land and the crown to One Who is entitled to it, that is the Messiah. To Him He will give the throne of David.

### Eze 21:28-32 | Judgment on Ammon

28 *“And you, son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the sons of Ammon and concerning their reproach,’ and say: ‘A sword, a sword is drawn, polished for the slaughter, to cause it to consume, that it may be like lightning— 29 while they see for you false visions, while they divine lies for you—to place you on the necks of the wicked who are slain, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end. 30 Return [it] to its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you. 31 I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and I will give you into the hand of brutal men, skilled in destruction. 32 You will be fuel for the fire; your blood will be in the midst of the land. You will not be remembered, for I, the LORD, have spoken.”*

Nebuchadnezzar’s decision to go up to Jerusalem (verses 20-22) does not mean that the Ammonites will escape judgment (verse 28). Their defamation over humiliated and devastated Judah is an additional reason to judge them. The sword of judgment that is in Nebuchadnezzar’s hand will massacre them as well (verses 9-10,15).

The Ammonites think they will be spared (verse 29). That is what their lying prophets with their false visions have caused them to believe. Those deceivers have even said that they will go up to Judah with Nebuchadnezzar, whose side they have chosen (2Kgs 24:2). They will then set their feet on the necks of the unholy wicked who belong to Zedekiah and whose iniquity has reached its zenith (cf. verse 25).

The call sounds to them that they should not arm themselves. They will not fight with Nebuchadnezzar and will not be able to resist him (verse 30). They will be judged in their own land and will not be led into exile like Judah. God will pour out His indignation on them and blow on them with the fire of His wrath (verse 31). He will do this by giving them into the hand of brutal men who have their destruction in mind.

The fire, picture of judgment, will do its destructive and consuming work among them (verse 32). The land will be full of the blood of the defeated in the midst of it. Their role will be utterly finished and they will no longer be asked for. They will have disappeared from memory. It happens that way because the LORD has spoken it.

## Ezekiel 22

### **Introduction**

This chapter contains three separate words of the LORD, each beginning with the phrase: “The word of the LORD came to me” (verses 1,17,23). These words of the LORD have as their common theme the defilement of Israel. The messages can be given the following titles:

1. The bloody city (verses 1-16).
2. The melting furnace (verses 17-22).
3. The wicked land (verses 23-31).

### **Eze 22:1-16 | The Bloody City**

*1 Then 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 cause her to know all her abominations. 3 You shall say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “A city shedding blood in her midst, so that her time will come, and that makes idols, contrary to her [interest], for defilement! 4 You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and defiled by your idols which you have made. Thus you have brought your day near and have come to your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations and a mocking to all the lands. 5 Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you, you of ill repute, full of turmoil. 6 “Behold, the rulers of Israel, each according to his power, have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood. 7 They have treated father and mother lightly within you. The alien they have oppressed in your midst; the fatherless and the widow they have wronged in you. 8 You have despised My holy things and profaned My sabbaths. 9 Slandering men have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood, and in you they have eaten at the mountain [shrines]. In your midst they have committed acts of lewdness. 10 In you they have uncovered [their] fathers’ nakedness; in you they have humbled her who was unclean in her menstrual impurity. 11 One has committed abomination with his neighbor’s wife and another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law. And another in*

*you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter. 12 In you they have taken bribes to shed blood; you have taken interest and profits, and you have injured your neighbors for gain by oppression, and you have forgotten Me," declares the Lord GOD. 13 "Behold, then, I smite My hand at your dishonest gain which you have acquired and at the bloodshed which is among you. 14 Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong in the days that I will deal with you? I, the LORD, have spoken and will act. 15 I will scatter you among the nations and I will disperse you through the lands, and I will consume your uncleanness from you. 16 You will profane yourself in the sight of the nations, and you will know that I am the LORD."'"*

This chapter is one long list of sins. The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). Again addressed as "the son of man" he is commanded to judge the blood city, that is Jerusalem (verse 2). The title "son of man" reminds us of the Lord Jesus, Who, as the Son of Man, is given by the Father authority to execute judgment (Jn 5:27). The city has become so depraved that God calls the city "blood city" (Eze 24:6,9). Nineveh is given a similar name (Nah 3:1). Jerusalem is given that name because of the blood that has flowed within its walls. Ezekiel has to cause the city to know all her abominations. 'Abomination' always has to do with idolatry. All injustice flows from it.

God tells Ezekiel what to say to Jerusalem (verse 3). He does not use flattering words. Violence and idolatry are mentioned in the same breath. Violence and idolatry have made the city guilty and defiled (verse 4). As a result, the end of the city is also in sight. God will turn the city over to the nations. Instead of being a blessing to the surrounding nations – which is God's purpose for Jerusalem – the nations reproach Jerusalem and mock her.

This mockery comes both from the peoples near Jerusalem and from the peoples far from her (verse 5). Her guilt and defilement are so great that it is spoken of as far away as the nations. God tells her that is one "of ill repute, full of turmoil". Defilement, sin, is the end of all togetherness. Chaos ensues. No one thinks of others anymore, for each is concerned only with and for himself.

The rulers, those in charge, have abused their power (verse 6). They have ranted violently. In doing so, they relied on their power. In their position of power they have mocked the law. They have killed people for profit. They do not care about the law of God.

The commandment to honor father and mother they trample on contemptuously (verse 7). They don't care about their parents (Exo 21:17; Lev 20:9; Deu 27:16; Pro 20:20). The stranger in their midst also has to suffer. This socially isolated group depends on the kindness of others to have an income. But the rulers see in this group only an opportunity to make money. They do not spare the socially weak as orphans and widows. Instead of supporting them in their tribulation they oppress them even more severely.

Of course, God also is targeted (verse 8). They don't give Him to what He is entitled. Not only that, they treat the gifts sanctified for Him with contempt – just as they do their parents. They don't care about justice at all (verse 9). They welcome slanderers with open arms. They hire slanderers and send them out to get people out of the way (cf. 1 Kgs 21:4-13). Then they go with them to the mountains to sacrifice to the idols and on that occasion also eat from the idol sacrifices. The disgraceful behavior of these slanderers they allow to continue in their midst undisturbed.

They also set aside all the commandments about marriage and sexuality that God has given (verses 10-11). Incest is committed in shameful and multiple ways. By “the father's nakedness” is meant the father's wife (cf. Deu 27:20; 2Sam 16:21-23; 1Cor 5:1). They don't care about God's prohibition against having intercourse with a woman who is unclean in her menstrual impurity (Lev 18:19), but humble her. The same goes for intercourse with his neighbor's wife (Lev 18:20). The son's wife is not safe either, but one takes her for one's own satisfaction (Lev 18:15). The same is true of the sister (Lev 18:9,11; Deu 27:22; 2Sam 13:12).

Nothing is sacred, nothing is safe, no one is spared. God's commandments regarding marriage and sexuality are repugnantly violated. They are guilty of abominable incest. No uncleanness is too filthy for them. In their excesses, they act “like unreasoning animals” (Jude 1:10), and not as creatures who have reason.

As easily as they trample on laws related to marriage and family, they allow themselves to be bribed to convict and put to death innocent people (verse 12). They demand excessive interest and usury from those in their power. They extort their neighbor, the compatriot. They take advantage of the neighbor's misery to benefit themselves.

The root cause of all the sins mentioned in detail is stated at the end of verse 12: they have forgotten God. Those who live with God and ask His for will will not break His law. To them the law is completely irrelevant because they do not live with God and do not ask for His will. As a result, they know no brake on their disgusting behavior. The only limit they know for their abominable deeds is that of their possibilities.

In great indignation about Jerusalem's criminal behavior, the LORD smites His hand (verse 13). The greed for money of her inhabitants as a root of all evil has led them to murder. The blood of the victims is among them. When the LORD comes to deal with the inhabitants, their talk will be over. Their hearts will fail and their strength will disappear when He acts against them (verse 14). They need not doubt that it will happen, for it will happen because the LORD has spoken. His speaking is His acting.

He will drive the inhabitants of Jerusalem out of the land and scatter them and disperse them among the nations in the lands around them (verse 15). In this way the LORD will cleanse Jerusalem of uncleanness. She has herself to blame for being thus profaned before the eyes of the nations (verse 16). Also, this is proof that the LORD has done it. Jerusalem will thereby know that He is the LORD.

### **Eze 22:17-22 | The Melting Furnace**

*17 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 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 the dross of silver. 19 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. 20 As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it in order to melt [it], so I will gather [you] in My anger and in My wrath and I will lay you [there]*

*and melt you. 21 I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. 22 As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.”*

Immediately follows a new speaking of the LORD as a continuation of what He has just said (verse 17). He tells Ezekiel that He compares those “who are of the house of Israel” to the dross of precious metal that comes to the surface when the fire is hotly heated (verse 18; cf. *Psa 119:119; Pro 25:4; Isa 1:22,25; Jer 6:27-30*). Dross that comes to the surface can be scooped up from the precious metal and cast away. Israel, that is the ungodly mass, will be revealed by the judgment as worthless dross and will be scooped up and cast away.

When the Babylonian forces enter Judah, the inhabitants of the land will flee within the walls of Jerusalem (verse 19). Jerusalem then becomes the melting furnace and God’s judgment becomes the melting process. The people of the land who fled to Jerusalem and all who are already in Jerusalem are compared to five metals (verse 20). They are gathered in the midst of Jerusalem as in a furnace, in which they will melt. With them, however, no Son of Man enters the furnace, as with the friends of Daniel (*Dan 3:25*).

He has gathered His people into the furnace. It is also He who kindles the fire, God Himself. He will blow on them with the fire of His wrath and melt them (verse 21). Again He says that they will be melted in the midst of the city (verse 22). By this they will know that He has poured out His wrath on them.

### **Eze 22:23-29 | The Wicked Land**

*23 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 24 “Son of man, say to her, ‘You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.’ 25 There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her. 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 profane, and they have not taught the*

*difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. 27 Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood [and] destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain. 28 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 oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice.*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel again (verse 23). He – again called “son of man” – is to speak to the land and not just to Jerusalem about their shameful behavior (verse 24). Because of their refusal to cleanse themselves, the land remains unclean. Therefore, it has received no rain and is barren. Instead of fruit for the LORD that they themselves can enjoy, His wrath comes upon them.

All sections of the people are involved in the unfaithfulness to God. First the prophets are mentioned (verse 25). They, who are to call God’s people to return to Him, as ‘colleague’, secretly make ‘price agreements’ to enrich themselves on the people. They act like a roaring lion tearing apart prey. So cruelly do they deal with God’s people for the sake of wealth and valuables they take from the people. They murder to the point that many women become widows.

The second category are the priests (verse 26). They are to present and live out the law to the people (Deu 33:10; Mal 2:7), but they adapt the law and break it themselves. They do not give God the gifts sanctified to Him, but use them for themselves (cf. 1Sam 2:16). As priests, they should know better than anyone what the distinction between holy and profane is (Lev 10:10; 11:47), but to them it is no matter of concern. Mixing of good and evil is a common thing for them, as long as it benefits themselves.

They don’t turn just a blind eye with regard to keeping the sabbath, but they close both their eyes. What God has said about the sabbath does not interest them at all. God is not being sanctified in their midst, but profaned.

The princes, the rulers, are no better than the categories already mentioned (verse 27). Instead of protecting the citizens and standing up for

their rights, they think only of themselves. They cruelly engage in self-enrichment. The comparison to wolves in the midst of God's people is telling. They tear apart their prey only to shed blood. This is how they destroy people, with the purpose of profiting from it.

Once again, the prophets come into play (verse 28). This category is characterized by *falsehood*, the previous by *violence* (verse 25). They make themselves look pretty, they act as if nothing is wrong. They moderate themselves to speak in the Name of the Lord GOD, while seeing nothing but false visions and divining lies. They say what people like to hear instead of presenting the terrible reality and calling for repentance. What they say, the LORD has not spoken, let that be clear!

The last category is the people of the land (verse 29). This group is no better than the previous categories who have some responsibility, but imitate them in their outrageous behavior. The people of the land also indulge in oppression and robbery. Poor and needy and foreigners are the victims who are robbed of their property without pity.

### **Eze 22:30-31 | No One Stands in the Gap**

*30 I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads," declares the Lord GOD.*

Then we hear the astonishment of the LORD at what He notices, namely, that there is no one who knows how to direct the people in the right direction (verse 30; cf. Isa 59:16a; Psa 106:23; Jer 5:1). Evil is so common that no wall can be build up to avert the judgment of God. There is no one to stand before Him as the representative of the people to keep Him from His intention. There is no intercessor to fill the gap that has been made in the wall of separation, through which idolatry flows in freely. There is no one to stop that flow. That is how common the apostasy is.

The LORD is so appalled at this that He "poured out" His indignation on them (verse 31). It is written here in the past tense, as if it had already taken

place. The people are so unchangeable in their sinful behavior that He has put an end to them by the fire of His wrath. What they get is what they themselves have asked for. Their way comes down on their own heads. They reap what they have sown.

It is an exhortation for us to stand up for God's rights in the midst of an apostate Christianity and to stand in the gap. We can pray that God in His grace will not let judgment come yet, but will bring many back to faithfulness to Him. That is one of the greatest benefits that we can bestow on God's people and, above all, honor God with. The Lord Jesus is the great Intercessor and Mediator. He is our example and we may follow Him in this too.

## Ezekiel 23

### **Introduction**

In Ezekiel 23, Ezekiel vividly paints the history of the sister kingdoms Israel and Judah. In Ezekiel 16, the LORD compared Jerusalem to a harlot. The same comparison is used in this chapter, but now for the entire nation. The emphasis in the previous comparison is on spiritual adultery with Canaanite idolatry. In addition, in Ezekiel 23 it is also about Israel's political adultery, that is, on its political alliances with foreign powers. Ezekiel 16 emphasizes more the earlier history of Israel, while Ezekiel 23 emphasizes more the later history.

The chapter can be divided into five sections:

1. Introduction: Oholah and Oholibah (verses 1-4).
2. The sin of Oholah (Samaria) (verses 5-10).
3. The sin of Oholibah (Jerusalem) (verses 11-21).
4. Judgment on Oholibah (verses 22-35).
5. Judgment on Oholah and Oholibah (verses 36-49).

### **Eze 23:1-4 | Oholah and Oholibah**

*1 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying, 2 "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; 3 and they played the harlot in Egypt. They played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and there their virgin bosom was handled. 4 Their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister. And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And [as for] their names, Samaria is Oholah and Jerusalem is Oholibah.*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). The LORD is going to introduce to Ezekiel the political sins of His people in a parable of two

women, two sisters (verse 2). This is the third time, after Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 20, that He deals with the history of His people. In the description in Ezekiel 16, we still find hope at the end of the chapter. That hope is missing in the description in this chapter. That the two women are daughters of one mother indicates that Israel was originally one people.

Yet from the time the people were in Egypt, they are represented as two women (verse 3). The actual tearing of the kingdom into two parts was preceded by a long time of inner division. This should be a warning to us to nip a spirit of division in the bud.

The two women take pleasure in the caresses of the Egyptians. The time in Egypt begins well. Joseph is viceroy. When Jacob and his sons come to Egypt, they are allowed to live in the best part of the land (Gen 47:6,11). When slavery comes, the people continue to benefit from the prosperity in Egypt. This prosperity gives a nice feeling. It makes slavery pleasant. Soon after they leave Egypt and the trials come, they even long to return to their stay in Egypt (Num 11:5; 14:2-4; Exo 16:3).

The LORD gives both women names and also says to whom those names belong (verse 4). The Hebrew word *ohel*, which means 'tent', is found in both names. Oholah means 'her tent' and Oholibah means 'My tent is in her'. Oholah is an allusion to the self-willed religion ('her tent') of the ten tribe realm, represented by Samaria. We see this willfulness in the erection of the altars for the golden calves at Bethel and Dan (1Kgs 12:28-30). Oholibah is an allusion to Jerusalem, where the temple of God ('My tent') stands and where He has dwelt.

### **Eze 23:5-10 | The Sin of Oholah and the Judgment on Her**

*5 "Oholah played the harlot while she was Mine; and she lusted after her lovers, after the Assyrians, [her] neighbors, 6 who were clothed in purple, governors and officials, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. 7 She bestowed her harlotries on them, all of whom [were] the choicest men of Assyria; and with all whom she lusted after, with all their idols she defiled herself. 8 She did not forsake her harlotries from [the time in] Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her, and they handled her virgin bosom and poured out their*

*lust on her. 9 Therefore, I gave her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted. 10 They uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and her daughters, but they slew her with the sword. Thus she became a byword among women, and they executed judgments on her.*

Samaria (the ten tribes) plays the harlot in a spiritual sense (verse 5). Instead of trusting in God, she connects herself with the Assyrians (2Kgs 15:19; Hos 5:13; 7:11; 8:9; 12:2). Seeking help from the Assyrians results in impressively dressed “neighbors”, men of distinction, entering the land (verse 6). Thus Assyrian culture makes its appearance in the land and conquers the heart of Samaria (verse 7). That culture is completely intertwined with the idolatry of Assyria which is also adopted by Samaria. The ten tribes bow down in fornication to the stink gods of Assyria.

But Assyria is not the only empire with which Samaria commits spiritual harlotry. Samaria also remains open to the influence of Egypt (verse 8). She continues to worship the idols of Egypt as she has done during the time of her slavery. Where appropriate, she also seeks political support from Egypt (cf. Hos 12:1). God reminds her of her shameless behavior that she has already displayed in her earliest days.

Because of her harlotry with Assyria, the LORD surrendered Samaria to the Assyrians (verse 9). From a political point of view, Assyria could not tolerate Samaria’s collusion with Egypt and punished Samaria severely for it (2Kgs 17:2-8). The Assyrians completely destroyed and disfigured Samaria and also depopulated it by taking away its population (verse 10). Thus, the existence of the northern ten tribes realm came to an end. The behavior of Samaria gives the Israelites a bad name among the other “women”, that is, among the other nations and especially among their sister nation Judah. In the following verses we see how Oholibah reacts to what has happened to her sister Oholah.

### **Eze 23:11-21 | The Sin of Oholibah**

*11 “Now her sister Oholibah saw [this], yet she was more corrupt in her lust than she, and her harlotries were more than the harlotries of her sister. 12 She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and officials, the ones near, magnif-*

*icently dressed, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. 13 I saw that she had defiled herself; they both took the same way. 14 So she increased her harlotries. And she saw men portrayed on the wall, images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion, 15 girded with belts on their loins, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like officers, like the Babylonians [in] Chaldea, the land of their birth. 16 When she saw them she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. 17 The Babylonians came to her to the bed of love and defiled her with their harlotry. And when she had been defiled by them, she became disgusted with them. 18 She uncovered her harlotries and uncovered her nakedness; then I became disgusted with her, as I had become disgusted with her sister. 19 Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt. 20 She lusted after their paramours, whose flesh is [like] the flesh of donkeys and whose issue is [like] the issue of horses. 21 Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom because of the breasts of your youth.*

Jerusalem (and Judah) has not let the terrifying example of Samaria and Israel keep them from going the same sinful way (verse 11). In fact, she has surpassed her sister in wickedness. Her passion leads her to act even more perniciously than her sister.

Like Samaria, Judah has sought help from Assyria (2Kgs 16:7), because she too has become enchanted with what Assyria has to offer (verse 12; verse 6). The LORD perceives how she has defiled herself by associating with Assyria and adopting its idolatry (verse 13). Thus both sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, continue on the same path of evil, away from the LORD.

Jerusalem does not limit herself to Assyria. She also comes under the temptation of the Chaldeans or Babylonians (verse 14). She sees the images of Chaldeans, portraits, engraved in the wall according to Babylonian custom. The red color of vermilion makes it appealing and attractive. The men depicted wear with pride the clothes of Babylon (verse 15). The advertisement works enchanting. Jerusalem instantly falls in love when she sees it with her own eyes (verse 16). Covetousness comes through seeing. It is the cause of the fall into sin (Gen 3:6; 1Jn 2:16). Advertising still works the same way today.

Jerusalem sends envoys to Babylon to ally with her. For a people who have the LORD as their God, this mission is deeply shameful. This mission is a great dishonor to God. In doing so, Jerusalem commits spiritual unfaithfulness that is equivalent to harlotry (verse 17). She defiles herself by this act. Sharing the love bed possibly also refers to worshiping the idols of Babylon, which we see in the word “harlotry”. Then she becomes disgusted with Babylon because Babylon’s love is over and Babylon treats her harshly. But when Babylon notices that Jerusalem seeks help from Egypt during the reign of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (Jer 37:5-8; Eze 17:12-15), Babylon turns against Jerusalem.

Shameless harlotries or idolatry has the effect that God also turns away from Jerusalem with disgust (verse 18). He cannot stand the fact that she, whom He has taken for a wife, behaves like a vulgar harlot who bares her body for any man.

Jerusalem keeps on playing the harlot and multiplies her harlotries by making new contacts, now with Egypt (verse 19). She seeks help from Egypt against the supremacy of Babylon. As a result, she comes to adopt the customs of Egypt. Judah imitates Samaria in this (verses 3,8). Also in Jerusalem, the ‘infatuations’ of the past reappear (verse 20). The Egyptians are compared to “donkeys” and “horses”, animals known for their fiery sex drive. For the gratification of that animal kind, Jerusalem makes itself available.

Then Ezekiel addresses Jerusalem directly (“thus you longed for”). He reminds her of her past shameful lusts and accuses her of allowing those feelings to gain the upper hand over her again (verse 21). It is a warning to us: if past sins, especially sexual ones, are not radically judged as sin, sooner or later they will take hold of us again (cf. Eph 4:17-19).

In the magazine ‘Live’, April/May 2013 issue, I read an article on ‘first impressions’ in which “remembering the days of her youth” (verse 19) has a current application. The article quotes something from the popular science magazine ‘Weet Magazine’. It concerns a remarkable quote from a lawyer, specializing in divorce, on April 24, 2010, in the daily Dutch newspaper ‘de Telegraaf’. After estimating the significant increase in divorces in the first

quarter of 2010 at about 20%, this lawyer says: 'The number of divorces has been increasing for years, partly because people are cheating more often and because of the rise of the Internet. As a result, old lovers suddenly reappear, with far-reaching consequences.'

Old loves with 'first impressions' that have not been forgotten, have not been discarded, and flare up again ...

### **Eze 23:22-35 | Judgment on Oholibah**

22 "Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold I will arouse your lovers against you, from whom you were alienated, and I will bring them against you from every side: 23 the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, [and] all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and officials all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses. 24 They will come against you with weapons, chariots and wagons, and with a company of peoples. They will set themselves against you on every side with buckler and shield and helmet; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they will judge you according to their customs. 25 I will set My jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in wrath. They will remove your nose and your ears; and your survivors will fall by the sword. They will take your sons and your daughters; and your survivors will be consumed by the fire. 26 They will also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels. 27 Thus I will make your lewdness and your harlotry [brought] from the land of Egypt to cease from you, so that you will not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore.' 28 For thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I will give you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom you were alienated. 29 They will deal with you in hatred, take all your property, and leave you naked and bare. And the nakedness of your harlotries will be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotries. 30 These things will be done to you because you have played the harlot with the nations, because you have defiled yourself with their idols. 31 You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand.' 32 Thus says the Lord GOD, 'You will drink your sister's cup, Which is deep and wide.

*You will be laughed at and held in derision;*

*It contains much.*

33 *'You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow,*

*The cup of horror and desolation,*

*The cup of your sister Samaria.*

34 *'You will drink it and drain it.*

*Then you will gnaw its fragments*

*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, bear now the [punishment] of your lewdness and your harlotries.'"*

"Therefore" (verse 22) refers to the unfaithfulness mentioned in the previous verses. The LORD will, as punishment for that unfaithfulness, set against her the nations from whom she has previously sought help. The LORD says who those are (verse 23). They are the Babylonians and the Assyrians, with some nomadic tribes, whom she has so admired (verse 6), but against whom she has also rebelled again. They will come against Jerusalem with great military display and set themselves against her from all sides (verse 24). They will be given power by the LORD to execute judgment on Jerusalem. They will do so in accordance with the customs of the nations she has adopted.

Through the former lovers, the LORD will make Jerusalem feel His jealousy (verse 25). He acts like a jealous husband who has been cheated by his wife in the lowest way. For this He is so wroth that He will bring His anger down on the city through the enemies. They will mutilate Jerusalem, make it hideous. Those who remain alive in the city will fall by the sword or be taken. Jerusalem will be deprived of all that is graceful and she will be displayed naked (verse 26).

That punishment will have the result that she will cease behaving shamefully and playing the harlot (verse 27). She will no longer think of an adulterous relationship with Egypt. That she will no longer think of Egypt is not because she has come to repentance. It is because the LORD has delivered her up to her enemies and she has lost all attractiveness because of

her deformity. In particular, she need not think any more of Egypt, which is not interested in a stripped and disheveled Jerusalem.

Verses 28-30 repeat in other words, what has already been said in verses 22-27. The LORD is so repulsed by her behavior that He presents her with her sins once again. He has to because she is so stubborn. He gives her over to the power of peoples she hates and from whom she sought to tear herself away (verse 28). Those nations, driven by hatred, will treat her shamefully, and will take away everything from her and leave her poor and destitute (verse 29).

She brought this judgment upon herself by her own disgraceful behavior toward the LORD (verse 30). She has offended Him to the depths of His soul by seeking support in political alliances with the neighboring nations. That lewd connection has manifested itself in the worship of the stink gods of those heathen peoples. What an insult to Him!

Thus, Jerusalem has gone the same way as her sister Samaria (verse 31). Therefore, Jerusalem will suffer the same judgment as Samaria; only it will be carried out by a different people. She will have to drink the cup of the wrath of God when the city is invaded by the Babylonians, just as Samaria drank that cup in her removal by the Assyrians.

This judgment is placed before the attention of Jerusalem once more in a song (verse 32). The fate of Jerusalem will not provoke pity, but jeers and mockery. The cup of God's wrath is filled to the brim. The enemies will note with gloating that the cup she is given to drink is well full, that severely she is punished. The cup is so full that whoever drinks it will be filled with drunkenness (verse 33). This drunkenness will not result in 'pleasantness', but in great and bitter suffering. Jerusalem can check with her sister Samaria to see what drinking that cup means.

Jerusalem will drink that cup and will drink it and drain it (verse 34). The punished harlot, who used to become drunk in committing her shameful fornication with lust, will now become drunk and insane with pain and grief when she has to drink the cup of God's wrath to the last drop. Out of her mind with pain, she will bite the cup to pieces; with the fragments,

she will rip open her breasts, with which she used to please her lovers. The Lord GOD has personally spoken this word and therefore it will happen.

Once again, the cause of this disciplinary action is emphatically presented to Jerusalem (verse 35). She has forgotten the LORD. That ignoring of the LORD is a guilty forgetting. It is the source of the misery. However, she has gone even further and cast Him contemptuously behind her back, thereby demonstrating how worthless she finds Him, not worth paying any attention to anymore. What she now faces are the consequences of her own sins.

### **Eze 23:36-49 | The End of Oholah and Oholibah**

36 Moreover, the LORD said to me, “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. 37 For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through [the fire] to them as food. 38 Again, they have done this to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and have profaned My sabbaths. 39 For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, they entered My sanctuary on the same day to profane it; and lo, thus they did within My house. 40 “Furthermore, they have even sent for men who come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and lo, they came—for whom you bathed, painted your eyes and decorated yourselves with ornaments; 41 and you sat on a splendid couch with a table arranged before it on which you had set My incense and My oil. 42 The sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and drunkards were brought from the wilderness with men of the common sort. And they put bracelets on the hands of the women and beautiful crowns on their heads. 43 “Then I said concerning her who was worn out by adulteries, ‘Will they now commit adultery with her when she is [thus]?’ 44 But they went in to her as they would go in to a harlot. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the lewd women. 45 But they, righteous men, will judge them with the judgment of adulteresses and with the judgment of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands. 46 “For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Bring up a company against them and give them over to terror and plunder. 47 The company will stone them with stones and cut them down with their

*swords; they will slay their sons and their daughters and burn their houses with fire. 48 Thus I will make lewdness cease from the land, that all women may be admonished and not commit lewdness as you have done. 49 Your lewdness will be requited upon you, and you will bear the penalty of [worshipping] your idols; thus you will know that I am the Lord GOD.”*

Ezekiel is commanded to judge the two apostate women (verse 36). The LORD presents the command to Ezekiel as a question (cf. Eze 20:4). He connects to the feelings of disgust which the prophet gradually acquired, which are also His feelings. The two women are put on the same level. This is a humiliation for Jerusalem, for the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the rest of the Judeans dislike the Samaritans (Jn 4:9; 8:48).

Ezekiel is to present the two sisters with the indictment. This means that they are told once again a detailed list of their sins which are now read out as an indictment. The summary is: adultery and murder (verse 37). The adultery here is primarily spiritual adultery, idolatry: bowing down in worship to the stink gods of the nations. The murder they commit by bringing the children destined for God as a gruesome sacrifice to those stink gods.

They did even more harm to God, for they defiled His sanctuary and profaned His sabbaths (verse 38). With God and His rights they take no account at all anymore. They will decide for themselves how to serve Him. As a result, they have so carelessly disregarded His rights that they dare to enter God's sanctuary the same day they sacrificed their children to the stink gods, without any shame (verse 39). It is supreme insolence. It is total insensitivity and indifference to what is appropriate for the presence of God.

The LORD complains that they have dared to misbehave like this in the midst of His house. It is a brutal disregard of His holiness. Their practice comes down to seeing the LORD their God as one of the idols, but one they do not take too seriously.

And still that is not all. On top of that, they invited idolatrous heathens to come to them (verse 40). They have done their best to make a good impression on those heathens. They bath themselves, make themselves attractive

and decorate themselves (cf. Pro 7:10-21). With heathens they want to connect to make themselves strong.

To put the guests in a good mood, they provide a good setting: a beautiful bed that invites sexual intercourse and a prepared table to fill the stomach well (verse 41). On that table are also incense and oil intended for the LORD. They take from the LORD what is His and put it before the heathens. This is gross abuse and an insult to the LORD.

The crowd accepts the invitation (verse 42). They come, and they join the two women at the prepared table. The revelry attracts other men. They are men of the lowest sort who appear distinguished. They bring gifts for the women with which they adorn them. These adornments act as shackles, for the women are captured by these people they invited.

There isn't much attraction left to Samaria and Jerusalem, and do the heathens still want to commit adultery with them (verse 43)? Do they really want to? Yes, because as long as there is still something to gain, the nations, especially if invited, will want to have that intercourse with Samaria and Jerusalem (verse 44). The disgraceful behavior of the two sisters started very early, as early as Egypt, and was continued by them into their old age, to the end of their existence as a people.

They will be judged for their adultery and fornication by "righteous men" (verse 45). This refers to the Assyrians (verse 9) and the Babylonians (verse 22). These nations are called "righteous" because despite their cruel practices they are the instruments through which God executes His judgment on His people. The adulterers are punished with death according to the ordinance of the law (Lev 20:10; Deu 22:22). How much more is this punishment deserved by women who, moreover, have brought upon themselves the most terrible blood guilt by sacrificing their own children to idols.

The LORD calls the nations to go up against Jerusalem and Samaria (verse 46). He gives the order to make them a terror and plunder. The nations will stone the two sisters with stones and kill them with the sword (verse 47). Thus their sons and daughters will perish and the offspring of evildoers will be exterminated. The houses, where they prepared their idolatrous practices, will be burned with fire. In this way, the shameful behavior in

the land will cease (verse 48). The judgment will be education for the women of other nations not to act in such a way.

Once again, God emphasizes that the judgment that strikes them is the result of their own disgraceful behavior (verse 49). They will bear the sins of their worship of their stink gods. When God upholds justice in this way, His own honor will shine thereby. He makes Himself known through this, and wherever He makes Himself known, He is glorified.

## Ezekiel 24

### Introduction

In the previous chapters, Ezekiel has always told the exiles that Jerusalem will also be judged. The exiles believe that things are still good in Jerusalem and that it must be very nice to be there. Ezekiel has described to them at length the sins of Jerusalem and that therefore the LORD will give up the city to judgment.

That thought does not enter the minds of the exiles. They simply do not believe the LORD and His servant Ezekiel. They have all kinds of arguments to reject Ezekiel's statements. These arguments are related to their national pride and their wrong view of the LORD and of the remnant in Jerusalem. They boast in their religious center. They believe that the LORD will never give up His city and His temple. Therefore, to them Ezekiel is a gloom and false prophet. In this chapter, the LORD no longer speaks of a judgment that is coming soon, but of a judgment that is in progress.

### Eze 24:1-14 | Parable of the Boiling Pot

*1 And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying, 2 "Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. 3 Speak a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,*

*"Put on the pot, put [it] on and also pour water in it;*

*4 Put in it the pieces,*

*Every good piece, the thigh and the shoulder;*

*Fill [it] with choice bones.*

*5 "Take the choicest of the flock,*

*And also pile wood under the pot.*

*Make it boil vigorously.*

*Also seethe its bones in it."*

*6 'Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,*

*"Woe to the bloody city,  
To the pot in which there is rust  
And whose rust has not gone out of it!  
Take out of it piece after piece,  
Without making a choice.*

*7 "For her blood is in her midst;  
She placed it on the bare rock;  
She did not pour it on the ground  
To cover it with dust.*

*8 "That it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance,  
I have put her blood on the bare rock,  
That it may not be covered."*

*9 "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,  
"Woe to the bloody city!  
I also will make the pile great.*

*10 "Heap on the wood, kindle the fire,  
Boil the flesh well  
And mix in the spices,  
And let the bones be burned.*

*11 "Then set it empty on its coals  
So that it may be hot  
And its bronze may glow  
And its filthiness may be melted in it,  
Its rust consumed.*

*12 "She has wearied [Me] with toil,  
Yet her great rust has not gone from her;  
[Let] her rust [be] in the fire!*

*13 "In your filthiness is lewdness.  
Because I [would] have cleansed you,  
Yet you are not clean,  
You will not be cleansed from your filthiness again  
Until I have spent My wrath on you.*

*14 I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming and I will act. I will not relent, and I will not pity and I will not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I will judge you," declares the Lord GOD."*

This chapter also begins with the introductory words that the word of the LORD is coming to Ezekiel (verse 1). But now a particularity is added and that is the date on which it happens. In fact, that date is so special that Ezekiel has to write that date down (verse 2). What makes the date special is that on this day the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem (2Kgs 25:1; Jer 39:1; 52:4). This day is later kept as a day of fasting during the exile (Zec 8:19).

First, a parable is told in verses 3-5. The explanation follows in verses 6-8, while new details are added in verses 9-14. Ezekiel is commanded to present the siege of Jerusalem in a parable to the rebellious house of Israel (verse 3). Here we see a prophetic representation of which the fulfillment occurs at the same time. The symbol and the event coincide. The judgment that Ezekiel announces through his parable is being carried out at the same time hundreds of miles away.

Ezekiel is to put a boiling pot on the fire and put water in the pot (cf. Jer 1:13). Then he must put good pieces of flesh and choice bones into the pot (verse 4). He must take the choicest of the flock and put the bones in the pot (verse 5). He must make it boil vigorously, paying special attention to the bones that they seethe. In order for bones to cook, the fire must be very hot. By the choicest of meat and bones is meant the most distinguished of the people, the flower of the nation.

The word “therefore” (verse 6) introduces the explanation of why the flesh and bones are in the cooking pot (cf. Eze 11:3,11). The LORD is to pronounce His “woe” on Jerusalem, the city He calls “blood city” with horror, because of the many murders committed in the city (cf. Eze 22:2). Blood sticks to the city (cf. Rev 18:24). The pot is Jerusalem. It is not just any pot, it is a pot with rust on it. Whatever the LORD has tried to remove the rust has been in vain.

Jerusalem is so attached to her harlotry and apostacy that any discipline is in vain. She doesn't want to listen. Therefore the flesh, that is the inhabitants of the city, will be removed from it piece by piece. There will be indiscriminate judgment. Judgment will strike all. A choice will not be made. No lot will be cast to set anyone free so that that person would be spared.

Jerusalem has gone so far in her shameless and brutal violence that she has not bothered to cover the innocently shed blood (verse 7). The blood was not poured out on the earth to be absorbed by the earth so that it is no longer visible, but it lies like a testimony on a bare rock that does not absorb the blood. Nor is the blood covered with earth (Lev 17:13). Here the blood remains uncovered on the rock and testifies against them. It cries out for vengeance and retribution, just as the blood of Abel, murdered by Cain, cried out to God from the earth (Gen 4:10; cf. Job 16:18). Ultimately, God Himself caused the blood to remain uncovered as a charge (verse 8; cf. Isa 26:21). He can refer to it as an occasion for His wrath and to exercise vengeance.

The wrath of God on Jerusalem is great (verse 9). Again He pronounces “woe” on the city and again calls it “blood city”. He expresses His great wrath by making the pile great. He will make the fire of His judgment very hot and therefore calls for the gathering of much wood (verse 10). The flames are to blaze high so that the flesh is boiled all over and the bones be burned. Just as everything in the pot decomposes and burns by the fire that is set under it, so the entire population of Jerusalem will be annihilated by the glow of God’s wrath. The announcement of judgment here is even stronger than in verse 5.

When everything in the pot is consumed, the pot itself is dealt with (verse 11). When in Jerusalem all the inhabitants have been killed, the city itself will be destroyed (2Kgs 25:9; Jer 38:18; 52:13). With the destruction of the city, the rust, the uncleanness, will also disappear. Thus judgment has a purifying, cleansing effect. Only in this radical way can the rust disappear. All previous efforts by the LORD to remove the uncleanness have proved futile, so that nothing remains for Him but this discipline (verse 12).

Because Jerusalem has not wanted to be cleansed, she has come to her shameful behavior (verse 13). She has not wanted to repent of her idolatry despite many forms of discipline. Her unrepentance has caused God to bring His wrath upon her.

The greatest evil is not that we sin, although of course that is bad, but that we refuse to turn away from sin. The law states that a person must be put

to death if he refuses to use the water for impurity for his cleansing in a particular case (Num 19:13; cf. Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34). For us, this speaks of refusing to confess a sin, with the result that God and fellow believers cannot have fellowship with us.

Because of Jerusalem's unrepentance, an unmitigated judgment must strike her (verse 14). God owes it to His holiness. He is longsuffering, but His longsuffering ends once. His longsuffering ends when He sees that someone, after many attempts to bring him to repentance, stubbornly refuses to repent. Those who do not repent will have to deal with a God Who will not repent of the judgment He must exercise. That judgment comes because it is deserved. It is according to the ways and deeds of the one being judged, here Jerusalem.

### **Eze 24:15-18 | Death of Ezekiel's Wife**

*15 And the word of the LORD came to me saying, 16 "Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come. 17 Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover [your] mustache and do not eat the bread of men." 18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. And in the morning I did as I was commanded.*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel again (verse 15). The message he receives connects directly to the previous one. It is a shocking message (verse 16). The LORD tells him that He will suddenly take his wife away from him. He calls her "the desire of your eyes", indicating how deeply Ezekiel loves her. The LORD also tells him to hold back his sorrow. Ezekiel is not to show any visible or audible signs of grief (cf. Jer 16:5). He is to mourn in silence.

When he is alone, he may give in to his grief (verse 17). Further, he may not follow any mourning custom. Usually the mourner walks bareheaded and with dust or ashes on his head (Jos 7:6; 1Sam 4:12; Isa 61:3). Going barefoot is also a sign of mourning (2Sam 15:30; Isa 20:2). Mourning includes covering the lower part of the face (Lev 13:45; 2Sam 15:30; 19:4; Jer 14:3; Mic

3:7). Nor should he eat the bread brought to a mourner on such occasions (Jer 16:7; Hos 9:4).

Briefly, Ezekiel indicates how the word of the LORD will be fulfilled (verse 18). He does not sit idly by waiting for the terrible event to occur. In the morning he has another prophetic message for the people and speaks to them. Before the day is over, the prophesied sudden blow falls and his wife dies. He will have groaned in silence that night, sitting by his dead wife (cf. Gen 23:2). The next morning, the obedient prophet does what the LORD has commanded him.

We see here again how a servant of God identifies with God's people in times of need, even when he has to rebuke them. He faces the worst loss that anyone on earth can experience. He must suffer out of obedience to God and out of love for God's people without saying a word. Although God does not require such an extreme sacrifice from us, it is important that we live as willing and dedicated servants.

### **Eze 24:19-24 | Meaning of the Death of Ezekiel's Wife**

*19 The people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?" 20 Then I said to them, "The word of the LORD came to me saying, 21 'Speak to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am about to profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes and the delight of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind will fall by the sword. 22 You will do as I have done; you will not cover [your] mustache and you will not eat the bread of men. 23 Your turbans will be on your heads and your shoes on your feet. You will not mourn and you will not weep, but you will rot away in your iniquities and you will groan to one another. 24 Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am the Lord GOD.'"*

The people will have heard of the disaster that struck Ezekiel. They know what is customary in such circumstances. However, Ezekiel does not act according to those customs. That raises questions among the people (verse 19). In fact, they understand that Ezekiel's behavior – his refraining from

mourning openly – must have some significance for them. Of any sympathy for the great loss Ezekiel has suffered, they give no evidence. Could they be so preoccupied with themselves that they do not think of expressing sympathy (cf. Job 2:11)? We read only that they ask what it means “for us” (Eze 37:18). In a serious speech, Ezekiel tells them what the LORD means by it (verse 20).

The message is that the LORD is going to profane His sanctuary (verse 21). It is that sanctuary of which they are so proud and to which they look with admiration. It is the most precious thing their soul possesses. Just as Ezekiel’s wife has been the desire of his eyes to him, so the temple is to them. Just as the wife, at whom Ezekiel looked with admiration, was taken from him by Divine intervention, so the temple, which they admire so much, will be taken from them by Divine judgment. The sons and daughters left behind in Jerusalem will also fall by judgment.

Just as Ezekiel did after the death of his wife, they will do when they have lost everything they have looked at with admiration (verses 22-23). Nor will they be able to help and comfort one another, for the grief is the same for all. No one is excluded. They will languish in their iniquity because they have not been willing to break with it. Therefore, they also cannot seek comfort from the LORD and must be content with complaining of their distress to one another. They have no reason to complain loudly, because they have always known what will happen to Jerusalem, but they have not believed it. Their knowledge of Jerusalem’s fate has not led them to repentance.

The question of verse 19 is clearly answered: Ezekiel is a sign for them (verse 24). When the temple is destroyed, they will do as Ezekiel did. When that event occurs, they will know that God is the Lord GOD. They will then be forced into that recognition. They will not be able to do otherwise.

### **Eze 24:25-27 | The Day of the Destruction of the Temple**

25 *As for you, son of man, will [it] not be on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their pride, the desire of their eyes and their heart’s delight, their sons and their daughters, 26 that on that day he who escapes will*

*come to you with information for [your] ears? 27 On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped, and you will speak and be mute no longer. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.”*

The LORD now addresses the word to Ezekiel personally (verse 25). Ezekiel, on the day of the destruction of the temple, “the desire of their eyes”, and the death of their sons and daughters, will receive word from an eyewitness who will confirm what he has just presented to the people (verse 26). That eyewitness comes to him after the fall of Jerusalem (Eze 33:21-22).

The message he receives and that encounter will become a turning point in his ministry. The people will be dumbfounded, but the prophet will again be able to speak openly and freely (verse 27; Eze 3:22-27). The fall of Jerusalem will impressively justify the prophet. He will be a sign to his people both in his silence and in his speaking.

## Ezekiel 25

### **Introduction**

With this chapter begins a new section containing announcements of judgments on seven nations. This section, which covers Ezekiel 25-32, contains the prophecies about:

1. Ammon (Ezekiel 25:1-7)
2. Moab (Ezekiel 25:8-11)
3. Edom (Ezekiel 25:12-14)
4. Philistines (Ezekiel 25:15-17)
5. Tyre (Ezekiel 26:1-28:19)
6. Sidon (Ezekiel 28:20-26)
7. Egypt (Ezekiel 29-32)

These chapters are a contrast to the previous chapters. In the previous chapters the LORD has sharply denounced the sins of Jerusalem. Now He is going to speak to other nations, nations that have watched the downfall of Jerusalem with great gloating. These nations are judged according to the LORD's promise to Abraham: "The one who curses you I will curse" (Gen 12:3a; cf. Mt 25:41-45). These nations are not only full of gloating about Jerusalem, but also about the LORD. The LORD is most closely associated with His people. Among the nations, the connection with their gods is also present.

In Ezekiel 25 there are four short prophecies concerning three brother nations of Israel (Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites) and a people claiming the land of Israel (Philistines). Each time, the LORD gives the reason for His judgment with the words "because" and "therefore" (verses 3-4,6-7,8-9,12-13,15-16). The conclusion is always the same: they will know that He is the LORD (verses 5,7,11,17). Also, it is a consolation to the faithful rem-

nant among the exiles, for they see in the judgment of their enemies that the LORD does not forget His people.

### **Eze 25:1-7 | Judgment on Ammon**

*1 And the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, set your face toward the sons of Ammon and prophesy against them, 3 and say to the sons of Ammon, 'Hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because you said, 'Aha!' against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and against the house of Judah when they went into exile, 4 therefore, behold, I am going to give you to the sons of the east for a possession, and they will set their encampments among you and make their dwellings among you; they will eat your fruit and drink your milk. 5 I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and the sons of Ammon a resting place for flocks. Thus 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 scorn of your soul against the land of Israel, 7 therefore, behold, I have stretched out My hand against you and I will give you for spoil to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples and make you perish from the lands; I will destroy you. Thus you will know that I am the LORD."*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He is to set his face toward the Ammonites and prophesy against them (verse 2). The phrase "son of man, set your face" occurs only in Ezekiel (Eze 6:2; 13:17; 20:46; 21:2; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 35:2; 38:2). By setting his face toward them, he sees sharply who it is about. The Ammonites are related to Israel through their descent from Lot, Abraham's nephew (Gen 19:36-38). They live on the east side of the Jordan and have always had a hostile attitude toward Israel.

Ezekiel is to call on the Ammonites to listen to the word of the Lord GOD (verse 3). The LORD is also the God of the Ammonites, even though they do not acknowledge Him and serve Milcom and Chemosh (Jdg 11:24; 1Kgs 11:5,7,33). The LORD is the God of the nations, even though they want nothing to do with Him (Rom 3:29). But God never gives up His rights. Every nation will have to give an account before Him one day.

The Ammonites loudly rejoiced over the destruction of the temple and over the destruction of the land of Judah and over the taking away of the inhabitants of Judah into exile. In their foolish, idolatrous mindset, they assumed that with the removal of the inhabitants of Judah, the power of the God of Israel was broken.

The LORD will make them feel that they are dealing with a God Who does discipline His people, but also disciplines those who rejoice about that (verse 4). The Ammonites will be delivered as prey to “the sons of the east”, which are Arab and Syrian Bedouin tribes. These will rule over them, eat their fruit and drink their milk.

Their capital Rabbah will be destroyed (verse 5). Instead of people, animals will find a resting place there. Rabbah will become a grazing place for camels and a resting place for small livestock. When the Ammonites will see this, they will be forced to acknowledge that He, the God of Israel, is the LORD.

The LORD mentions another reason for the judgment. That is their gloating over all that has come upon the land of Israel (verse 6). Gloating is an extremely sad and reprehensible form of entertainment. The Ammonites expressed it in an exuberant way, with clapping their hands and stamping their feet. The LORD sees that it comes from deep within them. He sees their hearts and what dwells therein.

Therefore He will stretch out His hand in judgment against them and give them for spoil to the nations (verse 7). He will Himself “cut” them “off”, “make them perish” and “destroy” them so that they will have no place among the nations and lands. It is an additional underscore of the undeniable fact that He is the LORD.

### **Eze 25:8-11 | Judgment on Moab**

*8 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because Moab and Seir say, 'Behold, the house of Judah is like all the nations,' 9 therefore, behold, I am going to deprive the flank of Moab of [its] cities, of its cities which are on its frontiers, the glory of the land, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon and Kiriathaim, 10 and I will give it for a possession along with the sons of Ammon to the sons of the east, so that the*

*sons of Ammon will not be remembered among the nations. 11 Thus I will execute judgments on Moab, and they will know that I am the LORD."*

The next word from the LORD concerns Moab with whom Seir – that is, the territory of Edom – is mentioned in the same breath (verse 8). The Moabites, like the Ammonites, are related to Israel through Lot (Gen 19:36-38). Moab despises Israel as a special people chosen by the LORD. To them, the house of Judah is like all the other nations. In doing so, they despise the LORD Himself, Who has chosen that people to be His people. Judah is certainly also to blame for this contempt, but the LORD blames Moab for its arrogant, condemning attitude. Someone who acts this way is completely blind to his own sins and brings judgment on himself.

Therefore the LORD will judge Moab (verse 9). His border guards will be unable to do anything against advancing enemies. The cities of which they are proud, with which they flaunt like an ornament, will be destroyed. They will be taken possession of by people from the east, the Arab and Syrian Bedouin tribes (verse 10; verse 4). The memory of them among the nations will disappear. While this too is a severe judgment, it seems to be less severe and radical than that on the Ammonites (verse 7). The judgments will force the Moabites to acknowledge that He is the LORD (verse 11).

### **Eze 25:12-14 | Judgment on Edom**

*12 "Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because Edom has acted against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has incurred grievous guilt, and avenged themselves upon them," 13 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also stretch out My hand against Edom and cut off man and beast from it. And I will lay it waste; from Teman even to Dedan they will fall by the sword. 14 I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel. Therefore, they will act in Edom according to My anger and according to My wrath; thus they will know My vengeance," declares the Lord GOD.*

The third judgment is pronounced by the LORD on Edom (verse 12), which is Esau. Edom is much more closely related to Israel than Ammon and Moab. Esau is the brother of Jacob. So Edom is in a literal sense a brother people. With Edom, however, there has never been any brotherly affection. He has acted against Judah more than any other hostile people

out of vindictiveness. Edom has incurred a heavy debt by taking revenge on Judah out of sheer vindictiveness. The vindictiveness toward Judah is in Esau's blood.

God will stretch out His hand in judgment against Edom (verse 13). This will be a radical judgment. Man and beast will be cut off. In other cases, cities are destroyed and people cut off, but a dwelling place for animals remains. This is not even the case with Edom. The whole land, from Teman in the extreme north to Dedan in the extreme south, will be given up to destruction.

For the destruction of Edom, God will use His people Israel (verse 14; Oba 1:18). His people will cause His anger and wrath to come upon that nation. Edom was first invaded by the Babylonians and later destroyed by the Arabs. In the time of the Maccabees, Edom was completely conquered by the Jews. In the end time the final judgment will come on Edom. There seems to be no recognition with Edom that He is the LORD, as we find with the other nations in this chapter. They will only know the vengeance of the Lord GOD.

### **Eze 25:15-17 | Judgment on the Philistines**

*15 Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because the Philistines have acted in revenge and have taken vengeance with scorn of soul to destroy with everlasting enmity," 16 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, even cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast. 17 I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes; and they will know that I am the LORD when I lay My vengeance on them.""*

The fourth announcement of judgment concerns the Philistines (verse 15). These enemies also receive the charge that they acted in vengeance (as did Edom) and have been raging with heartfelt gloating (as did Ammon). Their motivation is "an everlasting enmity" (cf. Eze 35:5). They have observed the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem with devilish delight.

Therefore the LORD will stretch out His hand also against them and other groups from Crete who have joined the Philistines ("the Cherethites") in

judgment (verse 16). If, after an initial judgment, some remain, a remnant hiding on the seashore, He will kill them there.

The LORD will punish their vengeance with His “great vengeance” and “wrathful rebukes” (verse 17). There is a tremendous threat in these expressions. Through them the LORD makes Himself known as a righteous Judge from Whom there is no escape. The righteous punishment cannot be escaped by anyone, neither can the forced recognition that He is the LORD. Every knee will bow to Him, even those who are under the earth (Phil 2:10).

## Ezekiel 26

### **Introduction**

After the LORD has pronounced His judgments on the enemies east and south of Israel, He now turns to the north. There lies Tyre, in present-day Lebanon. The prophecy about Tyre is divided into three chapters. Each chapter shows a particular feature of the megalomania and pride of Tyre. The judgment deals with:

1. her joy at the breaking of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 26);
2. her haughtiness and self-indulgence (Ezekiel 27);
3. her wisdom and insight (Ezekiel 28).

We may wonder why Tyre is getting so much attention. The reason is that Tyre bears a great resemblance to the great Babylon, the great spiritual power (Eze 27:1-36; Rev 17:1-18; 18:1-24). Tyre refers to that great power. Following on from Babylon is Rome, also a trading city. Rome is the great successor to Tyre. Behind the king of Tyre we see the person of satan himself (Ezekiel 28). We also see that person with the restored Roman Empire. With Tyre, prophetically, we are dealing with the great power of satan in the end time, both religiously and politically and economically.

### **Eze 26:1-14 | Judgment on Tyre**

*1 Now in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem, 'Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken; it has opened to me. I shall be filled, [now that] she is laid waste,' 3 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. 4 They will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock. 5 She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,' declares the Lord GOD, 'and she will become spoil for the*

*nations. 6 Also her daughters who are on the mainland will be slain by the sword, and they will know that I am the LORD.” 7 For thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry and a great army. 8 He will slay your daughters on the mainland with the sword; and he will make siege walls against you, cast up a ramp against you and raise up a large shield against you. 9 The blow of his battering rams he will direct against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. 10 Because of the multitude of his horses, the dust [raised by] them will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of cavalry and wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city that is breached. 11 With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will slay your people with the sword; and your strong pillars will come down to the ground. 12 Also they will make a spoil of your riches and a prey of your merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the water. 13 So I will silence the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will be heard no more. 14 I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the LORD have spoken,” declares the Lord GOD.*

The prophecy about Tyre is dated (verse 1). This eleventh year is the year Jerusalem is taken by the Chaldeans, the year of the destruction of Jerusalem (2Kgs 25:2-3). About that destruction Tyre rejoices greatly (verse 2). She calls Jerusalem “the gateway of the peoples”. Jerusalem is a formidable trade competitor of Tyre, for Jerusalem controls the overland trade routes from Egypt and Arabia to Tyre.

Now that this obstacle has been removed, Tyre can make even greater profits. Tyre boasts that control of the trade routes that Jerusalem possessed has now passed to her. Tyre sees the full benefits coming her way. She will become full of all riches because Jerusalem has fallen. Here we see that love of money, which is a root of all evil (1Tim 6:10a), destroys the good relations of old (1Kgs 5:1). Love of money here even causes joy at the severance and destruction of a former friend.

A behavior like that of Tyre is hated by the LORD (Pro 17:5b). Because Tyre is so full of selfishness and greed for money, the LORD will judge

the city (verse 3). In four prophecies, four extremely detailed and accurate predictions follow. Each of these prophecies begins with the words “thus says the lord GOD” (verses 3-6,7-14,15-18,19-21).

With the threatening words “behold, I am against you, O Tyre”, God predicts that He will bring up many nations against Tyre, as the sea brings up its waves. He compares the bringing up of these nations to a flood or a tsunami: the bringing up the waves of the sea. As God controls the waves of the sea, so He controls the nations. Those nations come this time not with peaceful intentions, to trade with Tyre, but to destroy her (verse 4). The protection of Tyre will be broken down and turned to dust. The proud mercantile city, built on a rock in the midst of the sea, teeming with people and boasting of its treasures, will become a barren rock where no one can live.

The only thing the rock in the midst of the sea can still serve for is to dry nets there (verse 5). So it will happen, for the LORD has spoken it. The wealth that has been piled up there will be taken as spoil by the nations. Those who live on the mainland, the daughters who feast on the commercial prosperity obtained, will be killed with the sword (verse 6). Thus they will know that He is the LORD.

In the second prophecy, the LORD tells who He is sending as enemies upon Tyre: the troops of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon (verse 7). This king with so much power that God calls him “the king of kings” (Dan 2:37), is nothing but an instrument in His hand, one who can do nothing but carry out His will. This king will move against Tyre from the north with a huge fighting force. The first thing he will do is “slay your daughters on the mainland with the sword”. By the “daughters” is meant the cities and towns on the mainland that are near Tyre and dependent on her (verse 8). Then he will besiege Tyre with heavy artillery. After that siege, he will break through the defenses by force and tear down the watchtowers (verse 9).

The multitude of horses he has will raise so much dust that Tyre will be covered by it (verse 10). When Nebuchadnezzar storms into the gate of the city with thundering violence, the thumping of the horses’ hooves and

chariots will make the walls tremble. The city will fall like an open city into the hands of the king of Babylon and his armies. When they are in the city, the streets will be broken up by the horses (verse 11). No passable road will remain. The inhabitants will be killed and every strength where people have entrenched themselves will come crashing down to the earth.

The accumulated wealth will be made a spoil and all the merchandise will be plundered (verse 12). Nothing of their treasures will remain for them. The walls they have built around their homes to protect their precious villas from burglars will be destroyed. Then their coveted abodes, of which they are so proud, will be razed to the ground. The debris will be dumped in the sea. That is the end of all their luxury.

This will also be the end of their songs, which they sing out (cf. Amos 5:23) and in which they praise how wonderfully they have prospered (verse 13). The harps with which they accompany their singing are silent, forever. God has put an end to their bellowing.

So the LORD will make Tyre a bare rock, where there is nothing left and no one lives (verse 14). The only thing left to do is to lay nets to dry. Never again will anything of Tyre rise up. Because the LORD has said so, it will be so.

### **Eze 26:15-21 | Reaction to the Fall of Tyre**

*15 Thus says the Lord GOD to Tyre, "Shall not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall when the wounded groan, when the slaughter occurs in your midst? 16 Then all the princes of the sea will go down from their thrones, remove their robes and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble every moment and be appalled at you. 17 They will take up a lamentation over you and say to you,*  
*'How you have perished, O inhabited one,*  
*From the seas, O renowned city,*  
*Which was mighty on the sea,*  
*She and her inhabitants,*  
*Who imposed her terror*

*On all her inhabitants!*

*18 'Now the coastlands will tremble*

*On the day of your fall;*

*Yes, the coastlands which are by the sea*

*Will be terrified at your passing.'"*

*19 For thus says the Lord GOD, "When I make you a desolate city, like the cities which are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you and the great waters cover you, 20 then I will bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lower parts of the earth, like the ancient waste places, with those who go down to the pit, so that you will not be inhabited; but I will set glory in the land of the living. 21 I will bring terrors on you and you will be no more; though you will be sought, you will never be found again," declares the Lord GOD.*

The third prophecy of the LORD deals with the reactions of the trading partners to the fall of Tyre (verse 15). The coastlands, that is, the islands in and the countries around the Mediterranean with which Tyre trades, will react with dismay to the news of the slaughter wrought in Tyre. The princes of the coastlands will mourn deeply (verse 16). It does make clear the extent of Tyre's influence as a trading partner. These coastlands owe their prosperity to Tyre, and now they suddenly see that prosperity disappear.

They will express their selfish grief by singing a lamentation over Tyre (verse 17). In the song, they first give high praise of Tyre's past fame, power, and wealth in order to make the contrast with the current situation all the stronger. The city that has disappeared from the everyday picture of the seas is famous. Many people have lived there. Its wealth has been its strength. Everyone in the area has been in awe of her. How totally different the situation is now (verse 18). The contrast with the past is enormous. The fall and ruin of the city have a shock effect on the coastlands. The sight is desolate. In similar terms, the New Testament describes the fall of Babylon (Rev 18:15-19).

In the fourth and final prophecy, God tells us that He Himself determined the fate of Tyre (verse 19). The nations (verse 3) and Nebuchadnezzar (verse 7) are merely instruments in His hand. God will cover Tyre with water as through a flood and submerge the city under the flood. The wa-

ters which she sails with her proud ships, and which are the source of her wealth and prosperity, will become her ruin. God will add Tyre to the people and nations who have long been dead and whose bodies are buried in the pit (verse 20). They no longer play any role in the land of the living. Their souls “dwell in the lower parts of the earth”, the realm of the dead, in Hebrew *sheol* or in Greek *hades*, where they are united with all who have died in unbelief.

Tyre will be utterly destroyed (verse 21). The city will not recover from that destruction. Tyre will only live on in memory as a terrifying example. The time will never come when the city will again become a factor of importance in world society. Those who seek to rebuild and restore Tyre will not find any starting point for that. There will be nothing left of Tyre to be found. Thus “declares the Lord GOD”.

## Ezekiel 27

### **Introduction**

The LORD is not yet finished with Tyre. As a result of the pride and complacency of Tyre and the fall that follows, Ezekiel is to take up a lamentation over Tyre. This lamentation is followed up in Ezekiel 28 with the lamentation over the king of Tyre.

### **Eze 27:1-3 | The Haughtiness of Tyre**

*1 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "And you, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre; 3 and say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrance to the sea, merchant of the peoples to many coastlands, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,  
"O Tyre, you have said, 'I am perfect in beauty.'*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He is commanded to take up a lamentation over Tyre (verse 2). That instead of a jubilation a lamentation over the fall of Tyre is to be heard shows that God is not pleased with the death of the sinner. Ezekiel is to tell Tyre what the occasion for this lamentation is (verse 3). First He mentions the place of settlement and then her occupations. Her place is very strategic and her occupations are in keeping with it. Tyre is the center of world trade in those days.

The location and occupations of Tyre serve only one thing and that is the honor and glory of Tyre herself. Full of haughtiness, she beats her breast and boasts of being "perfect in beauty" (cf. Eze 27:3,4,11; 28:7,12,17). She moderates attributes that God bestows on Jerusalem (Psa 48:1-2; 50:2; Eze 16:14). Where bystanders say of Jerusalem that she is "the perfection of beauty" (Lam 2:15), Tyre says this about herself. Therefore, God must judge Tyre, for "God is opposed to the proud" (Jam 4:6).

### **Eze 27:4-11 | Description of the Ship**

*4 "Your borders are in the heart of the seas;*

*Your builders have perfected your beauty.*

*5 "They have made all [your] planks of fir trees from Senir;  
They have taken a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you.*

*6 "Of oaks from Bashan they have made your oars;  
With ivory they have inlaid your deck of boxwood from the coastlands of Cyprus.*

*7 "Your sail was of fine embroidered linen from Egypt  
So that it became your distinguishing mark;  
Your awning was blue and purple from the coastlands of Elishah.*

*8 "The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers;  
Your wise men, O Tyre, were aboard; they were your pilots.*

*9 "The elders of Gebal and her wise men were with you repairing your seams;  
All the ships of the sea and their sailors were with you in order to deal in your merchandise.*

*10 "Persia and Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war. They hung shield and helmet in you; they set forth your splendor. 11 The sons of Arvad and your army were on your walls, [all] around, and the Gammadim were in your towers. They hung their shields on your walls [all] around; they perfected your beauty.*

In these verses, the LORD describes the wealth of Tyre in a parable. He compares Tyre and her development to a beautifully rigged, luxurious ship sailing on the high seas with the wind full in its sails. This picture fits well with the city built on a rocky island. No expense was spared in building the ship to make her "beauty perfect" (verse 4). It is a beautiful ship. However, there is a fatal lack: the LORD is not on board. That is why it suffers shipwreck, despite all the solid and beautiful materials and all the skilled helmsmen and 'maintenance technicians'.

The wood for the floors comes from cypress trees from Senir (verse 5). The masts are made of cedar from Lebanon. Cedar wood was used by King Solomon for paneling the inner walls of the temple and for the construction of his own house (1Kgs 6:15; 7:2). All building materials are chosen and used with care. Oak wood from Bashan is used for the oars, while ivory is used for the planks, which are inlaid with cypress wood from the coastlands of Cyprus (verse 6).

The famous Egyptian linen is used for the sails (verse 7). That colorfully embroidered fine linen is normally used for costly clothing. It makes the sails a banner, a gracefully flapping flag, which increases the distinguish- edness of the ship. The deck tents or staterooms, the sleeping quarters for the common sailor, are also furnished with the most magnificent fabrics from the coastal lands of Elishah.

The rowers were also recruited with care (verse 8). The people of Sidon and Arvad are known at this time as excellent pilots. The pilots are men who sail the seas with wisdom. They know the best sailing routes like no other. Even the maintenance department on board consists of experienced and skilled people (verse 9). If there is a leak, they know how to plug it immediately and adequately. All the ships and their crews are eager to come alongside and trade with the flagship Tyre. To protect its flourishing trade and prosperity, Tyre also employs soldiers (verses 10-11). By doing so, they believe they can ensure their perfect beauty.

### **Eze 27:12-25 | The Trade Relations**

*12 "Tarshish was your customer because of the abundance of all [kinds] of wealth; with silver, iron, tin and lead they paid for your wares. 13 Javan, Tubal and Meshech, they were your traders; with the lives of men and vessels of bronze they paid for your merchandise. 14 Those from Beth-togarmah gave horses and war horses and mules for your wares. 15 The sons of Dedan were your traders. Many coastlands were your market; ivory tusks and ebony they brought as your payment. 16 Aram was your customer because of the abundance of your goods; they paid for your wares with emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral and rubies. 17 Judah and the land of Israel, they were your traders; with the wheat of Minnith, cakes, honey, oil and balm they paid for your merchandise. 18 Damascus was your customer because of the abundance of your goods, because of the abundance of all [kinds] of wealth, because of the wine of Helbon and white wool. 19 Vedan and Javan paid for your wares from Uzal; wrought iron, cassia and sweet cane were among your merchandise. 20 Dedan traded with you in saddlecloths for riding. 21 Arabia and all the princes of Kedar, they were your customers for lambs, rams and goats; for these they were your customers. 22 The traders of Sheba and Raamah, they*

*traded with you; they paid for your wares with the best of all [kinds] of spices, and with all [kinds] of precious stones and gold. 23 Haran, Canneh, Eden, the traders of Sheba, Asshur [and] Chilmad traded with you. 24 They traded with you in choice garments, in clothes of blue and embroidered work, and in carpets of many colors [and] tightly wound cords, [which were] among your merchandise. 25 The ships of Tarshish were the carriers for your merchandise. And you were filled and were very glorious  
In the heart of the seas.*

These verses give an impressive list of countries and cities with which Tyre had trade relations. It shows the enormous influence of Tyre in a wide area. In the middle of that list are also Judah and Israel (verse 17). The merchandise consists of every possible commodity from which something can be earned, such as food, spices, fabrics, (precious) metals, animals and even people (cf. Rev 18:3).

Trading as an occupation or profession is not wrong. The Lord Jesus exhorts us to do business with our means (Lk 19:12-13). This is true in both material and spiritual terms. For us, it is about not to store up for ourselves “treasures on earth” but “treasures in heaven” (Mt 6:19-20).

The whole impressive exhibition of luxury and prosperity in the above verses seems to indicate that nothing can disturb Tyre’s happiness. Her prosperity can only get more and better. However, Tyre will experience how foolish it is to rely on the uncertainty of wealth (1Tim 6:17a). We also see this foolishness in the world, where high stakes are placed on economic growth. The pursuit of more will be punished mercilessly one day.

We see in the detailed listing of trade activities that God knows all the ways and all the actions of Tyre. He knows where she has been and what she has done there. In the enumeration, He holds up to Tyre that He has seen everything and also that she has done everything purely for her own sake and with an attitude as if she were God. Thus God will confront each person with his actions and with his mind and judge him accordingly (Rev 20:12).

**Eze 27:26-36 | The Shipwreck**

26 *"Your rowers have brought you  
Into great waters;  
The east wind has broken you  
In the heart of the seas.*

27 *"Your wealth, your wares, your merchandise,  
Your sailors and your pilots,  
Your repairers of seams, your dealers in merchandise  
And all your men of war who are in you,  
With all your company that is in your midst,  
Will fall into the heart of the seas  
On the day of your overthrow.*

28 *"At the sound of the cry of your pilots  
The pasture lands will shake.*

29 *"All who handle the oar,  
The sailors [and] all the pilots of the sea  
Will come down from their ships;  
They will stand on the land,*

30 *And they will make their voice heard over you  
And will cry bitterly.  
They will cast dust on their heads,  
They will wallow in ashes.*

31 *"Also they will make themselves bald for you  
And gird themselves with sackcloth;  
And they will weep for you in bitterness of soul  
With bitter mourning.*

32 *"Moreover, in their wailing they will take up a lamentation for you  
And lament over you:*

*'Who is like Tyre,  
Like her who is silent in the midst of the sea?*

33 *'When your wares went out from the seas,  
You satisfied many peoples;  
With the abundance of your wealth and your merchandise  
You enriched the kings of earth.*

34 *'Now that you are broken by the seas*

*In the depths of the waters,  
Your merchandise and all your company  
Have fallen in the midst of you.  
35 'All the inhabitants of the coastlands  
Are appalled at you,  
And their kings are horribly afraid;  
They are troubled in countenance.  
36 'The merchants among the peoples hiss at you;  
You have become terrified  
And you will cease to be forever.'""*

In these verses the LORD also uses the picture of the ship for Tyre to represent judgment on her. The downfall of Tyre is represented by a shipwreck caused by an east wind (verse 26). The east wind is a picture of Nebuchadnezzar coming to destroy Tyre. The contrast in this verse is striking. The first part describes the actions of man, to what the rowers of Tyre were capable of. In the second part, we see God's hand coming on Tyre in judgment that strikes her right in the heart of her pride.

Because of the shipwreck, the ship and its entire cargo will perish (verse 27). There will be desperation among all those who labored on the ship for the prosperity of Tyre (verses 28-34). There will be dismay among all who traded with her (verse 35), while the competitors will show their disgust with gloating (verse 36).

The wise men of Tyre (verse 8) who steered the ship were unable to prevent the shipwreck. Only God can give wisdom to go through this life without suffering shipwreck. In a spiritual sense, Christians can suffer shipwreck concerning their faith if they reject a good conscience (1Tim 1:19; Acts 24:16).

Faith will suffer shipwreck if material prosperity takes hold of us and we silence our conscience. Economic growth is also today the highest goal in the lives of countless people. This leads to a life of independence from God, which is essentially pride. And "pride [goes] before destruction" (Pro 16:18).

## Ezekiel 28

### **Introduction**

The section of Ezekiel 26-27 speaks of the city of Tyre. In Ezekiel 28 it is about the leader of Tyre. To the eye, Tyre has a leader who leads the city, but behind that man is a spiritual, demonic power that inspires him. There is a close relationship between the leader and that spiritual power. The leader is the visible representative of this demonic power that is worshiped as a deity.

We also see the combination of a human leader with a demonic power behind him governing him with the king of Babylon. The demonic power behind the king of Babylon is satan himself (Isa 14:12-15). Another example, which is still future, is the beast, the dictator of Europe in the book of Revelation, who is ruled by satan (Rev 13:1-9). Behind an earthly leader who has no regard for God, a demonic power rises.

### **Eze 28:1-5 | The Pride of the Leader of Tyre**

*1 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying, 2 “Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Because your heart is lifted up  
And you have said, ‘I am a god,  
I sit in the seat of gods  
In the heart of the seas’;  
Yet you are a man and not God,  
Although you make your heart like the heart of God—  
3 Behold, you are wiser than Daniel;  
There is no secret that is a match for you.  
4 “By your wisdom and understanding  
You have acquired riches for yourself  
And have acquired gold and silver for your treasuries.  
5 “By your great wisdom, by your trade  
You have increased your riches*

| *And your heart is lifted up because of your riches —*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He is to speak the word of the LORD to the leader of Tyre (verse 2). God fathoms the heart of that man and sees that in it is the worst pride of Tyre. He is the personification of the city. His pride is that he says of himself that he is God and that as God he rules the world trade. He imagines himself in his island city as in a house of gods on a mountain of gods, untouchable by men and perfectly safe.

God reminds him that he is nothing more than a man and not God. Despite this, he is so prideful that he makes his heart like the heart of God. He takes the place of God in pride and thinks he can act autonomously, without depending on anyone. He is completely complacent. Complacency is the typical sin of the great ones of the earth that will have its highest display in the man of sin, the antichrist (2Thes 2:3-8).

It is noteworthy that God says of the leader of Tyre that he is an especially wise man, even wiser than Daniel (verse 3; Dan 1:20; 5:11,12,14). The leader of Tyre does not moderate himself to be wise; he is wise. God has endowed him with that special wisdom. Only he has not used that wisdom in the manner of Daniel. He has used his extraordinary abilities to his own honor and fame, without any thought of humility in the knowledge that God has given him that wisdom.

The leader of Tyre used the wisdom granted to him to pursue selfish ends (verse 4). He used his wisdom and insight to increase his riches, to acquire wealth and fill his treasuries with gold and silver. By acting smartly, his wealth was increased (verse 5). But with the increase of his wealth, his pride has also increased. His wealth has corrupted him through and through. In his dealings he has not only been clever, but also dishonest (verse 18). Those who act apart from God think only of themselves and will always operate with lies and deceit.

### **Eze 28:6-10 | Judgment on the Leader of Tyre**

| *6 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD,  
| 'Because you have made your heart*

*Like the heart of God,  
 7 Therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you,  
 The most ruthless of the nations.  
 And they will draw their swords  
 Against the beauty of your wisdom  
 And defile your splendor.  
 8 'They will bring you down to the pit,  
 And you will die the death of those who are slain  
 In the heart of the seas.  
 9 'Will you still say, "I am a god,"  
 In the presence of your slayer,  
 Though you are a man and not God,  
 In the hands of those who wound you?  
 10 'You will die the death of the uncircumcised  
 By the hand of strangers,  
 For I have spoken!' declares the Lord GOD!'"*

Because the leader of Tyre has become so prideful that he says he is God, the judgment of the Lord GOD will come on him (verses 2,6-7; cf. Acts 12:21-23). God will bring the Babylonians upon him who will treat him violently. Then his wisdom will know no way out and his splendor will be desecrated. Nothing will remain of his pretended divine status.

Humiliation will be to the depths of the pit, i.e. the grave, and to the death of the realm of the dead (verse 8). The place where he has felt and behaved himself as God – the heart of the seas (verse 2) – is the place where he will die. Then it is over and out with his playing God. The LORD holds before him the question of whether, when he is face to face with his murderer, he will persist in claiming to be God (verse 9). What a worthless god he will prove to be when he is in the power of the one who defeated him. He will die a vile death because the Lord GOD has declared it (verse 10). No one will be able to change that.

Wanting to be like God caused the fall into sin (Gen 3:5-6). The desire to be like God has been present in man since that moment. Those who live without God are constantly looking for ways to satisfy that desire. The whole world system, which is in the power of satan, rests on the presump-

tion to be equal to God. Man imagines himself to be God and thinks he has everything under control and can govern everything; and he looks for ways and means to do this better and better. The tragedy of man is that he constantly thinks he can ultimately control everything. God will judge that pride by humbling the proud and punishing them with death, hell. Hell will be full of people who have all imagined themselves to be God in one way or another.

### **Eze 28:11-19 | Lamentation Over the King of Tyre**

*11 Again the word of the LORD came to me saying, 12 "Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "You had the seal of perfection,*

*Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*

*13 "You were in Eden, the garden of God;*

*Every precious stone was your covering:*

*The ruby, the topaz and the diamond;*

*The beryl, the onyx and the jasper;*

*The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald;*

*And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets,*

*Was in you.*

*On the day that you were created*

*They were prepared.*

*14 "You were the anointed cherub who covers,*

*And I placed you [there].*

*You were on the holy mountain of God;*

*You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.*

*15 "You were blameless in your ways*

*From the day you were created*

*Until unrighteousness was found in you.*

*16 "By the abundance of your trade*

*You were internally filled with violence,*

*And you sinned;*

*Therefore I have cast you as profane*

*From the mountain of God.*

*And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,*

*From the midst of the stones of fire.*

*17 "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;  
You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.  
I cast you to the ground;  
I put you before kings,  
That they may see you.*

*18 "By the multitude of your iniquities,  
In the unrighteousness of your trade  
You profaned your sanctuaries.  
Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you;  
It has consumed you,  
And I have turned you to ashes on the earth  
In the eyes of all who see you.*

*19 "All who know you among the peoples  
Are appalled at you;  
You have become terrified  
And you will cease to be forever."*

When the LORD has described the judgment on the leader of Tyre, He speaks again to Ezekiel (verse 11). He instructs him to take up a lamentation over the leader of Tyre, whom He now calls "the king" of Tyre (verse 12). He also gives him the words of this lamentation to speak on His behalf to the king of Tyre.

First the king is presented with all the privileges he has received (verses 12-15). Behind the description of this king in his perfection in wisdom and beauty looms the supernatural form of satan. The king of Tyre can be identified with satan. Therefore, reference can also be made to Eden, the garden of God, as a place where he has been present (verse 13). Thereby we should not think of paradise on earth (Genesis 2-3) – for there he came as the serpent (Gen 3:1) – but of God's court in heaven.

Almost all the precious stones mentioned here are also found in the first, second and fourth rows on the high priest's breastpiece (Exo 28:17-20). The order there is different and the three stones mentioned in the third row on the breastpiece (Exo 28:19) are missing here. This is not a comparison to

the function of the high priest, but to the brilliance of the position represented by the precious stones.

This splendor makes a great impression on a Jew and especially on a priest – and Ezekiel is a priest. Added to this is the fact that his whole person is covered with precious stones, that is, radiates glory, and not, as in the case of the high priest, only part of his person. The “tambourines and flutes” [it can also be translated “settings and sockets”] symbolize festive joy (Gen 31:27; 1Sam 10:5).

Satan is originally a cherub, anointed, i.e. appointed by God with a special care for His holy mountain (verse 14). God gave him his perfect beauty, as well as his function and his musical abilities. God created him perfectly, for God does not create anything that is imperfect. From the day this cherub was created, he is also blameless or perfect in his ways (verse 15). He does what God expects of him; he fulfills the purpose for which God created him. All is going well. “Until” the moment comes when God finds iniquity in him.

The privileged, protective cherub becomes prideful of his position (verse 16) and of all that God has given him. All his actions up to that point are actions to the glory of God. This changes when he begins to act independently of God and thus rebels against God. Then violence arises in him and he begins to sin. God can then no longer maintain him in His presence and removes him from His mountain. The cherub who has become satan – satan means opponent, attacker or accuser – is removed from the midst of the other cherubim, which are the “stones of fire”. This is the moment of which it is written: “For the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1Jn 3:8a). From now on, he cannot do anything but sin.

The cause of satan’s fall is his pride (1Tim 3:6), caused by his beauty (verse 17). As a result, his wisdom is also destroyed. True wisdom is the fear of God, or reverence for God, but that is not any longer present with satan from that moment on.

The judgment that God executes on Tyre leaves nothing of all the fame and prosperity of this mighty king. He is thrown to the earth. Other rulers, who at first admired him so much, now look down on him with contempt. Tyre

has come to her prosperity in a dishonest way (verse 18). The sanctuaries she has owned attest to this. By sanctuaries she may mean her palaces, but also her idol temples.

Both places had as a feature “the multitude” of her iniquities which she practiced and which resulted from “the unrighteousness” of her trade. Tyre caused the fire of judgment herself. All the fuel for it she has gathered herself. God only has to kindle it. As a result, the city has become a heap of ashes to the eyes of all who look at it.

All who know Tyre are appalled at the fall of this once powerful, prosperous, and impressive trading city (verse 19). From the fall of Tyre emanates a threat that causes horror. It is a warning to all other trading cities to realize that there is a God Who sees and judges everything. For Tyre, it is too late to repent. The city has ceased forever.

### **Eze 28:20-24 | Judgment on Sidon**

*20 And the word of the LORD came to me saying, 21 “Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, prophesy against her 22 and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am against you, O Sidon, And I will be glorified in your midst.*

*Then they will know that I am the LORD when I execute judgments in her, And I will manifest My holiness in her.*

*23 “For I will send pestilence to her And blood to her streets, And the wounded will fall in her midst*

*By the sword upon her on every side; Then they will know that I am the LORD.*

*24 And there will be no more for the house of Israel a prickling brier or a painful thorn from any round about them who scorned them; then they will know that I am the Lord GOD.”*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 20). He is to set his face toward Sidon and then prophesy against it (verse 21). Sidon is about forty miles north of Tyre on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The Lord GOD says to Sidon that He will be glorified in her midst (verse 22). This He will

do by executing judgments on Sidon. Through this He will make Himself known to her as the LORD.

The judgments consist of the pestilence that He will send to the city and the sword that will make many victims, so that the blood fills the streets (verse 23). Once again the LORD points out that by this they will know that He is the LORD.

Sidon receives these judgments because she has scorned and mocked Israel for the judgment God has brought upon His people (verse 24). The jeers and scorn have acted like prickly thorns and painful thistles. Other nations around Israel have also been guilty of this. God will silence all these nations, while there will be restoration for Israel. The following verses show that.

The judgment on Tyre and Sidon does not mean that there is no mercy for individuals in these cities. We see this in the Gospels. The Lord Jesus went near Tyre and Sidon (Mt 15:21; Mk 7:24) and healed the daughter of a woman from that area (Mt 15:22-28). Another example is that among the large crowd of people who came to Him because they had heard of Him were also people from Tyre and Sidon (Mk 3:8).

In addition, the Lord notes that the cities where He has been and which have seen His powers but rejected Him will be judged more severely than Tyre and Sidon (Mt 11:21-22). Thereby He also declares that the day of judgment has not yet fully arrived for the two cities, although they have already been visited by much judgment on them.

### **Eze 28:25-26 | Promise of Restoration for Israel**

*25 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and will manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. 26 They will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards and live securely when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God."'"*

As is so often the case in Scripture, we see that after the judgment on the nations, there will be blessing for Israel. While the surrounding nations are being ravaged, the LORD will gather the people of Israel from the nations among which He scattered them in His judgment (verse 25). Then they will sanctify Him; they will give Him the place in their midst that He has desired for so long. The nations will see it. Israel will live in its own land. It is the land that the LORD gave His servant Jacob.

God's people will then live in it securely and without worry, for their God protects them (verse 26). From the surrounding nations they will have nothing more to fear, for God judged those nations at the beginning of the realm of peace. Those nations will no longer attack them or even mock them. The judgments have caused them to bow down before God and acknowledge His authority, though by many that will be done only hypocritical. However, no one will be able to deny anymore that He, the LORD, is their God, that He is the God of Israel. To know Him is all that matters. To know Him is everything.

## Ezekiel 29

### Introduction

The section of Ezekiel 29-32 deals with the judgment on Egypt. In this section, “the word of the LORD” comes to Ezekiel seven times (Eze 29:1,17; 30:1,20; 31:1; 32:1,17). Seven is the number of completeness. This emphasizes that it is a complete message.

We might ask, why does God pay so much attention to Egypt? Throughout the Old Testament, Egypt is a land full of luring wealth and power, a picture of the world. The pride of Egypt is one reason for God to give this message. Egypt is a natural enemy for Israel, but when Israel falls into unbelief and no longer trusts God, Egypt shows itself to be a generous but unreliable ally. Once and again Egypt promises to help with armies, but once and again it turns out to be empty promises.

The message is addressed to Egypt, but it is also intended for the people of God. The people of God must be made aware by this message of the true character of this enemy. The lesson is that Israel has often put its trust in this land rather than in God and that this trust has always been betrayed (cf. Jer 17:5).

### Eze 29:1-12 | Judgment on Egypt

*1 In the tenth year, in the tenth [month], on the twelfth of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 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 monster that lies in the midst of his rivers,  
That has said, ‘My Nile is mine, and I myself have made [it].’*

*4 “I will put hooks in your jaws  
And make the fish of your rivers cling to your scales.  
And I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers,*

*And all the fish of your rivers will cling to your scales.*

*5 "I will abandon you to the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers; You will fall on the open field; you will not be brought together or gathered. I have given you for food to the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the sky.*

*6 "Then all the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the LORD, Because they have been [only] a staff [made] of reed to the house of Israel.*

*7 "When they took hold of you with the hand,*

*You broke and tore all their hands;*

*And when they leaned on you,*

*You broke and made all their loins quake."*

*8 'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will bring upon you a sword and I will cut off from you man and beast. 9 The land of Egypt will become a desolation and waste. Then they will know that I am the LORD. Because you said, 'The Nile is mine, and I have made [it],' 10 therefore, behold, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol [to] Syene and even to the border of Ethiopia. 11 A man's foot will not pass through it, and the foot of a beast will not pass through it, and it will not be inhabited for forty years. 12 So I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of desolated lands. And her cities, in the midst of cities that are laid waste, will be desolate forty years; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands."*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). The message has a date. By our calendar, the date is December 29, 588 BC. A year earlier, Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem began (Jer 32:1-5; 52:4; 39:1; Eze 24:1). Ezekiel is commanded to set his face against Pharaoh and prophesy against him and against all Egypt (verse 2). The LORD tells him what he is to speak on behalf of the Lord GOD (verse 3).

The judgment announcement begins with a parable. Pharaoh is described as "the great sea monster". The Greek translation of the Old Testament calls Pharaoh "the great dragon", the same designation satan has in the New Testament (Rev 12:9). The LORD thus points to the satanic nature of Pharaoh's government. Satan has Pharaoh in his power and expresses himself through him. The judgment on Pharaoh is therefore at the same time the judgment on satan. This sea monster is in the midst of the rivers of Egypt, all of which he considers his property. The sea monster mentions

the Nile by name and he adds that it is his, “my Nile”, and that he made it for himself.

Egypt owes its prosperity to the waters of the Nile. The river makes the Egyptian soil fertile. It is blasphemous pride on Pharaoh’s part to claim that he is the creator and owner of the Nile. Pharaoh sees himself as God (cf. Eze 28:2), as the creator of prosperity and well-being for his people.

There is no thought of the true God in Pharaoh’s haughty, arrogant language. We hear the same spirit of independence and selfishness in the language Nabal utters when the men of David come to him to ask for a favor (1Sam 25:11). God is not taken into account at all. Pharaoh thinks and talks as if he himself were God.

Modern man, who believes that everything belongs to him and that he has made everything for himself, utters the same language. Any notion of God as Creator and Sustainer is banished from thought. Everything in creation, everything he thinks he owns, is seen both as property and as an object of worship. Man thinks he is free to use creation, but he is essentially a slave to materialism.

The LORD lets Pharaoh know what He will do to him and the inhabitants of Egypt (verse 4). He will bring the monster with the fish – the fish refers to the Egyptians – up out of the river and give it to the beasts and birds for food (verse 5).

The occasion of this judgment is the deception that the Egyptians committed against Israel (verses 6-7). Israel made a covenant with them against Babylon, but Egypt broke that covenant (Jer 37:5-10; Eze 17:15). It has been shown that Egypt cannot provide any support, for it is only a reed. On a reed you cannot lean. If you do, it breaks. To this the commander of the king of Assyria reminds the envoy of Hezekiah (Isa 36:6). That Israel itself was warned against such a covenant is also true, but that is not the issue here. The issue here is Egypt’s untrustworthiness to God’s people.

Because of the deceitfulness of Egypt, the LORD will judge them (verse 8). He will do this by bringing the sword upon them. As a result, the land of Egypt will become a desolation and waste (verse 9). Through that judg-

ment, they will know that He is the LORD Who will withstand every pride and will judge.

The LORD in his judgment repeats Pharaoh's bragging about the Nile as his possession for himself. Pharaoh speaks highly of the Nile as his exclusive possession. In doing so, he defies God, Who made the Nile. Therefore God will make his whole land, from north to south, an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol in the north to Syene in the south, where the land borders Ethiopia (verse 10).

What remains of Egypt presents a particularly sad sight. Not a living being will pass through it (verse 11). Yet it is not a final situation. Its duration is set at forty years (verse 12). During that time the Egyptians will have been driven out of their land by God and scattered among the nations and dispersed among the lands.

### **Eze 29:13-16 | Restoration of a Remnant of Egypt**

*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 I will turn the fortunes of Egypt and make them return to the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin, and there they will be a lowly kingdom. 15 It will be the lowest of the kingdoms, and it will never again lift itself up above the nations. And I will make them so small that they will not rule over the nations. 16 And it will never again be the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing to mind the iniquity of their having turned to Egypt. Then they will know that I am the Lord GOD.'"*

Then we see that God in His grace also provides for a remnant of Egypt (verse 13). His grace is not limited to His people, but He shows it to Egypt as well (Isa 19:1-25). He announces a return of Egyptians whom He will make return from the scattering to their land of origin, Pathros (verse 14). There will not be many of them. The returnees together will be but an insignificant kingdom. They will be so "low" that they will not be able to lift themselves up above other nations, and they will be so "small" that they will not be able to rule over other nations (verse 15). Egypt will be of such little importance that it will have ceased to be a world power.

Egypt's greatness and display of power will be gone. As a result, Egypt will no longer be a temptation for Israel to seek support there, as they have done in the past (verse 16). That seeking support from Egypt has been an iniquity for Israel. They will no longer commit that iniquity, and Egypt will know that He is the Lord GOD Who makes all things turn for the better.

### **Eze 29:17-21 | Egypt as a Reward for Nebuchadnezzar**

*17 Now in the twenty-seventh year, in the first [month], on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 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. But he and his army had no wages from Tyre for the labor that he had performed against it." 19 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. And he will carry off her wealth and capture her spoil and seize her plunder; and it will be wages for his army. 20 I have given him the land of Egypt [for] his labor which he performed, because they acted for Me," declares the Lord GOD. 21 "On that day I will make a horn sprout for the house of Israel, and I will open your mouth in their midst. Then they will know that I am the LORD."*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel with the date added when this happens (verse 17). It is sixteen years later than the previous prophecy (verse 1). The LORD informs Ezekiel how He appreciates Nebuchadnezzar's efforts in his battle against Tyre (verse 18). Nebuchadnezzar's armies have done hard work in carrying out His judgments on Tyre. The siege of Tyre was hard work because it was an island city and it also lasted a very long time. The bringing up of the siege implements made heads bald and shoulders were rubbed bare.

For all this hard and many work, they received comparatively little pay, less than the LORD considers this work worth. It has been assumed that because of the long siege, the inhabitants of Tyre were able to bring many of their riches to safety, leaving relatively little spoil at the fall of the city. Therefore, the LORD determines that additional wages must be paid. This

He gives in the form of the conquest of Egypt which Nebuchadnezzar is allowed to rob of its abundance (verse 19; cf. Isa 43:3).

The LORD additionally mentions that Nebuchadnezzar's siege and destruction of Tyre was a work Nebuchadnezzar did for Him (verse 20). Therefore, the LORD gives him the land of Egypt. Egypt is conquered by the Babylonians.

For us, here is an encouragement. If God rewarded the king of Babylon for work he did ignorantly and for his own sake, how much more will the Lord Jesus reward us when we serve Him intentionally and for His sake.

The prophecy against Egypt ends in a promise of salvation for Israel (verse 21; cf. Eze 28:25-26). "On that day", that is, the day of judgment on the nations, the LORD will do something for Israel that will make that day a day of salvation for them: He "will make a horn sprout" for them. This horn – a picture of power – refers to the Lord Jesus (Lk 1:69).

The fulfillment of the prophecy will vindicate Ezekiel regarding all that he has announced. It will encourage him all the more to open his mouth to speak what the LORD has said.

In a prophetic sense, all who are under the rule of the Lord Jesus, when He rules, will open their mouths to testify of Him. They will know and let it be known that He is the LORD.

## Ezekiel 30

### Introduction

This chapter has two judgment announcements: the judgment on Egypt (verses 1-19) and the judgment on Pharaoh (verses 20-26). The first section can be divided into two sections: verses 1-12 deal with the judgment day for all of Egypt; verses 13-19 deal with the judgment on the individual cities of Egypt.

### Eze 30:1-12 | The Judgment Day Upon Egypt

1 The word of the LORD came again to me saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,

"Wail, 'Alas for the day!'

3 "For the day is near,

Even the day of the LORD is near;

It will be a day of clouds,

A time [of doom] for the nations.

4 "A sword will come upon Egypt,

And anguish will be in Ethiopia;

When the slain fall in Egypt,

They take away her wealth,

And her foundations are torn down.

5 Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all Arabia, Libya and the people of the land that is in league will fall with them by the sword."

6 'Thus says the LORD,

"Indeed, those who support Egypt will fall

And the pride of her power will come down;

From Migdol [to] Syene

They will fall within her by the sword,"

Declares the Lord GOD.

7 "They will be desolate

In the midst of the desolated lands;

*And her cities will be  
 In the midst of the devastated cities.  
 8 "And they will know that I am the LORD,  
 When I set a fire in Egypt  
 And all her helpers are broken.  
 9 On that day messengers will go forth from Me in ships to frighten secure  
 Ethiopia; and anguish will be on them as on the day of Egypt; for behold, it  
 comes!" 10 "Thus says the Lord GOD,  
 "I will also make the hordes of Egypt cease  
 By the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.  
 11 "He and his people with him,  
 The most ruthless of the nations,  
 Will be brought in to destroy the land;  
 And they will draw their swords against Egypt  
 And fill the land with the slain.  
 12 "Moreover, I will make the Nile canals dry  
 And sell the land into the hands of evil men.  
 And I will make the land desolate  
 And all that is in it,  
 By the hand of strangers; I the LORD have spoken."*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He is commanded to wail because of the judgment day that is coming upon Egypt on behalf of the LORD (verse 2). That judgment day is called "the day of the LORD" (verse 3) and is seen as "near". This expression is usually used to refer to the period beginning with the Lord Jesus taking His public authority into His hands and culminating in the realm of peace. In a narrower sense, the day of the LORD refers to the first time of that period when He begins to judge the world, which is after the rapture of the church and specifically the time of the great tribulation.

The judgment on Egypt is reminiscent of that day and points forward to it. The clouds indicate heavy thunderstorms and symbolize the time of the coming judgments on the nations.

The sword of the king of Babylon will come upon Egypt when Nebuchadnezzar's armies invade Egypt (verse 4). He will kill many with the sword.

The slaughter will be so fierce that Ethiopia south of Egypt will be seized with anguish when the message reaches them. Nebuchadnezzar will rob Egypt of its abundance and tear down its foundations, making reconstruction of the land impossible.

Nebuchadnezzar will also deal with people from all kinds of countries who support Egypt (verse 5). Probably we can think of mercenaries from those countries that Egypt has hired to be stronger against the king of Babylon. By “the people of the land that is in league [literally “of the covenant”] may be meant the Judeans who fled to Egypt. But all “those who support Egypt will fall” (verse 6). The pride of Egypt will sink and disappear. The land and cities of Egypt will be devastated (verse 7).

The LORD will give up Egypt to the fire of destruction (verse 8). All who help Egypt will be crushed. This is how they will know that He is the LORD. *He* deals with them, using Nebuchadnezzar as His tool. The fleeing Egyptians, as true emissaries of the LORD, will go out in ships to neighboring countries to tell them what has happened to them from the LORD (verse 9). The news of “the day of Egypt”, that is, the day when judgment comes on Egypt – and “behold, it comes!”, that day will surely come! –, will cause terror and paralyzing pain to all who hear of it.

The instrument the LORD will use to judge Egypt is Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (verse 10). He will put an end to the hordes of Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar’s armies are made up of the most violent people from the nations he has conquered (verse 11). The composition of his army guarantees a ruthless slaughter, which will bring the land to ruin and be filled with the slain.

By “evil men” and “strangers” are meant the Babylonians (verse 12). The LORD uses their “hand” to bring devastation upon Egypt. They will drain the canals, the Nile arms. These canals provide fertility for the land. When the water can no longer be brought over the land, it will wither and become a wilderness. They “will make the land desolate and all that is in it”. That is how it will happen, for He, the LORD, has spoken.

**Eze 30:13-19 | Judgment on the Cities of Egypt**

13 *Thus says the Lord GOD,  
 "I will also destroy the idols  
 And make the images cease from Memphis.  
 And there will no longer be a prince in the land of Egypt;  
 And I will put fear in the land of Egypt.*  
 14 *"I will make Pathros desolate,  
 Set a fire in Zoan  
 And execute judgments on Thebes.*  
 15 *"I will pour out My wrath on Sin,  
 The stronghold of Egypt;  
 I will also cut off the hordes of Thebes.*  
 16 *"I will set a fire in Egypt;  
 Sin will writhe in anguish,  
 Thebes will be breached  
 And Memphis [will have] distresses daily.*  
 17 *"The young men of On and of Pi-beseth  
 Will fall by the sword,  
 And the women will go into captivity.*  
 18 *"In Tehaphnehes the day will be dark  
 When I break there the yoke bars of Egypt.  
 Then the pride of her power will cease in her;  
 A cloud will cover her,  
 And her daughters will go into captivity.*  
 19 *"Thus I will execute judgments on Egypt,  
 And they will know that I am the LORD."'''*

Starting in verse 13, it is about the judgment on the cities of Egypt. Each city has its own gods and temples. The LORD shows that no god in Egypt is powerful enough to stand against Him. He also shows that He is different from the other gods because Jerusalem has been destroyed and He nevertheless has the power to destroy Egypt.

He begins with a word about the destruction of "the stink gods" and "the images" (verse 13). The Egyptians rely on these gods, as did God's people. The worthlessness of these gods is apparent. The folly of relying on them is

demonstrated. When the idols are gone, the Egyptians will no longer consult demons. There will also be no more human leadership, “prince”, for the princes have also been killed. That situation will cause fear in Egypt, a fear that God will place on that people, giving His exaltation over them even more emphasis.

Verses 14-18 list several Egyptian cities that are special objects of God’s judgment. God uses a wide variety of words to express what He will do and what it will cause. There is talk in these verses of:

1. desolate (cf. Lev 26:32; Hos 2:12),
2. set a fire (Eze 30:14,16),
3. execute judgments (Eze 30:14,19),
4. pour out wrath (Eze 14:19; 30:15),
5. cut off (Eze 14:13,17; 21:3; 25:13,16; 29:8; 30:15; 35:7),
6. writhe in anguish (Isa 26:17; Eze 30:16),
7. breached,
8. daily distresses,
9. fall by the sword (Eze 5:12; 17:21; 30:17; 33:27),
10. go into captivity (Eze 30:17-18).

“Sin”, the stronghold of Egypt (verse 15), does not impress Nebuchadnezzar, nor does a crowd or youthful strength or youthful beauty (verse 17). He will break the yoke of power with which Egypt has subjugated other nations (verse 18). Nothing will remain of “the pride of her power”. A cloud of disaster and misery will have descended over Egypt, leaving nothing recognizable of its original attractiveness. This is emphasized by the going into captivity of his daughters, with which the prospect of a restoration also disappears.

All these judgments, which come as punishments on Egypt, are done by the LORD (verse 19). By this they will know that He is the LORD.

**Eze 30:20-26 | Judgment on Pharaoh**

*20 In the eleventh year, in the first [month], on the seventh of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 21 "Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and, behold, it has not been bound up for healing or wrapped with a bandage, that it may be strong to hold 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 and the broken; and I will make the sword fall from his hand. 23 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands. 24 For I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand; and I will break the arms of Pharaoh, so that he will groan before him with the groanings of a wounded man. 25 Thus I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh will fall. Then they will 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 When I scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands, then they will know that I am the LORD.'"*

In the eleventh year, which is the year of the fall of Jerusalem, the word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 20). The LORD tells him that He has broken Pharaoh's arm – arm is a picture of strength (verse 21). Pharaoh no longer has strength in his arm to wield the sword. That strength will not come back either, because his arm will not be bound to heal. Because that break will not heal, he will not be able to become strong enough to develop any strength at all.

The LORD will also break up what remained of his power (verse 22). Both arms will be broken so that he cannot even hold the sword, let alone use it. Regrouping will not be possible either, for the LORD will scatter the Egyptians among the nations (verse 23).

In contrast, the LORD will make strong the arms of the king of Babylon (verse 24). He will also give him His sword in his hand. Pharaoh's arms are broken by Him, made powerless, so that he cannot stand against the king of Babylon. He will groan before the king of Babylon like a mortally wounded man.

Once again the LORD says He will make the arms of the king of Babylon strong and Pharaoh's arms will fall down powerless (verse 25). When Nebuchadnezzar will strike Egypt with the sword the LORD has given him, they will know that He is the LORD. They will also know that He is the LORD when He scatters them among the nations and disperses them among the lands (verse 26). It is also important for Israel to know this, so that they will never again rely on Egypt.

## Ezekiel 31

### Introduction

In this chapter, Assyria is used as an example to Egypt of the fate that will befall them.

### Eze 31:1-18 | Assyria as a Warning Example

*1 In the eleventh year, in the third [month], on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 “Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his hordes,*

*‘Whom are you like in your greatness?*

*3 ‘Behold, Assyria [was] a cedar in Lebanon*

*With beautiful branches and forest shade,*

*And very high,*

*And its top was among the clouds.*

*4 ‘The waters made it grow, the deep made it high.*

*With its rivers it continually extended all around its planting place,*

*And sent out its channels to all the trees of the field.*

*5 ‘Therefore its height was loftier than all the trees of the field*

*And its boughs became many and its branches long*

*Because of many waters as it spread them out.*

*6 ‘All the birds of the heavens nested in its boughs,*

*And under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth,*

*And all great nations lived under its shade.*

*7 ‘So it was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches;*

*For its roots extended to many waters.*

*8 ‘The cedars in God’s garden could not match it;*

*The cypresses could not compare with its boughs,*

*And the plane trees could not match its branches.*

*No tree in God’s garden could compare with it in its beauty.*

*9 ‘I made it beautiful with the multitude of its branches,*

*And all the trees of Eden, which were in the garden of God, were jealous of it.*

10 'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Because it is high in stature and has set its top among the clouds, and its heart is haughty in its loftiness, 11 therefore I will give it into the hand of a despot of the nations; he will thoroughly deal with it. According to its wickedness I have driven it away. 12 Alien tyrants of the 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 down from its shade and left it. 13 On its ruin all the birds of the heavens will dwell, and all the beasts of the field will be on its [fallen] branches 14 so that all the trees by the waters may not be exalted in their stature, nor set their top among the clouds, nor their well-watered mighty ones stand [erect] in their height. For they have all been given over to death, to the earth beneath, among the sons of men, with those who go down to the pit." 15 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day when it went down to Sheol I caused lamentations; I closed the deep over it and held back its rivers. And [its] many waters were stopped up, and I made Lebanon mourn for it, and all the trees of the field wilted away on account of it. 16 I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall when I made it go down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit; and all the well-watered trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon, were comforted in the earth beneath. 17 They also went down with it to Sheol to those who were slain by the sword; and those who were its strength lived under its shade among the nations. 18 "To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the earth beneath; you will lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword. So is Pharaoh and all his hordes!"' declares the Lord GOD."

In the eleventh year, the word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel again (verse 1). He must again go with a message to Pharaoh and his people, the Egyptians (verse 2). This time he is to present them with a parable. He begins by asking who Pharaoh and his hordes of subjects are comparable to. The answer follows immediately: it is with Assyria (verse 3). Assyria has always competed with Egypt for world domination, a battle sometimes won by one, sometimes by the other. But Assyria, as a world power, still makes the most impression.

There follows a description of the greatness and fall of Assyria. This is done by picturing Assyria as an impressive cedar in Lebanon. This tree

is a symbol of majesty and power and at the same time a picture of pride (Dan 4:20-28). This is already reflected in its tall trunk and “its top” which is “among the clouds”. This tree is so tall that it looks like an entire forest.

Because he can absorb abundant water, he grows prosperously (verse 4). Because of his greatness, he gains connection with all the trees in the field. Other peoples want to serve him or are subdued by him. Thus he becomes taller than all the trees of the field, which means he becomes greater than all other peoples (verse 5). Just as the branches of the tree provide protection for birds and animals, so he becomes the protector of all kinds of peoples (verse 6; cf. Dan 4:12; Mt 13:32).

In his loftiness he is beautiful and in his vastness he is mighty (verse 7). His appearance is reminiscent of the trees in paradise (verse 8). The most beautiful trees in the garden of God cannot measure up to him. With his appearance, he commands the respect of everything around him in creation.

The way he is presented here also expresses his immoderate complacency. As the LORD made the trees in the garden, He also made the cedar (verse 9). In the same way, He also made Assyria great. In verse 10, the LORD briefly addresses Egypt in between, which we see by the words “you are” [“it is” is literally “you are”] (cf. verse 2), as a reminder that the description of Assyria is in fact about Egypt.

But there is no awareness in Assyria, as in Egypt, that he owes his greatness to the LORD. On the contrary, his heart has lifted up itself on his height and his power. What God has given him and made of him, he has in pride attributed to himself. Therefore the Lord GOD pronounces His judgment on him and will give him into the hand of “a despot of the nations”, that is, the king of Babylon, the rising world power (verse 11). He has repaid him his wickedness and expelled him from his supreme position. But it is the LORD Himself Who has done that.

The picture of the tree is further used to describe the fall of Assyria (verse 12). Assyria is cut down. There he lies, felled. His branches, by which is meant all the nations associated with him, fall with him and perish. Others move away from him, without further concern for him. There are some, however, who continue to dwell with him and sit on his branches (verse

13; verse 6). These are nations who first shared in Assyria's prosperity and now see some profit in his fall.

The fall causes such a startling effect that all the trees are careful not to exalt themselves (verse 14). None of the 'water drinkers', that is, no tree as a picture of a people, should dare to exalt themselves. Just as a tree cannot grow by itself, but only thanks to water, so a people cannot grow by themselves, but only in dependence on God. Those who want to become great in their own strength are blind to the end that awaits earthly rulers: surrendered to death and going to the lowest places of the earth. There they are nothing more than all the other people who are already there.

That, says the Lord GOD to Egypt, is what happened to Assyria (verse 15). It went down to Sheol. The fall did not bring joy to the LORD, but lamentations. In the picture, the waters mourn over the fall of the cedar, He shrouds Lebanon in blackness ["mourn" is literally "be darkened"] and made all the trees of the field wilt away.

There is dismay among the nations because of the deep fall of Assyria to Sheol because they fear the same fate (verse 16). If Assyria with its awesome military might cannot withstand the Babylonians, who will be able to withstand them? In his fall, he drags others with him into the pit. But in the end it is not the Babylonians who have caused the nations to quake, but the quaking has come from the LORD.

On the other hand, among those who are in the realm of the dead – the dethroned princes and defeated nations – there is a certain satisfaction when the king of Assyria joins them. His power on earth has not protected him from the judgment of God. They had to bow down to him on earth, but now he is equal to them. They are all in Sheol and have ended up there in the same way (verse 17). All have fallen by the sword that has been his powerful weapon, with which he has subdued other nations.

Then the LORD again addresses Pharaoh and his people directly (verse 18; verse 2). He asks him again the question He asked at the beginning. Again, the answer immediately follows. The LORD assures Pharaoh that he and his people will not fare any differently than Assyria and the nations allied with him did. They will lie down in disgrace after being slain by the

sword. That is how it will end with Pharaoh and all his hordes. The Lord GOD declares so and therefore it will go that way.

## Ezekiel 32

### **Eze 32:1-16 | Lamentation Over Pharaoh**

*1 In the twelfth year, in the twelfth [month], on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him, 'You compared yourself to a young lion of the nations, Yet you are like the monster in the seas; And you burst forth in your rivers And muddied the waters with your feet And fouled their rivers.'"*

*3 Thus says the Lord GOD, "Now I will spread My net over you With a company of many peoples, And they shall lift you up in My net.*

*4 "I will leave you on the land; I will cast you on the open field. And I will cause all the birds of the heavens to dwell on you, And I will satisfy the beasts of the whole earth with you.*

*5 "I will lay your flesh on the mountains And fill the valleys with your refuse.*

*6 "I will also make the land drink the discharge of your blood As far as the mountains, And the ravines will be full of you.*

*7 "And when [I] extinguish you, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud And the moon will not give its light.*

*8 "All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you And will set darkness on your land," Declares the Lord GOD.*

9 "I will also trouble the hearts of many peoples when I bring your destruction among the nations, into lands which you have not known. 10 I will make many peoples appalled at you, and their kings will be horribly afraid of you when I brandish My sword before them; and they will tremble every moment, every man for his own life, on the day of your fall." 11 For thus says the Lord GOD, "The sword of the king of Babylon will come upon you. 12 By the swords of the mighty ones I will cause your hordes to fall; all of them are tyrants of the nations,

*And they will devastate the pride of Egypt,  
And all its hordes will be destroyed.*

13 "I will also destroy all its cattle from beside many waters;  
And the foot of man will not muddy them anymore  
And the hoofs of beasts will not muddy them.

14 "Then I will make their waters settle  
And will cause their rivers to run like oil,"  
Declares the Lord GOD.

15 "When I make the land of Egypt a desolation,  
And the land is destitute of that which filled it,  
When I smite all those who live in it,  
Then they shall know that I am the LORD.

16 This is a lamentation and they shall chant it. The daughters of the nations shall chant it. Over Egypt and over all her hordes they shall chant it," declares the Lord GOD.

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). It is again a word with a calendar designation: year, month and day are mentioned. Ezekiel is commanded to take up a lamentation over Pharaoh (verse 2; cf. Eze 2:10; 19:1; 26:17; 28:12). Judgment on God's enemies, however deserved that judgment may be, deeply saddens a true prophet.

Ezekiel is to say to Pharaoh that he resembles a young lion and monster in the seas. The imagery of the lion (Eze 19:2,3,5,6; cf. Pro 19:12; 20:2) is not elaborated, that of the sea monster (Eze 29:3) is. His ferocious actions in the seas and rivers refer to the turmoil Pharaoh has brought among the nations. He is a cruel ruler and an unreliable ally.

The Lord GOD will judge him (verse 3). He will do so by catching him in His net. That net consists of a multitude of nations, namely Babylon and the nations that are with him. They are the tools in God's hand to overwhelm Pharaoh and take him captive.

Once Pharaoh has lost his power and been robbed of everything valuable, he will be left destitute (verse 4). He will then be a prey to the vultures and the scavengers who will take from him what is left of edible food. The corpses lying on the mountains and valleys will be robbed of what they still possess (verse 5). The slaughter will be so great that the whole land, up to the mountains and riverbeds, will be filled with blood (verse 6).

Pharaoh, who has been acting like a sun god, will be extinguished, so that nothing of his brilliance will be seen (verse 7). He, who has seen himself as the radiant center of heaven, will be shrouded in blackness (verse 8). Clouds of God's wrath will cover him. He will no longer receive and pass on any (errant) light. Other princes, too, who have allied themselves with him and seen themselves as lights, will be shrouded in black for his sake. The LORD will lay a thick blanket of darkness over the whole land (cf. Rev 8:12; Isa 13:10; Amos 8:9; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Mt 24:29).

When the nations see the downfall of the mighty Egyptian empire, the LORD will trouble the hearts of those nations (verse 9). They will turn away from Egypt full of disappointment, appalled at its fall. With Egypt failing, their hope of successfully resisting the king of Babylon is dashed. Instead of hope, there is now despair (verse 10). The sword that defeated Egypt now brandishes menacingly before their eyes. The sword in Nebuchadnezzar's hand is controlled by the far more powerful hand of God. When Egypt has fallen, it will cause trembling and fear for their own lives.

That Egypt will fall by the sword of the king of Babylon is certain (verse 11). The soldiers of the king of Babylon are all tyrants who will, without mercy, reign in Egypt in a violent manner unprecedented among the nations (verse 12). The pride of Egypt will be destroyed and all its hordes will be destroyed. All life will be annihilated. The waters will remain ripple-free, because there will be no one, neither man nor beast, left to stir them up (verse 13).

The water will be clear and transparent, without a ripple like that of an oil stream (verse 14). Egypt is fertile because of the supply of silt brought by a turbid Nile. But there is no more silt, so there will be barrenness and withering instead of fertility. The result of the judgments of the LORD will be that they will know that He is the LORD (verse 15).

The lamentation just sung by Ezekiel will be sung by the daughters of the nations (verse 16). They will sing about Egypt and all of its multitude when Egypt is desolate and the multitude is gone from the land. That will be after the Babylonians have executed His judgment on Pharaoh and his people as the avenging sword of the LORD.

### Eze 32:17-32 | Wailing for Egypt

*17 In the twelfth year, on the fifteenth of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 18 "Son of man, wail for the hordes of Egypt and bring it down, her and the daughters of the powerful nations, to the nether world, with those who go down to the pit;*

*19 'Whom do you surpass in beauty?*

*Go down and make your bed with the uncircumcised.'*

*20 They shall fall in the midst of those who are slain by the sword. She is given over to the sword; they have drawn her and all her hordes away. 21 The strong among the mighty ones shall speak of him [and] his helpers from the midst of Sheol, 'They have gone down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword.'* 22 *"Assyria is there and all her company; her graves are round about her. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword, 23 whose graves are set in the remotest parts of the pit and her company is round about her grave. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living. 24 "Elam is there and all her hordes around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised to the lower parts of the earth, who instilled their terror in the land of the living and bore their disgrace with those who went down to the pit. 25 They have made a bed for her among the slain with all her hordes. Her graves are around it, they are all uncircumcised, slain by the sword (although their terror was instilled in the land of the living), and they bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit; they were put in the midst of the slain. 26 "Meshech, Tubal and all their hordes are there; their*

graves surround them. All of them were slain by the sword uncircumcised, though they instilled their terror in the land of the living. 27 Nor do they lie beside the fallen heroes of the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war and whose swords were laid under their heads; but the punishment for their iniquity rested on their bones, though the terror of [these] heroes [was once] in the land of the living. 28 But in the midst of the uncircumcised you will be broken and lie with those slain by the sword. 29 "There also is Edom, its kings and all its princes, who for [all] their might are laid with those slain by the sword; they will lie with the uncircumcised and with those who go down to the pit. 30 "There also are the chiefs of the north, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who in spite of the terror resulting from their might, in shame went down with the slain. So they lay down uncircumcised with those slain by the sword and bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit. 31 "These Pharaoh will see, and he will be comforted for all his hordes slain by the sword, [even] Pharaoh and all his army," declares the Lord GOD. 32 "Though I instilled a terror of him in the land of the living, yet he will be made to lie down among [the] uncircumcised [along] with those slain by the sword, [even] Pharaoh and all his hordes," declares the Lord GOD.

Two weeks after lamenting over Pharaoh (verse 1), the word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel again (verse 17). He is now to wail "for the hordes of Egypt", which is Pharaoh's people (verse 18). This wailing has also been called a "death song". It speaks of deep melancholy and sadness. The LORD tells Ezekiel to use his complaint to bring down the hordes of Egypt to the pit, to the realm of the dead. The words he utters mean death for the Egyptians. This is so because his words are in fact those of the LORD. And what the LORD speaks, happens. He will use Nebuchadnezzar to fulfill His words.

The lament begins by asking Egypt whom he does surpass in beauty (verse 19). The answer is that no one does. They may hold that opinion, but it will only make their fall all the greater. They are told to come down and be resigned to the uncircumcised. This is not a request, but a command that will be carried out.

They will share in the fate of others who have also fallen by the sword (verse 20). They will be handed over to the sword and drawn away like

garbage. This is a great shock to the Egyptians. They are used to decorating, mummifying and preserving their dead. They are used to building pyramids and making showpieces of the tombs. Now they are told that their dead bodies will be treated with the greatest defamation. The mighty heroes who preceded them in death will address them with contempt when they descend into Sheol, the realm of death (verse 21). Nothing will remain of the respect they enjoyed on earth.

Five examples are given of nations that have fallen and with whom Egypt is now aligned by its demise. The first nation is Assyria (verses 22-23). How they boasted of their power and how cruelly they ranted against peoples subjugated by them. They, who have caused terror in the land of the living, lie defeated by the sword in the depths of the pit, while there is also a company of unburied bodies around his grave.

The second people are Elam (verses 24-25). Elam is the first people mentioned in the Bible to go out to war (Gen 14:1-9). This once warlike people, who like the Assyrians brought terror in the land of the living, suffer the same fate as the Assyrians (cf. Isa 21:2; 22:6; Jer 49:34-39). They are now among those slain by the sword, but in that place they find nothing of the respect they commanded on earth. They are now despised.

The third is Meshech and Tubal, two Asia Minor nations (verse 26; cf. Gen 10:2; Eze 38:2,3). Like Assyria and Elam, Meshech and Tubal have been a terror in the land of the living. When they lay down mortally wounded, not a shadow remained of the heroes they once were. The tribute that heroes usually receive at their burial by burying their weapons of war with them is not there for them (verse 27). Instead of the honor of weapons of war, iniquity lies upon them. That will also be the fate of Egypt (verse 28).

The fourth people is Edom (verse 29). For him too, as for the peoples mentioned above, there is no honorable place in the realm of the dead. Nothing remains of his former power.

The last people cited in the complaint about Egypt are a collection of nations who have all been mighty in the land of the living, but have now descended with disgrace into the realm of the dead (verse 30). Their place

is with the other nations who have descended into the realm of the dead in disgrace.

Pharaoh will see all the named peoples in the realm of the dead and take comfort in the fact that he is not the only one who must suffer this fate (verse 31). It is, of course, a particularly meager, cold comfort. Nor is it true comfort, for any sympathy that might ease or help bear pain is absent. It is more gloating that others are also in the realm of the dead. Pharaoh will not feel the judgment any less severe because of it.

The prophecies about the nations end with the observation that Pharaoh will know that he is in the realm of the dead because the LORD has imposed His terror on him in the land of the living (verse 32). Therefore, he is now in a place of contempt. He has ended up there because he has fallen by the sword of God's judgment. That is what the Lord GOD declares and that is why it is so.

As we read this chapter, we are impressed by God's monotonous, constantly repeated judgment of one people after another. There is nothing beautiful about sin, for sin ends in death. It is cause and effect. What ends in death remains there forever and ever. That eternal condition awaits every soul who dies without Christ.

## Ezekiel 33

### **Introduction**

With Ezekiel 33 begins the fourth main section of this book (Ezekiel 33-39). This section deals with the future glory of Israel and can be divided as follows:

1. The faithful watchman and the faithful Shepherd (Ezekiel 33-34).
2. A renewed land (Ezekiel 35-36).
3. A renewed people (Ezekiel 37).
4. Extermination of the last enemy (Ezekiel 38-39).

### **Eze 33:1-9 | The Duty of the Watchman**

*1 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, 'If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman, 3 and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his [own] head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand.' 7 "Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. 9 But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and*

*he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life.*

Here, after the announcements of judgment on seven hostile nations, Ezekiel again resumes his task as a prophet concerning God's people. The word of the LORD comes to him (verse 1). The LORD again reminds him of his responsibility as a watchman (verse 2; Eze 3:16-21). His earlier warnings of the coming of judgment by the king of Babylon, have come true, but the heart of the people has not been changed by it. Hence, new judgments and especially the final judgment await the unrepentant, and hence Ezekiel must continue to warn. We, too, are never done warning people of the judgment to come, even though there have been so many more judgmental acts of God.

Ezekiel is to address the word to his fellow citizens and again present to them the righteousness of the LORD. He must do this by using an example from everyday life that can be understood by everyone. When the LORD announces that He is bringing the sword, that a hostile people are approaching, it is a good thing for the people to appoint a watchman. They choose someone from their area who is trustworthy and knows the area. When that man sees the enemy coming, he will blow an alarm on the trumpet, warning the people that the enemy is coming (verse 3; cf. Amos 3:6a).

Two responses are possible to the blowing of the trumpet: ignore or listen. He who does not heed the sound of the trumpet and is killed has only to blame himself (verse 4). He has been stubborn and did not take warning (verse 5). It is his own fault that he was killed. However, he who he takes warning is not killed, but delivers his life.

It is also possible that the watchman is unfaithful and does not blow the trumpet when he sees the sword coming (verse 6). Such a watchman is a coward or a traitor. He thinks only of himself and flees to save himself or conspires with the enemy. When the sword comes and kills people, those people do die in their own iniquity, but the watchman is guilty. Judgment comes irrevocably. People who perish have themselves to blame because they have lived in iniquity, but the watchman also has his responsibility.

God has no pleasure in punishing people. Therefore, He makes them warn. If the watchman does not warn, He will require the blood of his hand. We recognize this kind of watchman in our day in preachers who preach only love, but do not give warning of judgment or even deny judgment. They are traitors and colluding with the enemy of God. People who listen to these preachers perish in their own iniquity, but the preachers will be called to account by God and judged for their negligence.

Then the LORD addresses the word to Ezekiel personally and says to him that He has appointed him a watchman over the house of Israel (verse 7). This shows a difference from the watchman of the previous verses, for he was appointed by the people (verse 2). Ezekiel is to act as a faithful watchman, warning Israel on behalf of the LORD. The LORD holds up to him the great responsibility that this task entails. He tells him that judgment on the wicked is determined, but also that the wicked must be warned (verse 8).

If Ezekiel does not warn the wicked, he is guilty of the judgment that strikes the wicked. That wicked person does die in and because of his own iniquity, but Ezekiel is blamed for not warning him. If Ezekiel did warn the wicked, but the wicked does nothing with that warning, then Ezekiel is free from the blood of the wicked and he has delivered his own life (verse 9; cf. Acts 20:26-27; 1Cor 9:16). The responsibility of the watchman is strongly emphasized.

### **Eze 33:10-20 | Call to Turn Back**

10 "Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus you have spoken, saying, "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?"' 11 Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?' 12 And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, 'The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.' 13 When I say to the righteous he will

*surely live, and he [so] trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die. 14 But when I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, 15 [if a] wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 16 None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live. 17 "Yet your fellow citizens say, 'The way of the Lord is not right,' when it is their own way that is not right. 18 When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it. 19 But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he will live by them. 20 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways."*

Ezekiel is commanded to go to the exiles with a specific message (verse 10). The LORD has heard that they have said that their transgressions and their sins are upon them and that they see no way out. Their initial optimism regarding Jerusalem, which they had thought would be spared, has turned to cheerless despair. The prophecies of Ezekiel, as well as those of Jeremiah, regarding Jerusalem have come true against their expectations. What have they to expect from life now?

In that situation, the word of the Lord GOD comes to them with the hopeful words that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live (verse 11). He calls the house of Israel to turn, for why should they die? They need not die, for the door to life is open. The invitation is made to them by a loving God. We hear His urgent, pleading call to turn in the twofold "turn back, turn back". This is how He urges them to do so!

We too may proclaim that hopeful message on His behalf to the people of the world. It is still the "the acceptable time ... the day of salvation" (2Cor 6:2) and God through us is still begging people to be reconciled to Him (2Cor 5:20).

What Ezekiel has to say to his fellow citizens, they are not hearing for the first time (verse 12; Eze 18:29-32). God's message is unchanging and so is His government. Sin brings judgment, no matter how much good someone may have done, and turning back brings life, no matter how much wickedness someone may have done.

What matters is listening to God and accepting what He says. This concerns both the righteous and the wicked. A righteous person may think that his righteousness, all his good deeds, entitles him to life (verse 13). Such an attitude shows that he trusts in his own righteousness and not in God. In practice, therefore, he will come to injustice and will die in it.

In the case of the wicked, the opposite happens when he accepts God's judgment on his life (verse 14) and turns from his sin. He shows that he has repented by practicing justice and righteousness (verse 15). He will make amends for wrongs done (cf. Lk 19:8). His conversion involves a condemnation of all his past sins. Of these he may know that they are forgiven and will be remembered no more (verse 16; Heb 8:12). The doing of justice and righteousness is the evidence of his turning back and of the new life he has received. He will live from this new life and remain alive.

Ezekiel's fellow citizens add to their pessimistic, unjustified statement that life has no meaning for them anymore (verse 10), the extremely misplaced accusation that the LORD (*Adonai*) does not do justice (verse 17). They have said that before and the LORD has answered them (cf. Eze 18:25,29). It is all shrugging off self-responsibility – still – and a denial of one's own sins. The LORD's dealings with the righteous who do injustice and with the ungodly who turn are grounds for them to accuse Him of injustice (verses 18-19).

This accusatory attitude can also be seen today. People have an opinion about God and in their foolishness think they can and do judge Him. They are full of their own good works and point condemningly at Christians who lie and cheat. They will find out that with all their so-called good works they are heavily in debt to God for not bowing down to Him as sinners. God will judge them and do with them according to their own ways (verse 20; cf. Rom 2:1-3).

### **Eze 33:21-22 | Message of the Fall of Jerusalem**

*21 Now in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month, the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, "The city has been taken." 22 Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the refugees came. And He opened my mouth at the time [they] came to me in the morning; so my mouth was opened and I was no longer speechless.*

A few months after the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel receives word of this from people who were able to escape from Jerusalem (verse 21). They do not bring him news that he does not already know. Ezekiel already knows because his mouth has been opened. The journey from Jerusalem to Babylon required about three to four months in those days (cf. Ezra 7:9). The evening before the refugees come to Ezekiel, the LORD has opened his mouth which he had not been able to open until that time (verse 22; Eze 24:25-27; 3:24-27).

The end of his muteness marks the beginning of a new phase in his ministry. After the announcements of judgment, from now on he will mostly make announcements of restoration.

### **Eze 33:23-29 | Arrogance of the Remnant**

*23 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 24 "Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was [only] one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.' 25 Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "You eat [meat] with the blood [in it], lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land? 26 You rely on your sword, you commit abominations and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?"' 27 Thus you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "As I live, surely those who are in the waste places will 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 the strongholds and in the caves will die of pestilence. 28 I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of her power will cease; and the mountains of Israel will be desolate so that no one will pass through. 29 Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have committed.'"*

After Ezekiel's mouth is opened, the word of the LORD comes to him (verse 23). The LORD tells him that there are still people left in the devastated land (verse 24). These people, however, are far from humbled by the judgment that has struck them and the land. Instead, they believe they have a special claim to the land. They point to Abraham. Abraham is only by himself if he is granted the land as an inheritance. They, on the other hand, are many, so they have that much more right to the land.

These people claim the land because of their numbers compared to Abraham, while they have no part in the faith of Abraham, but continue to sin (verse 25). They eat meat with the blood still in it, they bow down to their stink idols and act violently against their neighbor (cf. Jer 41:2-7). With such wicked behavior, how do they think they can assert a right to the land and repossess it?

They do not lean on the LORD, but on their sword (verse 26). With it they commit violence and loot for themselves what they think they need. They commit atrocities and take the wife of their neighbor. Thus they continue to commit the heinous sins that brought God's judgment on Jerusalem and Judah. So how do they think they can still keep the land? This section does show how hardened they are, how jaded in their feelings of what is sin in the eye of God.

Ezekiel is commanded to announce judgment to them (verse 27). Wherever they are, they will perish, whether by the sword, by the wild beasts, or by pestilence. Nothing will come of their proud, misplaced expectations (verse 28). All life will disappear from the land and from the mountains. When the LORD has made the land an even greater desolate waste than it already is, they will be forced to acknowledge that He is the LORD (verse 29).

### **Eze 33:30-33 | Hearing, but Not Doing**

30 *"But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, 'Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.'* 31 *They come to you as people come, and sit before you [as]*

*My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires [expressed] by their mouth, [and] their heart goes after their gain. 32 Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them. 33 So when it comes to pass—as surely it will—then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.”*

The LORD lets Ezekiel know that the exiles, his fellow citizens, are talking about him a lot (verse 30): ‘Ezekiel has been absolutely right, then, in his predictions of the downfall of Jerusalem. Then he is the man we should be with to hear the word of the LORD.’ Ezekiel is suddenly popular. The LORD warns him not to be mistaken about the crowds coming to him (verse 31). They do come to him in large numbers and flatter him greatly, but their heart goes after their gain. The call to turn is not taken seriously by them; what matters is that something benefits them (cf. Eze 22:13,27).

It is a great trap for a servant of God when people like to come to him because he can speak so beautifully about the Lord. So they come to Ezekiel (verse 32). He can say it so beautifully. But the content of the prophet’s words does nothing at all with them. They are not open to it. They hear his words, but to their meaning they are deaf. They are hearers, but not doers of the word (Jam 1:22-25; Mt 7:24-27).

It is a matter of great sorrow for every true servant of the Lord when people love to listen to him, but that his words have no effect in the hearts and lives of the listeners. The response should not be: ‘What knowledge this man has’, but: ‘The Lord has spoken clearly to me. Now I know what to do.’

The spoken word of the LORD will not return empty (verse 33; cf. Isa 55:11; Heb 6:7-8). Though at the time there is no humble bowing to what He has spoken through His servant, the time is coming when all that has been spoken in His Name will be acknowledged. Then all who have heard it will have to acknowledge that there has been a prophet in their midst.

## Ezekiel 34

### Introduction

Israel's sins and judgment are primarily due to a corrupt and selfish leadership. The first step toward the restoration of the people is to replace the worthless shepherds with the true Shepherd. This chapter deals with the situation of Israel after the fall of Jerusalem until the time the Lord Jesus returns. Thus, that situation also applies today (cf. Lk 21:24b; Jer 23:1-8).

### Eze 34:1-10 | 'Woe' to the False Shepherds

*1 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat [sheep] without feeding the flock. 4 Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. 5 They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. 6 My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one 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 flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but [rather] the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; 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 demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them."'"*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He is commanded to prophesy to the shepherds of Israel, that is, to predict judgment on them (verse 2). The shepherds are the leaders of the people. To them he is to pronounce “woe” (cf. Mt 23:13,15,16,23,25,27,29). Without introduction, “the Lord GOD” gives the reason for His ‘woe’: these shepherds think only of themselves instead of the sheep. They should be there for the sheep, but they see the sheep as objects they can feast on.

In verses 3-6 there follows a whole list of accusations showing that the sheep are not in any way their concern, but that they are exploiting those sheep. The tense form in which verse 3 appears shows that they do not do this only occasionally, but that they behave in this way constantly. The emphasis is on the fact that the shepherds are only after one thing and that is gain (cf. Eze 33:31):

- “You eat the fat (i.e. the best, cf. Lev 3:3; 3:14; 4:8; 7:30; 7:31; 8:25; 1Sam 2:15)
- and you clothe yourself with the wool (cf. Eze 44:17);
- you slaughter the fat [sheep] (cf. Zec 11:16),
- without feeding the flock.”

In verse 4, six crimes are described. Five of them are crimes of negligence, things they don’t do when they should be expected to. It is deliberate, culpable negligence. The sixth crime is what they do, when they should not. Instead of caring for the vulnerable sheep, they exploit those sheep:

- “Those who are sickly you have not strengthened,
- the diseased you have not healed,
- the broken you have not bound up,
- the scattered you have not brought back,
- nor have you sought for the lost;
- but with force and with severity you have dominated them.”

---

In verses 5-6 the LORD holds up the consequences of the unmerciful treatment of the sheep to the cruel, selfish shepherds:

- "They were scattered for lack of a shepherd,
- and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered" (verse 5).
- "My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill;
- My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth,
- and there was no one to search
- or seek [for them]" (verse 6).

Instead of caring for the sheep, protecting them and keeping them together, the shepherds of Israel terrorize the sheep. Then they leave them to their own devices, making them prey for the predators, which are nations like Edom, Syria, Ammon, Moab, by whom they are scattered. All cohesion is gone. They are scattered sheep and therefore even more vulnerable. There is no one from the cruel leaders who pays any attention to them at all, let alone anyone who goes searching or seeking for them to help them.

These shepherds, the leaders of the people, are not shepherds, but wolves and are in everything the opposite of the Lord Jesus, Who is the good Shepherd. When He sees the crowds, He is moved with compassion for them, "because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36). He has given His life for the sheep, He seeks for them, He saves them, He protects them (Jn 10:11) and He makes them one flock. The good under-shepherds follow Him in this (1Pet 5:1-4).

The heartless actions of the false shepherds call down God's judgment on them (verse 7). The LORD calls them to listen to His judgment (verse 8). In saying, "as I live", He implores that He will punish this evil. That is how seriously He takes their misconduct. The gravity of their sins concerns not only the sheep, but especially the fact that they are *His* sheep. Never does He give up the right to His sheep, even though He delegates the care of

those sheep to under-shepherds. He blames the shepherds for making His sheep prey for themselves and also food for all the beasts of the field.

What happens to the sheep is because there is no shepherd to care for them. And those shepherds are still “My shepherds”, as the LORD says. He has appointed them. But the shepherds have gone their own way, thinking only of themselves. They have fed only themselves and not the sheep of the LORD.

Once again the urgent call to the shepherds to listen to the word of the LORD is heard (verse 9). It shows the deep indignation of the LORD. He says He is against the shepherds, He will call those shepherds to account and judge them (verse 10). He will demand the sheep from them – because they are His sheep – and He will remove the shepherds from their function. Then for the shepherds it is over and done with feeding themselves. He will rescue His sheep from their mouth, so that the sheep will no longer be their food.

### **Eze 34:11-16 | The LORD Himself Feeds His Sheep**

*11 For thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. 13 I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. 14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord GOD. 16 “I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.*

The LORD Himself will take the place of the unfaithful shepherds who feed themselves and take care of His sheep (verse 11). We see in the actions described of Him in verses 11-13 how He is busy and working toward His

goal: He searches, seeks, delivers, leads out, leads in and feeds. He will search for His sheep, to know where they are, and seek them out. When He finds them, He delivers them from the claws of the enemy and He leads them out of the hostile environment. Then He brings them to their land, where He feeds them by refreshing streams of water and makes them live safely. What a Shepherd He is!

He shows His interest in His sheep by Himself searching for them and seeking them out. His interest is evident not only in His words, but also in His actions. He goes in search of His sheep, as a true shepherd does (verse 12; Lk 15:4-7). He is committed to make His scattered sheep one flock again. For this purpose He delivers them from all the places "to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day". Here we can think of the day of the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Joel 2:2; Zep 1:15).

Further, it applies to the time when the LORD will bring His sheep back from exile and scattering into their own land (verse 13). There they will find fertile soil and water and places to live. When He, as their true Shepherd, has brought them back, He will not leave them to their own devices either, but will care for them in His land and provide them with everything they need (verses 14-15). They will also be able to lie down safely, without fear of enemies. This situation did not occur at the return from the Babylonian exile, but refers to the time of the realm of peace.

The LORD points out that He will do what the false shepherds have failed to do (verse 16). He cares for the lost, strayed, broken and sick. He seeks the lost, He brings back the scattered, He binds up the broken and He strengthens the sick. His whole heart goes out to them and all His actions are beneficial.

In contrast, He will wipe out sheep that do not belong in His flock. "The fat and the strong" are the wicked among the people who have enriched themselves at the expense of their poor and weak peers. When He has destroyed them, He will take their place. He Himself will feed His sheep as it should be. He will not bend the law, as the false shepherds have done, but will deal with His sheep in a righteous way, as it should be expected of a good shepherd (Jn 10:10-15). He will do so as His Servant David (verse

23), the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, Who is Himself the LORD. He is the true Shepherd-King of His people. He is Shepherd first and in that capacity also King.

### **Eze 34:17-22 | The LORD Judges**

*17 "As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats. 18 Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet? 19 As for My flock, they must eat what you tread down with your feet and drink what you foul with your feet!'" 20 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them, "Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21 Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns until you have scattered them abroad, 22 therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another.*

The LORD will also repay the injustice that has taken place in the midst of the sheep of His flock (verse 17). There is, on the one hand, the weak "sheep" and, on the other hand, there are the strong "rams" and "male goats". The rams and the male goats are those who helped the leaders oppress the sheep, their weak fellow sheep, the vulnerable. The LORD will judge the rams and the male goats. They deserve that judgment doubly because they are guilty in two respects with respect to the sheep. First, they themselves feed in the good pasture (verse 18). The weak sheep have to settle for second best.

However, it does not stop with the feeding in the good pastures. Whatever remains as second choice is trodden down by the rams and the male goats with their feet, so that it becomes spoiled and unconsumable. This applies to both food and water (verse 19). Thus, the leaders and their followers are always working to benefit themselves at the expense of the weak and poor, while leaving nothing for them.

The LORD will stand up for the weak and poor (verse 20). The weak are pushed away from their safe environment by the strong (verse 21). In the

flock, the law of the strongest applies. In addition to destroying what is edible, the strong also push the weak out of the flock. Any security and safety is taken away from them. They are prey to the wild beasts, which are the hostile nations (verse 22; verse 28).

But the LORD will put a stop to that behavior. He will stand up for His sheep and deliver them and protect them. He judges “between one sheep and another”, which means that He judges completely justly and indiscriminately. And only His judgment counts.

### **Eze 34:23-31 | Promise of the One Shepherd**

*23 “Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken. 25 “I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. 26 I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. 27 Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. 28 They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make [them] afraid. 29 I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore. 30 Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord GOD. 31 “As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God,” declares the Lord GOD.*

This last section describes the millennial realm of peace under the Messiah, Who is here called “My servant David” (verse 23). The LORD will raise up His Shepherd and entrust Him with His sheep. He is “the Chief Shepherd” Who is coming back (1Pet 5:4). He will care for the sheep and lead them. The LORD and His Shepherd have an equal care for the sheep. They are

also essentially the same Person. The LORD is their God and the Servant is their Prince (verse 24; cf. 2Sam 5:2b). So it is, for the LORD has declared it.

The LORD confirms His verbal promise with a covenant (verse 25). This gives His sheep even more security. He makes with them “a covenant of peace”, a covenant that flows from the all-encompassing new covenant that characterizes the millennial realm of peace (Jer 31:31-34). That covenant also ensures security. The harmful beasts, symbols of false leaders and hostile nations (verse 28), will be removed from the land by Him. Unconcerned they will live in the wilderness and undisturbed they will be able to sleep in the woods. Everything speaks of rest and peace, safety and security.

There is also an abundance of blessing that comes over His people and over the area where they live (verse 26). “My hill” is Mount Zion, and the places around it is Israel. Through the rain that He gives, the trees will give their fruit and the land will give its yield (verse 27; cf. Hos 2:21-22; Joel 2:23-27). Once again, the LORD speaks of them being secure on their land without care. They will have rest and also freedom, for the LORD has removed their oppressors from them. Thus they will know that He is the LORD.

Nor will there be any more change for the worse in that situation (verse 28). The enemies will no longer find prey in them; they will no longer be devoured. There will be no more fear. Safe, untroubled and fearless, they will enjoy all the blessings that the LORD gives them in rich measure. The guarantee of an unruffled peace lies in “a plant of renown” [Darby Translation] that is the Lord Jesus, their Messiah, whom the LORD will cause “to raise up” [Darby Translation] on their behalf (verse 29). The word “raise up” in this verse is the same word in Hebrew as “set over” in verse 23, which also talks about the Messiah (cf. Isa 60:1). He will drive out the hunger and the reproach.

When that situation has arrived, they will know that the LORD is with them (verse 30). Always the statement, that people will know that He is the LORD, has been a threatening statement because it has always been related to the judgment that He executes. Now this statement is in connection

with blessing. Knowing that He is the LORD is the basis of blessing for His people. They will also know that they are His people. That connection is a strong assurance that no more calamity can strike them.

However, they, His sheep, the sheep of His pasture (verse 31; Psa 100:3), will always need to have the consciousness that they are only men, weak and mortal, and that their salvation and blessing is only in Him, their God. With this powerful reminder, the description of future blessing concludes.

## Ezekiel 35

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, the false shepherds were swept away as obstacles to the restoration of God's people and replaced by the true Shepherd. In the next two chapters (Ezekiel 35-36), which form a unit, we see that the enmity of the nations, represented in Edom, is judged to make way for the blessing of God's people. In Ezekiel 35 the judgment on Mount Seir – that is Edom – is announced. In Ezekiel 36 it is about the promises of God for the mountains of Israel.

### Eze 35:1-15 | Prophecy Concerning Mount Seir

*1 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 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 make you a desolation and a waste.*

*4 "I will lay waste your cities  
And you will become a desolation.*

*Then you will know that I am the LORD.*

*5 Because you have had everlasting enmity and have delivered the sons of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of the punishment of the end, 6 therefore as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I will give you over to bloodshed, and bloodshed will pursue you; since you have not hated bloodshed, therefore bloodshed will pursue you. 7 I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and returns. 8 I will fill its mountains with its slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain by the sword will fall. 9 I will make you an everlasting desolation and your cities will not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 10 "Because you have said, 'These two nations and these two lands will be mine, and we will possess them,' although the LORD*

*was there, 11 therefore as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I will deal [with you] according to your anger and according to your envy which you showed because of your hatred against them; so I will make Myself known among them when I judge you. 12 Then you will know that I, the LORD, have heard all your revilings which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel saying, 'They are laid desolate; they are given to us for food.' 13 And you have spoken arrogantly against Me and have multiplied your words against Me; I have heard [it]." 14 Thus says the Lord GOD, "As all the earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation. 15 As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you. You will be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the LORD."*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He is commanded to set his face on Mount Seir and prophesy against them (verse 2). Mount Seir represent Edom (Gen 32:3; 36:8). Ezekiel turns to him with a message of judgment.

The LORD stretches out His hand in judgment against Mount Seir and Edom, and makes the land and the cities a desolation and a waste (verses 3-4). This is how they will know that He is the LORD. It is not just about the downfall of Edom, but primarily about the honor of the LORD. All enmity against the LORD's people is ultimately directed against Him.

In the book of Ezekiel Edom, his attitude and the judgment of God have been discussed before (Eze 25:12-14), but here He deals with Edom and his attitude in more detail. God points out Edom's everlasting enmity to His people and thus to Himself (verse 5a). Edom has helped to bring down God's people by the sword when the people are already having such a hard time and are being brought down by the Babylonians (verse 5b). He has sought to take possession of the land of God's people (verse 10) and set up a big mouth against God (verse 13). For all these reasons God's judgment comes on him (Oba 1:10-14; Psa 137:7).

Edom hated and violated Israel with an everlasting enmity (verse 5; Num 20:14-21; Amos 1:11). This enmity is inextinguishable and will be present and expressed until the end time. "At the time of their calamity, at the time of the punishment of the end" refers to Israel in the time of the great trib-

ulation. It is the time when iniquity reaches its zenith in the reign of the antichrist and the enmity of the surrounding Arab nations (cf. Eze 21:25).

The LORD will then avenge on Edom the iniquity committed by him, the shedding of blood (verse 6). Edom will be given over to bloodshed and pursued by bloodshed. The whole way of Edom is a way on which blood has flowed: first the blood shed by him and then the blood of himself. In the Hebrew word for blood, *dam*, which is mentioned four times in this verse, the name Edom resonates.

Once again, the LORD speaks about how He will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation (verse 7; verse 3). Not a living creature will be able to maintain itself there. The LORD will exterminate anyone who even passes through it and also anyone who wants to return to it after a while. Everywhere lie the slain who have been killed by the sword (verse 8).

As the enmity of Edom is an everlasting enmity, so the LORD will make Edom into “an everlasting desolation” (verse 9). The cities will no longer be inhabited. Then Edom will be forced to the conclusion that He is the LORD. It will also be clear then that all of Edom’s plans to take possession of “these two nations and these two lands”, that is Judah and the ten tribes (Eze 37:22), have come to naught (verse 10).

He does not care that the LORD is in the land and dwells in the midst of His people. The LORD means nothing to him, just as every wicked man can know that God exists, but takes absolutely no notice of Him. Such people, in self-will, do as they please or they even turn against God in brutal rebellion in audacity in order to subject Him to themselves. This presumption finds its nadir in the beast from the sea (Rev 13:1-9).

Mount Seir is full of anger and envy against Israel (verse 11; cf. Gen 27:41). That anger and envy are behind his hatred and the violence with which he acts against Israel. The LORD will judge that mind and behavior and thereby make Himself known to Edom. He will bring down on his head the bitter enmity with which Edom has acted against his brother. His people will thereby know that God’s power is not diminished and that He punishes all the attackers of His people. He thereby makes Himself known

“among them” – that is, the two nations of Israel (verse 10) – as their Protector.

It will also dawn on them that He has heard all the revilings that Mount Seir has spoken against the mountains of Israel (verse 12). Edom has offended the LORD by seeing the discipline He has had to bring upon His people as an occasion to plunder Israel. But he forgets that the LORD and His people are one (cf. Mt 25:40,45; Acts 9:1-5).

In the end, then, their revilings were directed at the LORD, as if He were impotent to deliver His people from the power of their oppressors (verse 13). Edom has set up a big mouth against Him and mocked Him. The LORD emphasizes that He Himself heard all these words from his mouth. It was not told to Him by others. His people did not complain to Him about it.

When judgment comes on Edom, there will be no pity for him anywhere. On the contrary, “all the earth” will rejoice that this hateful and blood-thirsty people has come to their end (verse 14). Edom will receive the same treatment that Israel received and over which he expressed his joy, his gloating (verse 15; cf. Deu 32:43). Edom will be measured with the same measure with which he has measured. All of Edom will become a desolation altogether. The generality of judgment allows for no exceptions. For the last time, the LORD says that by this they, Mount Seir and all Edom, will know that He is the LORD (verse 9).

## Ezekiel 36

### Introduction

Ezekiel continues his encouraging messages. He has so far expressed hope for the future in terms of new leadership for the people (Ezekiel 34) and judgment on their enemies (Ezekiel 35). Now he is going to speak of the restoration of Israel to the land (Ezekiel 36).

### Eze 36:1-7 | The Invaders Driven Out

*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 has spoken against you, ‘Aha!’ and, ‘The everlasting heights have become our possession,’ 3 therefore prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “For good reason they have made you desolate and crushed you from every side, that you would become a possession of the rest of the nations and you have been taken up in the talk and the whispering 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 to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes and to the forsaken cities which have become a prey and a derision to the rest of the nations which are round about, 5 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who appropriated My land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy [and] with scorn of soul, to drive it out for a prey.” 6 Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My wrath because you have endured the insults of the nations.’ 7 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, ‘I have sworn that surely the nations which are around you will themselves endure their insults.*

Ezekiel is to prophesy to “the mountains of Israel” (verse 1). He has been given this command before, but then to proclaim judgment (Ezekiel 6). Now the LORD says to the land that it will again be filled with people

(verses 10-11,37-38). This prophecy is contrasted with the prophecy about Mount Seir, which is Edom, for which there is no future (Ezekiel 35).

Israel is called to hear the word of the LORD. The occasion for the prophecy is what the enemy has said about Israel (verse 2). The enemy referred to consists of the nations that have taken the land, such as Ammon and Tyre (verse 3; cf. Eze 25:3; 26:2), with Edom mentioned separately (verse 5; cf. Eze 35:10; 25:12).

The enemy, in his pride, thinks he can take possession of Israel. He speaks of “the everlasting heights” (cf. Gen 49:26; Deu 32:13) having become his possession. “The everlasting heights” is a beautiful description for Israel, which God has chosen for His everlasting possession. The enemy thinks that he can take possession of Israel because the people are scattered and therefore seem to have no right to the promised land (verse 3). The enemy has no eye and no heart for God’s promises for His people.

The nations use big words about God’s land and speak ill of it (cf. Num 13:32). It is the rhetoric of people who pat themselves on the back because of their own righteousness, while portraying the people they want to attack as evil. With it they motivate themselves to go and take possession of the land. In their haughty thoughts, they have already given themselves the land. But God knows their foolish posturing. To Him their words are nothing more than hollow drivel.

He tells the mountains of Israel that He knows how the nations think about the land (verses 4-5). Of all the nations that speak evil of God’s people, only Edom or Esau is mentioned by name. He is the ringleader. The nations have appropriated for themselves the LORD’s land – He calls it “My land” in verse 5 (Lev 25:23). What joy they take in it. With all their hearts they rejoice over this annexation. They already see their flocks grazing on Israel’s pasture land.

Only fools think and speak this way, people who do not take God into account. God does not address them in His answer, but His land. The attitude of the nations is the occasion for Him to pronounce a prophecy about His land in its entire expanse (verse 6). He is wroth at the insults which the nations have brought upon His land and which His land has endured (cf.

Zec 1:13-16). Therefore, He says to His land, those nations will themselves endure their insults (verse 7).

### **Eze 36:8-15 | Israel Bears Fruit and Is Populated**

*8 But you, O mountains of Israel, you will put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come. 9 For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you will be cultivated and sown. 10 I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited and the waste places will be rebuilt. 11 I will multiply on you man and beast; and they will increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as you were formerly and will treat you better than at the first. Thus you will know that I am the LORD. 12 Yes, I will cause men—My people Israel—to walk on you and possess you, so that you will become their inheritance and never again bereave them of children.’ 13 “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because they say to you, “You are a devourer of men and have bereaved your nation of children,” 14 therefore you will no longer devour men and no longer bereave your nation of children,’ declares the Lord GOD. 15 “I will not let you hear insults from the nations anymore, nor will you bear disgrace from the peoples any longer, nor will you cause your nation to stumble any longer,” declares the Lord GOD.”*

Unlike the nations (verse 7), His land will no longer bear shame, but it will bear fruit (verse 8). The land will bear fruit for the people of Israel, for the time for the return of the people is at hand, that is, according to the LORD, for to Him the future is present (cf. 2Pet 3:8). In order to work the blessing, He assures them that He is for them and He will turn to the land. The land will be cultivated and sown (verse 9). This is a wonderful reference to the coming of the Messiah to His people whereby the land will also share in His glory.

There will be people in the land again, who together will form the house of Israel (verse 10). It will be one, with nothing missing. The cities will be inhabited again and the ruins rebuilt (cf. Isa 58:12; 61:4; Amos 9:11,14). Man and beast will be numerous and increase in number (verse 11). The former times will revive and even surpassed by the goodness of God. Then the mountains will know that He is the LORD. His people will walk over the

land and take possession of it, never to lose it again (verse 12). This situation will be worked and maintained by the Messiah in the realm of peace.

The LORD will turn all that has been said for evil of His land to good (verse 13). His land has been accused of devouring its own people (cf. Num 13:32) and of bereaving its own nation of their children. This is due to their unfaithfulness (Lev 18:24-25,28). Their children died in multitudes in the wars, as well as by being sacrificed to idols by their parents. It will be no longer the case, says the LORD (verse 14). He will deprive the nations of any reason to ever utter another word of insult over the land (verse 15). How He will do that, He says in the next section.

### **Eze 36:16-21 | Concern for His Holy Name**

*16 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 17 "Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity. 18 Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. 19 Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them. 20 When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.' 21 But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 16). The LORD reminds him of the time Israel lived in their land and what they did then (verse 17). Their ways they have gone and their deeds they have done are clearly before Him. They have defiled themselves, so He has had to treat them like a woman who is a secluded one because of her uncleanness. This means that He has had to break off dealings with this people (Lev 15:19-27).

Instead of being able to show His love to the people, He had to pour out His wrath on them (verse 18). They caused it by their violence and their idolatry. Therefore, He removed them from their land and scattered among the nations and dispersed them throughout the lands (verse 19; Eze

20:23; Lev 26:33). It is the judgment they have deserved by their ways and by their deeds.

Among the nations to which they were scattered and dispersed, they behaved no better than in their land (verse 20). There, too, they profaned the holy Name of the LORD (Rom 2:24; Isa 52:5). From the exile and scattering, the nations draw the conclusion that God has dealt faithlessly with His people and has been unable to protect His people. Thus they profaned the Name of the LORD. But the cause lies with Israel, which has turned away from the LORD in such a way that He did have to deal with them in this way.

However, the LORD Himself will take care for the holiness of His Name before the nations (verse 21). Therefore, He will not give up His people, however guilty they may be, to extermination. That would result in new and greater slander from the nations. However, He will remove all ground for reproach by being merciful to His people, that is, a remnant, by sparing them and redeeming them.

### **Eze 36:22-32 | A New Heart and a New Spirit**

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 My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. 23 I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. 24 For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. 28 You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. 29 Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you.*

*30 I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again 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 in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. 32 I am not doing [this] for your sake," declares the Lord GOD, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!"*

Ezekiel is to tell Israel not to think that they owe their redemption and return to their land to themselves (verse 22). The LORD does it solely for His own holy Name's sake. Never does God's mercy on man lie with man, but God's mercy always finds its origin in Himself in spite of man. When the LORD sanctifies His great Name, it is to let the nations know that He and He alone is the LORD.

To accomplish this, He vindicates the holiness of His great name in His people (verse 23). He vindicates in them His Name before the nations by bringing them back to their land, through which He shines as the God of truth and faithfulness. The nations will be impressed by His greatness, as He reveals Himself to His people as the Holy One, Who at the same time maintains His justice and lets His grace prevail.

He Himself will take the initiative and gather His people from all nations and bring them to their land (verse 24). The returned people will experience a tremendous spiritual renewal (verse 25). The LORD Himself will sprinkle clean water on them, making them clean, cleansed from all their filthiness and abominations. Water is a picture of God's Word and of God's Spirit (Eph 5:26; Jn 7:38-39). God's Word, through the working of God's Spirit, makes them aware of all their sins so that they will confess them.

Confession cleanses and creates room for God to give them "a new heart" and to put "a new spirit" within them (verse 26). He will remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. A heart of stone speaks of depraved insensitivity to the LORD. The heart is as hard as stone (cf. 1Sam 25:37). A heart of flesh speaks of receptivity to the Word of God.

In their heart of flesh God will give His Spirit (verse 27). They will not only receive a new spirit in the sense of a new inner being, but God will give them His Spirit. Their heart of flesh will be open to God's Word. As a

result, they will walk in the statutes of the LORD and obediently keep His ordinances by observing them.

If everything is in harmony with the will of God, they will also be able to enjoy the rich blessing of living in the land. The greatest blessing, though, is that they will be a people to Him and He will be a God to them (verse 28).

The Lord Jesus refers to these verses in His conversation with Nicodemus about the new birth (verses 25-28; Jn 3:5-6). He is surprised that Nicodemus does not understand Him, since surely Nicodemus could have known from this section of the book of Ezekiel about what He is talking. The new birth happens through water and the Spirit. The new birth is entirely God's work through His Word and His Spirit. It is only through this that people are born of God and become His children. No one can do anything about being born of God by himself. And once a person is born of God, no one can change it.

The situation Ezekiel describes will not be a temporary one, but a continuous and unchanging one. This is because the LORD has saved them from all their uncleanness (verse 29). He will call an abundance of blessing over the trees and the field for them instead of the former famine. That famine He had to impose on them because of their constant forsaking Him and sinning against Him. The abundant fruit of the trees and of the field will also result in them no longer receiving the reproach of famine among the nations (verse 30).

The abundant blessing will be in stark contrast to the evil ways they have gone and to their evil deeds (verse 31). The contrast will bring them to loathe themselves. When we receive goodness from God, we will also experience how unworthy we are of that goodness. Then it again dawns on us that the Lord does not bestow His goodness on us because of who we are, as if we were any better than others, but that He does so because of Who He Himself is (verse 32). Then with gratitude there is also shame. The awareness that we are unworthy of the LORD's goodness is also an evidence of true repentance.

**Eze 36:33-38 | The Sole Purpose: The Glory of the LORD**

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 will be rebuilt. 34 The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by. 35 They will say, "This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified [and] inhabited.'* 36 *Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places [and] planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it."* 37 *'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock. 38 Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD.'"*

On the same day that the people are cleansed, the LORD will bestow all the deferred blessing on the people (verse 33). The cities will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. The devastated land will be cultivated to bring forth food and fruit (verse 34). The land will remind all who passes by of "the garden of Eden", paradise (verse 35). The people who pass through the land will be those who first scoffed that the LORD had not been able to preserve His people from destruction (cf. 1Kgs 9:8-9; Jer 18:16; Eze 5:14; 16:15).

So it will be in the realm of peace, when the Lord Jesus reigns as Messiah. The surrounding nations that did not perish in the great tribulation will know that He is the LORD, because He has rebuilt what was ruined and planted that which was desolate (verse 36). He will do it, because He has spoken it.

Israel will then be in perfect harmony with the LORD. They will ask Him things that He gladly answers (verse 37). They may think that there are only a few of them, a rest, a remnant, remaining. Therefore, they will ask Him to multiply the people. He will. He will make them as numerous in people as there are sheep. Sheep are sacrificial animals. The comparison shows that His people will be made up of people who dedicate themselves to Him as a living sacrifice (cf. Rom 12:1).

They will be like sanctified sheep being sacrificed to the LORD on the appointed times (verse 38). Every day of their lives will be like appointed time for them, a day of dedication and sacrifice to the LORD. The formerly destroyed cities will be filled with “flocks of men” (cf. Eze 34:31). What a joy that will be to the LORD! He will receive all the glory for it, for He has done it.

## Ezekiel 37

### **Introduction**

Israel will experience a two-fold restoration:

1. There will be a national restoration, a people's own existence with its own government.
2. There will also be a spiritual restoration, a new inner self, a new heart and a new spirit wrought by the Spirit.

We see these two sides of restoration in this chapter and also that these two sides will take place in chronological order: first national restoration and then spiritual restoration.

This chapter is the answer to all who see no restoration for Israel, not in Ezekiel's day and not in our day. In Ezekiel's time, the destruction of the temple means the loss of their faith. The people are absolutely convinced of the final end of the nation and that there will be no restoration (verse 11; cf. Eze 11:17-20). The LORD responds to their hopelessness through a vision (verses 1-14), a symbolic act (verses 15-25), and a covenant (verses 26-28).

### **Eze 37:1-10 | The Vision of the Bones**

*1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. 2 He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, [there were] very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, [they were] very dry. 3 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." 4 Again He said to me, "Prophesy 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 that you may come to life. 6 I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I*

*am the LORD.” 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, 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 come to life.”” 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.*

Ezekiel is shown a special vision (verse 1). Therefore, the hand of the LORD comes upon him (cf. Eze 1:3; 3:14,22; 8:1; 33:22; 40:1). The LORD takes him up in the spirit and brings him outside his house and residence and sets him down, in the middle of a valley (cf. Eze 3:22). The valley is covered with bones of men. The valley is not a burial ground, but a battlefield (cf. verse 10). The battlefield is filled with bones of the slain who have been left unburied. It is a great reproach not to be buried (cf. 2Sam 21:12-14; Psa 141:7; Jer 8:1-2; 22:19; Eze 6:5). That reproach has come upon Israel.

The LORD makes him go around about the bones in the spirit on all sides (verse 2). This allows him to take in the whole spectacle. He notes that there are very many of them and also that they are very dry. It has been a massacre done thoroughly. All life has long since disappeared from them.

Then the LORD asks Ezekiel if these bones will come back to life (verse 3). The only answer Ezekiel can give is that the LORD knows. His answer indicates that he does not know the answer to the question or even holds it to be impossible to know, for the scene really offers no hope of life. At the same time his answer indicates that he is convinced that the LORD does know the answer and is also able to give life where the situation is so hopeless (cf. Gen 18:14; Jer 32:17-18). He, like every Old Testament believer, believes in the resurrection as an act of the LORD’s power (Isa 25:8; 26:19; Dan 12:2; Hos 6:2).

After his answer, which shows confidence in the LORD, he is commanded to prophesy over the bones (verse 4). He is to address the dry bones and command them to hear the word of the LORD. Humanly speaking, it is

foolishness to speak to dry dead bones as if they could hear and obey as living beings. But to God, that is no problem. It shows His Godhead. He calls things that are not, as if they were, and He brings life where death reigns (Rom 4:17b). It is the same in a spiritual sense. We were dead in trespasses and sins, but when the voice of the Son of God sounded to us, there came a passing out of death into life (Jn 5:24-25).

The Lord GOD speaks through Ezekiel to the bones that He will give breath, or spirit, of life in them, by which they will come to life (verse 5; cf. Gen 2:7; Num 16:22; Psa 104:29; Ecc 3:21). To accomplish this, He will give the bones everything they need to form a body, such as sinews, flesh and a skin (verse 6; cf. Job 10:11). He will also give them breath, or spirit, so that the bones will be able to come to life. By this act of the LORD, the bones will know that He is the LORD. The glory of this event is for Him.

Ezekiel does as he is commanded (verse 7; cf. Eze 12:7; 24:18). His prophesying has immediate results. First there is the noise, a rattling. That rattling is heard because the bones begin to move. They each take their own place in relation to the other bones. Thus they join together to form ordered skeletons. Then Ezekiel sees how the sinews and flesh come on them and how the LORD covered them with the skin (verse 8). But there is no breath, or spirit, in the bodies yet. They still remain corpses.

To bring the breath, or the spirit, of life into the bodies, the LORD uses Ezekiel (verse 9). Ezekiel must prophesy to the breath, or the spirit, to get into the dead. He is to call the breath, or the spirit, to “come from the four winds”, which is a reference to the fact that the Israelites are scattered to all corners of the earth and must be gathered together from there (cf. Jer 31:8a; Isa 43:5-6). This breath, or this spirit, of life comes from God and blows through all nature and gives life to all creatures.

Ezekiel again does as commanded by the LORD (verse 10). Then the breath, or the spirit, comes into them and the bodies come to life. A great army thus arises. Ezekiel is visibly impressed by the size of that army and speaks of “an exceedingly great army”.

### Eze 37:11-14 | Explanation of the Vision

*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 has perished. We are completely cut off.' 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. 14 I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD.'"*

Then the LORD gives Ezekiel the explanation of the vision (verse 11). The dead bones are not just a picture of Judah, but of "the whole house of Israel". The whole people have given up hope of a national existence. They see themselves as cut off from God's land and God's blessings. This is indeed their situation as a result of their sins. They lead a dry and dead existence (cf. Psa 31:12; 32:4).

After the battlefield as a picture of death, we now get the graves as a picture of death. The valley of dry bones speaks of the totality of defeat. There is no one left to bury the bones. The grave speaks of the impossibility of returning to life. The people are buried, as it were, in Babylon and other lands. Therefore, Ezekiel must prophesy that the Lord GOD will open the graves to come up out of their graves and bring them "into the land of Israel" (verse 12).

He calls them "My people" here. He will raise them from the grave because Israel is His people. That prophecy does not refer to the apostate multitude, but to the remnant whom He, according to the election of His grace, always preserves for Himself (Rom 11:5).

This prophecy is a wonderful promise of the restoration of Israel as a nation on their land. The return from Babylon is like a resurrection from the grave and death. But that is only a partial and also a temporary resurrection. In the future, that resurrection will be expressly for the whole people.

They will know that He is the LORD when He has done this mighty life-giving work to His people by opening their graves and raising them

up from their graves (verse 13). Then He will also give them His Spirit and they, after their national restoration, will also be restored inwardly and receive new life (verse 14). They will see that what the LORD has spoken has also been fulfilled by Him. The Spirit is yet to come (Joel 2:28-32). He is coming in a converted Israel. It is, as has already been said, a restoration in two stages: first nationally, then spiritually.

### **Eze 37:15-28 | God Will Reunite Judah and Israel**

*15 The word of the LORD came again to me saying, 16 "And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.' 17 Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. 18 When the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?' 19 say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.'" 20 The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. 21 Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; 22 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. 23 They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. 24 "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. 25 They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. 26 I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. 27 My*

*dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. 28 And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”““*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 15). He is to perform another signifying act (verse 16; cf. Eze 4:1,9; 5:1; 6:11; 12:3; 24:16). He is to take one stick. On it he is to write “for Judah”, which is the two tribes realm. He must also write on it “for the sons of Israel”. This does not mean the entire ten tribes realm, but refers to the “companions” of Judah among the Israelites. By these companions we can think of the tribe of Simeon (Jos 19:1-9) and of the tribe of Benjamin. We can also think of those who joined the two tribes realm over time from the ten tribes realm because they wanted to remain faithful to the LORD’s service in the temple at Jerusalem (2Chr 11:13-14; 15:9; 30:11,18; 31:1).

Ezekiel must then take another stick and write on it “for Joseph”. It is “the stick of Ephraim” – the name often used to designate the whole of the ten tribes – “and all the house of Israel, his companions”. “His companions” are all who belong to the ten tribes.

Ezekiel is then to bring those two sticks together and join them “one to another into one stick”, so that in his hand they become one (verse 17). The symbolism of the act is clear. Yet the LORD expects the exiles to ask questions about what Ezekiel is doing (verse 18). The symbolism is that the two houses of Israel will become one again. But there is no belief in this among the people who were taken away. So they ask not so much what it means to *them*, but what it means to *Ezekiel*.

The LORD tells Ezekiel what to answer (verse 19). Then it appears that what Ezekiel is to do are the actions of the LORD Himself. He, the LORD, takes Ephraim as a stick and adds it to the stick that represents Judah. Thus He makes them one stick. The place where that happens is His hand. In His hand they become one. The joining together is His work. As Ezekiel passes on what the LORD says, he is to hold the stick, on which he has written the names, in his hand before the eyes of his audience (verse 20).

Next, the LORD tells Ezekiel to tell his fellow people how He will make the two sticks one stick (verse 21). He will take the sons of Israel from among

the nations to which they have been scattered and bring them into their own land. Then He will make them one nation on the mountains of Israel (verse 22). They will then have one King over them, that is the Messiah, and will no longer be divided into two kingdom. This prophecy was not fulfilled at the return from the Babylonian exile, but will be fulfilled in the future.

Then, when they live in their land and enjoy the blessing of the Messiah's rule, they will no longer fall into idolatry (verse 23). Their return will be accompanied by a cleansing work of the LORD. He can only recognize a cleansed and pure people as His people and of that people be their God. His Servant David is the Messiah (cf. Isa 9:6; Jer 23:5; 30:9; 33:17; Amos 9:11; Mic 5:2-4). He will be both King and Shepherd (verse 24). The Lord Jesus, Who is already our Shepherd, will then also be the Shepherd of His people. Under such a leadership of loving care and beneficent authority, they will walk in the LORD's provisions and observe His ordinances. They will not want to do otherwise.

The land they live on is the land that the LORD promised to His servant Jacob many centuries ago (verse 25; Gen 28:13). In that land his descendants have lived. In that land future descendants will also live, forever. The guarantee for this is that the Messiah will be their Prince forever. By "forever" is meant the coming age of the realm of peace, when the Lord Jesus will reign.

An additional confirmation of this continued blessing is the "covenant of peace" that the LORD will make with them (verse 26; Num 25:12; Eze 34:25). This covenant is also an "everlasting covenant" (cf. Gen 9:16; Gen 17:7,13,19; Exo 31:16; Lev 24:8; Num 18:19; 2Sam 23:5; 1Chr 16:17; Psa 105:10; Isa 24:5; 55:3; 61:8; Jer 32:40; 50:5; Eze 16:60), which can only be made on the basis of the blood of Christ (Heb 13:20).

The LORD gives them a place of blessing where He will also make them numerous. This numerous posterity will be dedicated to Him, so that He can put His sanctuary in their midst. That sanctuary will also be there forever. Since the exodus of the people from Egypt, the LORD has longed to

dwell with a redeemed people. This will then be the case in a perfect way, because the people will be completely in tune with Him.

Thus there is a threefold assurance that the blessing will last forever, that is throughout the period of the realm of peace:

1. Their Prince will reign forever.
2. The covenant is an everlasting covenant.
3. The sanctuary of the LORD will be in their midst forever.

His tabernacle, His dwelling place, is then with them (verse 27). Then that perfect fellowship between God and His people can be enjoyed, to the joy of His heart and to the good of His people. By the presence of His sanctuary in the midst of His people, the nations will know that He is the LORD, Who sanctifies Israel (verse 28).

It is clear that Israel does not owe it to themselves to be back in the land and enjoy abundant blessing. Their return and the blessing they may experience are a testimony to the glory of the Name of the LORD. All honor will be given to Him. He will receive that honor both from His people and from the nations.

## Ezekiel 38

### **Introduction**

The section of Ezekiel 33-37 gives a nice overview of the restoration of Israel in the end time, culminating in the Messianic realm of peace (Eze 37:24-28). From other prophecies we know that the Lord Jesus, at His return to earth to deliver His people from their enemies, defeated several enemies. These include at least:

1. The armies of the restored Western Roman Empire, which is the united Europe. They are crushingly defeated by the Lord at Har-Magedon (Rev 16:13-16; 19:17-19).
2. Nations gathered in Edom, the greatest hater of God's people. They are crushingly defeated by the Lord in Edom (Isa 63:1-6).
3. The king of the north and his allies. They are crushingly defeated by the Lord between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea (Dan 11:40-45).

These enemies in particular oppressed Israel severely during the great tribulation. Ezekiel does not speak of that great tribulation. He speaks primarily of God's work to bring Israel into the promised blessing. That blessing has come with the coming of the Messiah to His people. He has made from the two nations and kingdoms they were – the ten and the two tribes – again “one nation ..., on the mountains of Israel” with “one King”, which is He Himself (Eze 37:22).

At this point we have arrived in this book. But there is another enemy that must be defeated before the realm of peace can be fully established. That enemy is described in this and the next chapter (Ezekiel 38-39).

That this enemy is special is evident from the detailed description to make clear why, where and how God is dealing with this enemy. In seven prophecies, introduced each time with “thus says the Lord GOD”, the picture of

the extermination of this mysterious enemy is drawn (Eze 38:1-9,10-13,14-16,17-23; 39:1-16,17-24,25-29).

### **Eze 38:1-9 | Prophecy About Gog**

*1 And the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 “Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him 3 and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. 4 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 splendidly attired, a great company [with] buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords; 5 Persia, Ethiopia and Put with them, all of them [with] shield and helmet; 6 Gomer with all its troops; Beth-togarmah [from] the remote parts of the north with all its troops—many peoples with you. 7 “Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. 8 After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, [whose inhabitants] have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them. 9 You will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.”*

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel (verse 1). He is to set his face toward Gog (verse 2). Gog is in the land of Magog and is prince of Rosh [or: chief prince of], Meshech and Tubal. Magog, Meshech and Tubal are nations descended from the sons of Japheth, the son of Noah (Gen 10:2; 1Chr 1:5). Who Gog himself is is not clear from Scripture. He dwells in “remote parts of the north”, i.e. the uttermost north (verses 6,15). Gog is not the king of the north of Daniel 11, for that one is associated with Assyria or great Syria. The king of the north will not attack Israel when it is at rest in its unprotected land, but earlier. Gog is a power that is so audacious to attack Israel after all that has happened,.

Nor should these Gog and Magog be confused with the Gog and Magog mentioned in Revelation 20. There they are powers that organize the rebellion *after* the realm of peace (Rev 20:7-9), whereas here in Ezekiel it is an

---

attack *at the beginning* of the realm of peace. The rebellion in Revelation 20 also comes not only from the uttermost north, as here in Ezekiel, but from all corners of the earth and across its breadth. The names Gog and Magog are used in Revelation 20 because that rebellion is similar to the attack that Ezekiel describes. Ezekiel describes a rebellion that takes place when the Lord Jesus is already present on earth and Israel is living peacefully and unconcerned, while there are still some enemies who must also be subdued.

The most plausible explanation – found in several commentaries – is that by the enemy Ezekiel describes, Russia is meant. In my view, several details in the description support this explanation, although certainly some details remain unclear. As we reflect on these chapters, these details are discussed.

Regarding the names Meshech and Tubal, Roger Liebi says the following in his explanation of this chapter: ‘Meshech and Tubal mean the Muscovites and Tobolskites. These are the primordial peoples of today’s Russians, who populated the area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea 2,000 years ago.’

It is remarkable that the LORD Himself initiates Gog’s attack on Israel, because He wants to judge that prince (verse 3). He will do so by pulling him by hooks in his jaws like a beast in an irresistible way to Israel (cf. Eze 19:4,9; 29:4). This does not alter the fact that this power itself intends to advance. Here we see that the LORD makes use of the evil plans of this power, just as He makes use of the evil plans of satan (cf. 2Sam 24:1; 1Chr 21:1; Isa 10:5-19; Hab 1:5-11).

The big difference with the other enemies of God’s people in the past is that Gog is not an instrument in God’s hand to discipline His people. That is the case with, for example, the Assyrians in the book of Isaiah and the Babylonians in the book of Jeremiah. Those nations were used by God as His disciplinary rod for His people. What we see with Gog, however, is that God wants and will judge this enemy in His land because of all that this enemy has done to His people and because of their opposition and enmity to Him.

That the initiative comes from the LORD is clear (verse 4). Gog is compelled, as it were, into this expedition by force. A mighty army is formed, with horses and horsemen, wearing impressive uniforms. The soldiers are armed to the teeth and skilled in the handling of the sword. This army also includes soldiers from other nations (verses 5-6). But the overall responsibility lies with Gog, who is appointed by the LORD as a guard over this vast army (verse 7).

The preparation of the expedition will take considerable time, “many days”, but when the time comes, Gog will be punished. This will happen when he finally arrives in restored Israel with the intention to seize its chance there (verse 8). After their wanderings Israel has been gathered “in the latter years” from many nations and then lives on the mountains of its land, which have been so destroyed by its previous enemies that it seems to be a permanent devastation. Now that the people have returned to their land, the hostile powers have been judged, and the Messiah is protecting them, they live there unconcerned. Ezekiel uses the phrase “living securely” (verses 11,14; Eze 39:26; cf. Lev 25:18,19; 26:5; 1Kgs 4:25) to describe the Messianic security and safety of God’s new Israel.

This situation is the perfect opportunity for Gog and his armies to launch a ruthless attack (verse 9). They imagine they can overrun the land with their throngs of soldiers and destroy it once again. Their attack targets a land that has suffered indescribably for centuries and now finally has peace. Gog’s whole attitude shows his insidious cunning and ruthlessness.

### **Eze 38:10-13 | Deliberations of Gog**

*10 Thus says the Lord GOD, “It will come about on that day, that thoughts will come into your mind and you will devise an evil plan, 11 and you will say, ‘I will go up against the land of unvalled villages. I will go against those who are at rest, that live securely, all of them living without walls and having no bars or gates, 12 to capture spoil and to seize plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places which are [now] inhabited, and against the people who are gathered from the nations, who have acquired cattle and goods, who live at the center of the world.’ 13 Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish with all its villages will say to you, ‘Have you come to capture spoil? Have you*

*assembled your company to seize plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to capture great spoil?”*

For the second time the words “thus says the Lord GOD” (verse 10) are heard. The LORD says that He knows the deliberations of the heart of Gog. Nothing is hidden from Him, not even the deepest hidden thoughts. He knows exactly what Gog will say about going against His people (verse 11). Gog is perfectly aware of the situation in Israel, how the people live there completely unprotected and unconcerned (cf. Eze 39:26; Jer 49:31; Zec 2:1-5). He just doesn’t pay attention to the fact that the LORD is the Keeper of His people.

Therefore, he makes haughty plans for a raid (verse 12). He is guided by greed. It is conceivable that Israel, through its victories over its enemies after the great tribulation, is a tremendously wealthy people, having acquired cattle and goods. That the people “live at the center of the world” is literally: “they live at the navel of the earth” (Eze 5:5; cf. Deu 32:8). The land is the center of the earth, from which all blessing for the whole earth emanates. The land is geographically, globally speaking, the intersection of three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa.

There are other nations who do see profit in Gog’s enterprise (verse 13). They ask questions that show where their interest lies. These nations have escaped the judgments that have come on the earth and they have been spared without it having brought an inner change in them.

### **Eze 38:14-16 | Gog and His Allies**

*14 “Therefore prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “On that day when My people Israel are living securely, will you not know [it]? 15 You will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army; 16 and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It shall come about in the last days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.”*

Gog's evil deliberations, but known to the LORD, are reason for commanding Ezekiel again to prophesy against Gog (verse 14). For the third time it sounds seriously "thus says the Lord GOD" to Gog. He tells Gog that on the day he will be in Israel, he will come to know that the LORD knows and governs all things.

Then the LORD will make it known to him that He knows and has known everything and that this enemy has come from the uttermost north with a huge army to cover His people and the land like a cloud (verses 15-16). The time is also known to the LORD. The time is not only known by Him, but is determined by Him. He controls everything so that He uses Gog to make Himself known to the nations through him and to sanctify Himself before their eyes.

The Divine purpose is above all else. In carrying out His purpose, God also uses the low motives of man. We see the same thing in what Isaiah says about the invasion by Assyria (Isa 10:5-12) and in what Habakkuk says about Babylon (Hab 1:5-11). God *does not activate* man's sinful will, but He *uses* man's active sinful will. What Gog intends as a victory for Himself is made by God into an opportunity to glorify Himself.

### **Eze 38:17-23 | Gog Judged by the LORD**

*17 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for [many] years that I would bring you against them? 18 It will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "that My fury will mount up in My anger. 19 In My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare [that] on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. 20 The fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse and every wall will fall to the ground. 21 I will call for a sword against him on all My mountains," declares the Lord GOD. "Every man's sword will be against his brother. 22 With pestilence and with blood I will enter into judgment with him; and I will rain on him and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential*

*rain, with hailstones, fire and brimstone. 23 I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD.”*

For the fourth time the words “thus says the Lord GOD” (verse 17) are heard. Gog is reminded of an earlier speaking of the LORD. We have no record in Scripture of those prophecies; at least the name Gog is not mentioned anywhere in the prophecies or by prophets. It may mean that this refers to statements of the prophets about the north as the direction from which judgment is coming. We can take the reference to what the prophets have said about Russia in this way that what the LORD has said about and against Assyria (Isa 10:5-34) also applies to Russia.

We can compare this to what the Lord Jesus says about John. The Lord calls him “Elijah who would come” (Mt 11:14). Malachi announced Elijah (Mal 4:5). That announcement is fulfilled with the coming of John, for he is Elijah in a spiritual sense. He preached repentance to make the people ready to receive the Messiah. But the people have not repented. Therefore, Elijah must come again. This happens at the coming of the two witnesses in Jerusalem in the end time of whom he is one (Rev 11:3-6). Elijah is not one of those witnesses personally, but one of those witnesses exhibits his characteristics.

We see this with Russia which has the characteristics of Assyria. There is a strong connection between Russia and Assyria. In fact, Russia is the driving force behind Assyria’s actions. We read this in Daniel 8 (Dan 8:21-27), specifically in the phrase, “His power will be mighty, but not by his [own] power” (Dan 8:24). By “his power” is meant the power of Assyria, and by “not by his [own] power” is meant that he is helped by the power of Russia.

There is a distinction, however, already pointed out above, and it is well to repeat it in this context. Other nations, especially Assyria, that have gone up against Israel have triumphed because God has used them as a disciplinary tool for His people. That the LORD brings Magog or Russia upon His land does not happen as a threat to His people because they have departed from Him, for all deviation has come to an end. They are now living in rest in the land under the blessing and protection of their Messiah. Gog

is not used as a disciplinary tool, but is judged because of his rapacious desires, particularly targeting God's people.

In the day that Gog comes into God's land, the LORD's fury will mount up in His anger against him (verse 18; Psa 18:8,15). In His anger, He will shake the land of Israel by a severe earthquake, so that the mounted armies will not know where to go and what to do (verse 19). All nature will tremble, not only the beasts of the land and all the men, but also the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens (verse 20). Every place where the enemies might seek shelter will be thrown down. It will be so, that the land will tremble only in the places where the enemies are, while the rest of His people will not be disturbed. We see something similar in the plagues that God brings upon Egypt, while He exempts His people living there from those plagues (Exo 8:22; 9:4,26; 11:7).

On all the mountains, which the LORD calls "My mountains", where the enemies are unjustly located, He will call the sword against them (verse 21). That will be their own sword. He will make the sword do its deadly work, in that the enemies, dazed and blinded by terror, will kill one another (cf. Jdg 7:22; 1Sam 14:20). The pestilence will also break out (verse 22). Through this and through the blood that the sword makes flow, God will carry out His justice against Gog.

Also, God Himself will actively participate in the battle by sending down from heaven "a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire and brimstone" on him. And not only on him, but also on all his troops and the many nations that accompany him on this expedition.

With the judgment on Gog, God gives a final proof of His greatness and holiness in the sight of many nations (verse 23). By this they will all know that He is the LORD.

This battle and this judgment of the LORD take place when the Lord Jesus is already in Jerusalem. A comparison with the governments of David and Solomon can help understand this situation. David and Solomon together are a picture of the Lord Jesus. David is a picture of the Lord Jesus as the suffering and also ruling King and Solomon is a picture of Him as the Prince of peace. With both David and Solomon we see that not everything

is immediately peace when they are king. Even then there are opponents who must be overcome before there is true peace in the kingdom.

Another consideration is that Gog has never cared about God and His Christ. He has always denied the existence of God and Christ and will continue to do so. Therefore, he will be totally unimpressed by the fact that Christ has established His throne in Jerusalem. God said something similar about Edom a few chapters back. He knows that Edom is boldly claiming: "'We will possess them,' although the LORD was there" (Eze 35:10). Thus Gog foolishly does not believe in His supremacy. To him, only a man rules there, though a man of enormous power. Directed and blinded by satan, he carries out his own wicked intentions.

What God is doing with Russia is reminiscent of what He once did through Elisha with the army of the king of Syria (2Kgs 6:8-23). It is a similar history with a completely opposite ending. The king of Syria sends a large army to capture one man, Elisha. At Elisha's prayer, God strikes that great army with blindness. Then Elisha brings this army "in the midst of Samaria" (2Kgs 6:20). The king of Israel wants to kill the enemies, but Elisha wants them to have food and be able to return to their lord.

In the time of Elisha, there is grace for the Syrians. There is no such grace for Russia in the time of which Ezekiel speaks. They are brought by God "on the mountains of Israel" (Eze 39:1-2), which is in the middle of the land, which includes Samaria. It is in that area that they are put to death by God.

Syria and Russia are closely linked in the time of which Ezekiel speaks. We see in our days that this close connection is revealing itself more and more clearly in the political field of forces. The fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39 is casting its shadow.

## Ezekiel 39

### Introduction

This chapter is the continuation of the previous one and goes on to make known to us what God is going to do with Gog.

### Eze 39:1-16 | Gog as Spoil for Israel

1 *“And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal; 2 and I will turn you around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north and bring you against the mountains of Israel. 3 I will strike your bow from your left hand and dash down your arrows from your right hand. 4 You will fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field. 5 You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken,” declares the Lord GOD. 6 “And I will send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD. 7 “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 will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. 8 Behold, it is coming and it shall be done,” declares the Lord GOD. “That is the day of which I have spoken. 9 “Then those who inhabit the cities of Israel will go out and make fires with the weapons and burn [them], both shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears, and for seven years they will make fires of them. 10 They will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons; and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them and seize the plunder of those who plundered them,” declares the Lord GOD. 11 “On that day I will give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off those who would pass by. So they will bury Gog there with all his horde, and they will call [it] the valley of Hamon-gog. 12 For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land. 13 Even all the people of the land will bury [them];*

*and it will be to their renown [on] the day that I glorify Myself," declares the Lord GOD. 14 "They will set apart men who will constantly pass through the land, burying those who were passing through, even those left on the surface of the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. 15 As those who pass through the land pass through and anyone sees a man's bone, then he will set up a marker by it until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog. 16 And even [the] name of [the] city will be Hamonah. So they will cleanse the land."*

Ezekiel must continue to prophesy against Gog (verse 1). For the fifth time the words "thus says the Lord GOD" are heard in connection with Gog. The first words that follow are similar to those of the beginning of the previous chapter (Eze 38:1-3).

The LORD repeats His purpose to take Gog up from his home in "the remotest parts of the north" or "the uttermost north" to bring him against "the mountains of Israel" (verse 2). Immediately afterwards, He says that He will disarm Gog and his band in Israel and how He will do it (verse 3). It is presented as a battle, in which Gog has no chance, however. The LORD simply knocks his bow out of his left hand and renders his right hand powerless so that he cannot hold his arrows. There he stands, defenseless. Then he will fall on the mountains of Israel, along with all those who have gone up with him (verse 4). There they lie, defeated. Those who have thought to rob rich booty are given by the LORD to the predatory birds and the hyenas for food.

Even though the armies of Gog that have escaped from the mountains regroup in the open field, they are no match for the LORD there either (verse 5). He will cut them down there. It will happen, because He has declared so. The land in the uttermost north, Magog, from which Gog has gone, will be judged by the LORD with His fire (verse 6). The fire will also come to the coastlands that live in safety. It is possible that this refers to the countries that lie on the coast of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.

As for Israel, the LORD will make His holy Name known in their midst (verse 7). He will no longer let His holy Name be profaned. He is the "Holy One" – here not of Israel (Psa 71:22; Isa 5:19; 10:20; 12:6; 30:12; 30:15; 41:14;

43:3; 43:14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 54:5; 60:14), but – “in Israel”. He dwells in the midst of His people. His judgment on Gog in His land makes that clear once again. In that day, the day about which He has spoken that Gog will be judged and for which He has looked forward, there will be a firm peace, to which no one can change anything (verse 8). Then there will be undisturbed, full peace in Israel and in the world.

The destruction is described in a few words. The description of the consequences is much more detailed. The enemies believe they will ambush Israel as prey, but the opposite happens: the inhabitants of Israel will take spoil of their attackers (verses 9-10). This section is reminiscent of the Jews in Susan in the book of Esther, who are also first threatened with being killed by their enemies, but where the roles are also reversed (Est 9:1-10).

The weaponry of the armies of Gog will serve as firewood. It is a huge arsenal. One will be able to make fires of it for as much as seven years. Usually captured weapons are added to one’s own weapon stock. But addition to one’s own stock of weapons is not necessary, for there will be no more wars. At the coming of Christ, weapons have been turned into farm implements (Isa 2:4a; Mic 4:3).

After the complete extermination of Gog, the LORD designates a grave for the fallen in Israel (verse 11). There will be no transportation of the corpses to their own land. The place of the grave is “the valley of those who pass by”. That valley will become a mass grave, so it can no longer be used as a thoroughfare for travelers. The valley will be given a new name, “valley of Hamon-gog” or “valley of the multitude of Gog”.

The slaughter among the armies of Gog will be so great that it will take seven months to bury all the corpses, or what is left of them (verse 12). In burying those countless corpses, the entire population will participate (verse 13). The LORD has defeated the enemy, He gets the glory. His people share in the victory and deal with the results. It is the sure proof of the total annihilation of the enemy. They not only hear of it, but can touch the evidence of it, as it were.

After seven months, when the masses have been buried, men set apart for the purpose will be engaged in tracking down remnants of the enemy

(verse 14). This search is necessary to completely cleanse the land (cf. Num 19:16). They are aided in this task by those who pass through the land who, as they journey through the land, discover a human bone here or there (verse 15). When they see bones, they are to make them recognizable so that the buriers can easily notice the bones and bury them in the mass grave. This is how the land will be cleansed.

The name of the mass grave is connected to the name of the city Hamonah (verse 16). Hamonah means ‘multitude’. When all the remnants of the ‘multitude’ of corpses are buried in that one place, the land will be cleansed.

### **Eze 39:17-24 | The Judgment on Gog Glorifies the LORD**

*17 “As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, “Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. 18 You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as [though they were] rams, lambs, goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. 19 So you will eat fat until you are glutted, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. 20 You will be glutted at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war,” declares the Lord GOD. 21 “And I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them. 22 And the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God from that day onward. 23 The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me, and I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword. 24 According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them.””*

In verse 17 we hear a new “thus says the Lord GOD” – for the sixth time in these two chapters. The LORD is returning to what He said to Ezekiel in verse 4. He is to call all the birds of prey and beasts of prey to feast on

the fallen multitude of Gog. The LORD calls it “My sacrifice” (verses 17,19) and “a great sacrifice” (verse 17) that He brings.

The predators may eat the flesh and drink the blood (verses 17-19). The blood is the life and belongs to God. He can therefore determine what He does with it. Here He gives it to the beasts of prey, making the libelous destruction of this immense army even more libelous. The ‘meal’ is mentioned in components and there may be unlimited eating, to satiety and drunkenness. The sacrifice that the LORD brings knows no measure. They may eat it at “My table” (verse 20). The LORD has prepared everything, they need only consume, placing no limit on themselves.

Through His dealings with Gog and his multitude, God shows His glory to the nations (verse 21). Those nations will see His judgment that He has executed. They will see in that judgment His hand that He has laid on Gog and His multitude as proof of His complete rule over these rebels.

If ever there was a thought that the LORD could not deliver His people, it has now been set right (verse 22). That thought may have arisen in the past among His people, the house of Israel, who have been besieged and destroyed again and again by enemies. That thought may also have occurred to the nations who have been able to take possession of Israel again and again (verse 23). The nations will come to realize that they were very wrong in attributing Israel’s exile to God’s inability to protect His people from the enemies.

It did not occur to them that God sent those very enemies and gave them the power to overcome His people because His people had been unfaithful to Him and therefore He had to discipline them. That is why the king of Babylon was able to carry the people away into exile and why other enemies were able to kill them. It is because the LORD has given His people into their hands. He dealt with His people because of their transgressions against Him (verse 24). Therefore, He had to hide His face from them.

### **Eze 39:25-29 | Israel Restored in Their Land**

*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 will forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their [own] land with no one to make [them] afraid. 27 When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. 28 Then they will know that I am the LORD their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them [again] to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. 29 I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD.*

For the seventh and final time in these two chapters, the words “thus says the Lord GOD” (verse 25) are heard. The content of those words is the restoration of Israel to the land. That restoration begins by bringing a reversal in the captivity of His people whom He calls “Jacob” (cf. Psa 85:1; Jer 30:18; 33:26). The name Jacob recalls their progenitor in his weakness. The origin of restoration lies with the LORD and has its ground in His mercy and in standing up for His Name. He takes care of “the whole house of Israel”, that is, all twelve tribes (cf. Eze 3:7; 20:40; 36:10; 37:11). At the same time He stands up for His holy Name.

All their disgrace and all their treachery in the past will be forgotten once they dwell in their land (verse 26). The people dwell in the land in peace as a people restored in their relationship with the LORD. This is also consistent with the prophet’s speech which speaks of the returned people who have finally found rest in the blessing of the kingdom of peace.

The Author of the blessing of the realm of peace is the LORD. He is bringing them back from the nations and gathering them from the lands of their enemies (verse 27). As a result, He will be sanctified through them in the sight of many nations, that is, they will recognize Him as the one true God. It will no longer be a question of Who is the God of Israel and that He – and not the nations – dealt with His people (verse 28).

He led His people into exile among the nations because of their unfaithfulness to Him. First in Babylon and later also among “many nations” because of their rejection of the Messiah. It will also be perfectly clear that it

is He and no one else Who has gathered His people back to their land, not forgetting anyone.

Then the relationship is not merely temporary or partial, but forever and completely restored. He will no longer hide His face from them (verse 29). They don't have to, because they will serve Him with all their heart. They do this because the LORD has poured out His Spirit on them. The Spirit lays hold of them and as a result they will always do everything to the glory of God. The Spirit will also dwell in the midst of God's people in the rebuilt temple, about which the following chapters will inform us in detail.

# Ezekiel 40

## **Introduction**

With Ezekiel 40, the final section of the book begins. After the restoration of Israel in its land (Ezekiel 36-37) and the extermination of its last enemies (Ezekiel 38-39), the realm of peace can be established in all its glory. While almost all the other prophets go no further than mentioning the realm of peace, sometimes with a brief description of that peace, Ezekiel goes into detail in these final chapters (Ezekiel 40-48) about the new temple, the new priesthood, and the new division of the land in the realm of peace.

After all the battles, there is finally complete rest everywhere on earth. The center of that rest is the sanctuary – mentioned briefly in Ezekiel 37 (Eze 37:26,28) – where the LORD dwells and is served.

Ezekiel 40-48 can be subdivided as follows:

1. First, Ezekiel gives a description of the sanctuary (Ezekiel 40:1-42:20), in which the glory of the LORD returns (Eze 43:1-12).
2. Then he describes the altar and its dedication and the priestly service that takes place in the sanctuary (Ezekiel 43:13-47:12). He can give this description because the LORD gives him in a vision a picture of the sanctuary and its statutes.
3. In the last section (Ezekiel 47:13-48:35) we see the new inhabitants of the land and the division of the land among the twelve tribes.

Note: The explanation of this last section of the book of Ezekiel is not always easy. Interpreters have pointed out the following problems for its interpretation and application:

1. The description is not complete.
2. There are differences in the Hebrew manuscripts, sometimes including distinctions between what is written and what is read.

3. The text of the Septuagint (LXX) is in some cases clearer than the Hebrew text (and sometimes tacitly adopted by translators).

4. The specific architectural terms used, the meaning of which is unknown even in the time of the LXX. [End of note]

The description of the sanctuary that Ezekiel sees in the vision is not complete. For example, most of the height measurements are missing. Also mostly missing is the mention of the materials needed in the construction of the sanctuary. When Moses built the tabernacle and when Solomon built the temple, those materials were mentioned.

The absence of the enumeration of materials seems to imply that this description is primarily concerned with the presence and use of the temple, its existence and purpose. However, it is mentioned elsewhere that the materials will be supplied by kings of various nations (Psa 68:29), from which people will also come to help with the construction (Zec 6:15a).

The description of the tabernacle is also not given in detail. But what is lacking in that description is not an insurmountable defect when Moses built and erected it. For Moses saw the example of the tabernacle on the mountain (Exo 25:9,40; Heb 8:5). Something similar applies to Solomon's temple, for Solomon received the design of the temple from his father David in writing (1Chr 28:19).

The temple that Ezekiel sees will be built by the Messiah Himself, the Lord Jesus (Zec 6:12). We may have for our idea now an incomplete description of that temple, insufficient to replicate it in detail. The Lord Jesus as the Builder is the guarantee that that temple will be perfect in every detail. Nothing will be lacking. Every part and every room will be in the right place and of the right dimensions. They will be in perfect harmony with and in proper proportion to all other parts and rooms.

The rather dry enumeration of dimensions looks rather technical. As a result, the description – as with the tabernacle – seems to give little food for the heart. But all who have learned that God has had every word written down in His Word because He considers it important for us, will long to know what He also has to say to us through this description. For “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for

correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2Tim 3:16-17).

Even though we do not know the exact meaning or place of some of the details, it is clear that God is working in an orderly fashion, according to a well-defined plan. This is reminiscent of the order that He also desires to see maintained in the church, His house in this age (1Cor 14:40; Col 2:5). When it comes to the service of worshiping God – and that is the emphasis at this sanctuary – He indicates at length and precisely how He wants His people to perform that service. This is also true for us in this day and age, as the Lord Jesus says: "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23-24).

The Old Testament describes four dwellings of God. The first is the tabernacle. This is the (movable) dwelling place of God with His people in the wilderness. The second is the temple, the permanent dwelling place of God in the land. This was built by Solomon and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. This is the first temple. The third dwelling place of God is the temple built by Zerubbabel after the return to the land of a remnant from the Babylonian exile. This temple was later enlarged by Herod and destroyed by the Romans in the year 70. This is the second temple. The temple that Ezekiel sees and describes for us is the third temple, that of the realm of peace.

Now it is significant that these four dwelling places of God are all in fact one and the same dwelling place. The Scriptures make that clear. To begin with, we see that what is true of the tabernacle is also true of the temple. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews speaks of the tabernacle, while speaking of the service in the temple (Heb 9:1-7). The arrangement of and service in the tabernacle is, so to speak, interchangeable with the arrangement of and service in the temple.

This identification continues in the three temples. We learn this from the prophet Haggai. Haggai speaks to the people who have returned from exile in the land of God and have rebuilt the temple. He says of the just rebuilt house of God to all who stand by it: "Who is left among you who

saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?" (Hag 2:4). He speaks emphatically of "this temple in its former glory". By this he refers to the temple that Solomon built. They have rebuilt that temple – "this temple" – though without the splendor that that temple had.

Haggai also prophesies of the future temple, the temple of Ezekiel. That too is not a new dwelling place of God, but a renewal and enlargement of its original glory. God says: "I will fill this house with glory" (Hag 2:7). Again, "this house"! He adds: "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former" (Hag 2:9).

In Ezekiel 40-42 we have the actual description of the house. In a vision, the prophet walks with a Man Who gives him a tour through the entire temple. This tour happens, except for a few interruptions, silently. All kinds of architectural aspects come to attention. While Ezekiel watches in silence, the Man also takes all kinds of measurements.

The Man breaks silence several times to explain something to Ezekiel (Eze 40:4,45; 41:4,22; 42:13; 43:18). Later He speaks a few more times (Eze 46:20; 47:6,8). The LORD Himself also speaks, when His glory returns to the temple and He instructs Ezekiel to pass on the message of the house he saw (Eze 43:6-12).

### **SOME TOOLS to Help Understanding the Description of the Temple**

Several models have been made based on the biblical data. Some of the models are depicted at [https://www.christipedia.nl/wiki/Tempel\\_van\\_Ezechi%C3%ABl](https://www.christipedia.nl/wiki/Tempel_van_Ezechi%C3%ABl) That web page also contains some animations:

1. Animation of the messianic temple according to the Jew Chaim Clorfene. Duration: 1 min 55 sec. English spoken. Author: Chaim Clorfene.com. Uploaded on Youtu-be.com Jun 12, 2012: <https://youtu.be/M58fM2ae7Zw>
2. Verse by verse animation of Ezekiel 40. At the top left of the animation is the verse number. Duration: 6 min. 1 sec. English text in the illustrations. Author: Bibli-aprints.com. Upload on Youtube.com Aug 30, 2012: <https://youtu.be/YNmERZkT6JM>

3. Verse by verse animation of Ezekiel 42-43. At the top left of the animation is the verse number. Duration: 3 min 28 sec. English text in the illustrations. Author: Bibli-aprints.com. Upload on Youtube.com Sept 11, 2012: <https://youtu.be/oQRegCrJHzk>

### **Eze 40:1-4 | Ezekiel in Visions Brought into Israel**

*1 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there. 2 In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south [there was] a structure like a city. 3 So He brought me there; and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway. 4 The man said to me, "Son of man, see with your eyes, hear with your ears, and give attention to all that I am going to show you; for you have been brought here in order to show [it] to you. Declare to the house of Israel all that you see."*

Ezekiel is shown the vision of the new temple when he has been in exile for twenty-five years (verse 1), which is in the year 573 BC. He does not speak of 'my exile' but of "our exile" (cf. Eze 33:21), indicating that he does not place himself outside or above the people who have been taken into exile, but is part of them. He suffers as a righteous with the unrighteous.

The date is specified. It is "at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month". By "the tenth of the month" is meant the tenth of the month of Abib (Exo 13:4), the first month of the religious calendar. The tenth day of that month is the day on which the paschal lamb for the Passover was to be chosen (Exo 12:2-3). Thus, it is the day when the people had to be engaged carefully with the paschal lamb in view of the deliverance of the people and the security of the firstborn behind the blood of the lamb.

The fact that the LORD gives the temple vision on this very day connects the deliverance of the people from the bondage of Egypt with the future deliverance and security of the people under the protection of the LORD by virtue of the blood of the true Passover, the Lord Jesus (1Cor 5:7b). Just

as God delivered His people to dwell with them then, He will do so again in the (now near) future.

This is also a comforting thought regarding the fall of Jerusalem, which is also mentioned in the dating. It is “the fourteenth year after the city was taken”. The city will rise again as the city of the great King, Who as the paschal Lamb Himself laid the foundation for it. He will then dwell in the midst of His people in His temple.

“On that same day”, accurately marked with date and mentioning the fall of the city not thought possible, “the hand of the LORD” comes upon Ezekiel. By this is meant that the Spirit comes upon him and seizes him. “In the visions of God” he is brought “into the land of Israel”, where he is set by Him “on a very high mountain” (verse 2; cf. Rev 21:9-10). The word “there” (verse 1) in Hebrew is *shamma*. With this word *shamma*, “there”, the book also ends (Eze 48:35).

Led by the hand of the LORD, Ezekiel arrives on the south side of the mountain where was “a structure like a city”, which is the temple complex. He expresses himself in the same vague way he did in Ezekiel 1. That vagueness will disappear more and more as he gets to see everything up close.

Again, it is noted that Ezekiel is brought “there”, *shamma* (verse 3; verse 1). He sees a Man there. This Man will show him the sanctuary in all its details. This Man is indeed the Angel of the LORD or an appearance of the Son of God (cf. Jos 5:13; Zec 1:8; 2:1; 6:12). This is evident in the Man’s appearance, which is “like the appearance of bronze”. Bronze is the picture of the righteousness of God that endures in the fire of God’s judgment (Num 16:35-40). The Man perfectly meets the righteousness of God.

He has two instruments of measurement in His hand: “a line of flax and a measuring rod”. With the line of flax, great distances and round shapes can be measured (Eze 47:3). The measuring rod is practical for measuring the height of something and for measuring flat surfaces, for example, a wall. These instruments of measurement are the ordinary instruments carried by a master builder. That He measures means that He is the Owner (cf. 2Sam 8:2; Psa 16:6; 78:55; Zec 2:1). It is His house and He determines

how it will look. He is also the Builder (Heb 11:10). The Man stands in the gateway. Often the gate is the place of justice (Rth 4:1,11; Amos 5:10,12,15). Here the gateway has more of the idea of a secure and controlled entrance to the temple.

The Man instructs Ezekiel to keep his eyes and ears well open to all that He will show him of the temple (verse 4). Next, Ezekiel is to give attention to the teaching connected with it. Finally, the LORD says to him that He has brought him there with the purpose of showing him all this. He immediately adds that Ezekiel is to declare all that he sees to “the house of Israel”.

There are four verbs here in the imperative: “see”, “hear”, “give attention”, “declare”. This order is important for anyone who wants to study God’s Word. The order is also important for us as we walk with Ezekiel. Then we must see what he sees and hear what he hears and give attention to it with our hearts. Then we can declare it to others (cf. Ezra 7:10).

The command given to Ezekiel makes it clear that the description of the temple is a message from God to the people of Israel, which they are to take in with their eyes, ears and hearts (Eze 44:5). We may apply that to ourselves when it comes to the spiritual temple in our day, the New Testament church. The future temple that Ezekiel sees will – like the tabernacle and the first temple (of Solomon) and the second temple (of Zerubbabel) – be a picture of the true temple of God in heaven (Rev 11:19). The temple refers in every detail to the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. He as Man is the complete fulfillment of the temple, He is the true dwelling place of God (Col 1:19; 2:9; Jn 2:19-22).

In the description of the temple in Ezekiel, the particular emphasis is on the holiness of the house. The tabernacle and the temple are also holy buildings and a picture of the church as a holy house. But in the temple that Ezekiel describes, the emphasis is very much on the holiness of the house. In addition, the area around the temple is also a most holy area because the glory of the LORD has moved into the house (Eze 43:4-5,12). Thus, on the day of Pentecost, the glory of God has come to dwell in the church when the Holy Spirit is poured out. He fills both the whole house where the believers are gathered and the individual believers (Acts 2:1-4).

This future, literal, material temple therefore refers in type or example to the church, which in this age of grace is the temple of God (1Cor 3:16-17; 2Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19-22). Just as Ezekiel must thoroughly study and speak of the plan of the temple and the service therein, so it is also important for us to be concerned with God's plan for the spiritual house and to conduct ourselves in accordance with it (1Tim 3:15; 1Cor 14:33,40). It is also important that all the redeemed be told these things by teaching.

The temple is also a picture of the body of the believer in this age of grace (1Cor 6:19). Therefore, there are important spiritual lessons also for the individual believer to learn from Ezekiel's description of the temple.

### **Eze 40:5 | The Wall on the Outside**

*5 And behold, there was a wall on the outside of the temple all around, and in the man's hand was a measuring rod of six cubits, [each of which was] a cubit and a handbreadth. So he measured the thickness of the wall, one rod; and the height, one rod.*

The first thing Ezekiel sees is "a wall on the outside of the temple [literally "house"]" (verse 5). With this he begins the description. This wall runs around the entire temple complex, including the two courts. The Man measures the wall with "a measuring rod" that He has in His hand. The length of the measuring rod is "six cubits". This "cubit" is not the usual cubit of six handbreadths, which is 45 cm, but a "cubit and a handbreadth" (i.e., seven handbreadths), which is also called 'the royal cubit'. This cubit is the standard length measurement for this temple.

According to various interpreters, about 52.5 cm should be counted for this cubit (assuming a hand width of 7.5 cm). The measuring rod ("one rod") in the Man's hand is six cubits and is 3.15 m (= 6 × 52.5 cm) in this calculation. The wall is therefore 3.15 m wide and 3.15 m high.

That the measuring begins with the wall indicates that everything within the wall has a place specially set apart for God in relation to the area outside the wall. Whatever is inside the wall is set apart for or dedicated to God. It can be compared to sanctifying the seventh day as a day that God sets apart from the other six days to be special to Him (Gen 2:3). We also

see this with the wall around Jerusalem (Neh 12:27). Also, the wall ensures that evil, sin, does not have access. The wall separates the holy from the profane (Eze 42:20).

Right at the beginning of the description of the temple, we see of how great importance these two aspects – dedication to God and the keeping out of sin – are. They are the conditions that must be met if God is to dwell in the midst of His people, for “holiness befits Your house, O LORD, forevermore” (Psa 93:5b).

### **Eze 40:6-16 | The Outer East Gate**

*6 Then he went to the gate which faced east, went up its steps and measured the threshold of the gate, one rod in width; and the other threshold [was] one rod in width. 7 The guardroom [was] one rod long and one rod wide; and [there were] five cubits between the guardrooms. And the threshold of the gate by the porch of the gate facing inward [was] one rod. 8 Then he measured the porch of the gate facing inward, one rod. 9 He measured the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and its side pillars, two cubits. And the porch of the gate was faced inward. 10 The guardrooms of the gate toward the east [numbered] three on each side; the three of them had the same measurement. The side pillars also had the same measurement on each side. 11 And he measured the width of the gateway, ten cubits, and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits. 12 [There was] a barrier [wall] one cubit [wide] in front of the guardrooms on each side; and the guardrooms [were] six cubits [square] on each side. 13 He measured the gate from the roof of the one guardroom to the roof of the other, a width of twenty-five cubits from [one] door to [the] door opposite. 14 He made the side pillars sixty cubits [high]; the gate [extended] round about to the side pillar of the courtyard. 15 [From] the front of the entrance gate to the front of the inner porch of the gate [was] fifty cubits. 16 [There were] shuttered windows [looking] toward the guardrooms, and toward their side pillars within the gate all around, and likewise for the porches. And [there were] windows all around inside; and on [each] side pillar [were] palm tree ornaments.*

After measuring the wall, the Man comes to “the gate which faced east” (verse 6). In the wall, the symbol of separation, which ensures that sin stays out, are three gates. The gates give access to the dwelling place of God.

They speak of God inviting His people to come to Him. The description of the east gate – which also applies to the other gates – shows what God sets as conditions for coming to Him.

Because the main entrance to the temple complex faces east – as with tabernacle and Solomon’s temple – the description begins with that gate. No less than eleven verses are devoted to that description. The east gate is also the gate through which the glory of the LORD departed (Eze 10:19; 11:23). This gate is special because of the entry and exit of the glory of God (Eze 43:2,4).

The east is the side of the rising of the sun and the side from which the Lord Jesus will come (Mt 24:27). The description of the east gate is repeated when describing the north gate (verses 20-23) and the south gate (verses 24-27). Each gate is long and resembles a short tunnel or a kind of passage. Also, as we will see in a moment, there are guardrooms, which makes the gate look like a small house.

By way of a staircase the Man comes – while Ezekiel follows Him closely and we as readers with him – into the porch of the gate that gives access to the outer court. It does not say here how many steps the staircase has, but it does say how many steps it has for the north gate and the south gate (verses 22,26). That there are steps to climb implies that the outer court where one comes after passing through the gate is higher than the ground before the gate outside around the wall. The man measures the width of the threshold of the gate. It is one rod or 3.15 m. There is a second threshold, which is equally wide.

In the gate are guardrooms one rod long and one rod wide, that is 3.15 m square (verse 7). These guardrooms are for the gatekeepers (cf. Eze 44:11; 1Kgs 14:28; 2Chr 12:11). Between the guardrooms is a distance of five cubits. On the other side of the gate, on the side of the other porch, the last room before stepping out of the gate into the outer court, is a threshold one rod long.

After the threshold, He measures the porch of the gate facing inward (verse 8). The porch is an additional room after the guardrooms. It is located after the last guardroom and next to the opening at the end of the gate through

which one enters the outer court. The width of the porch is one rod, that is 3.15 m, which is as wide as the guardroom. Then He measures the length of the porch. It is eight cubits (verse 9), that is 4.20 m. The thickness of the side pillars of the opening is two cubits, that is 1.05 m. Then it is mentioned again that the porch of the gate faces inward.

There are six guardrooms in the gate (verse 10). Of these, three are on one side and three on the other side of the corridor. They are all the same size and so are the side pillars. A gate serves to protect the temple. Someone who wants to enter must go through the gate and past the guards. Thus there is constant control of who enters and who leaves the temple. The gate is there to determine someone that he is entering sacred ground through the gate.

The three guardrooms with gatekeepers recall the principle we encounter in both the Old and New Testaments that two or three witnesses are needed to give an acceptable testimony (Deu 17:6; 19:15; Mt 18:16; 2Cor 13:1; 1Tim 5:19; 1Jn 5:7-8). Again, the acceptance of a stranger into a local church occurs not only on the basis of his own testimony, but also on the basis of that of other believers (Jn 5:31; Acts 9:26-27; 18:27; Rom 16:1; 2Cor 3:1; Col 4:10).

The Man then measures the width of the gateway (verse 11). It is ten cubits or 5.25 m. That is also the width of the entire gateway. The length of the gate is thirteen cubits. In front of the guardrooms there is an additional space of one cubit (verse 12), possibly as a kind of "security area" because the guardrooms have no door. The waiting areas are six cubits long and six cubits wide.

The roof is also measured (verse 13). The measurement is made in connection with the guardrooms below. The roof is twenty-five cubits wide. A roof provides protection from weather effects from above. In the spiritual application the roof provides protection from demonic powers in the heavenly places. It should be noted that the entrances to the guardrooms are directly opposite each other. One entrance is not wider or narrower than the other. God's standards are always the same when it comes to welcoming

His people into His house. He does not change as times change and does not adjust as people change.

The side pillars He also measures (verse 14). They are “sixty cubits [high]”. The pillars are added to the gate as a reinforcing part. That it is added “the gate [extended] round about to the side pillar of the courtyard” seems to indicate that the side pillars as the front part of the gate are not in front of, but as the only part of the gate are *on* the court. The length of the gate, from the entrance gate to the opening of the porch which is on the side of the outer court, is fifty cubits (verse 15), which is twice its width (verse 13).

In the gate, where the guardrooms are, and at the side pillars, are shuttered windows (verse 16). The windows are beveled inwards, they face inward, that is, they are narrow on the outside and wide on the inside, that is, in the guardroom itself. The windows illuminate the guardrooms with sunlight shining in and provide fresh air. There are also windows in the pillars of the front halls at the front and back of the gate.

In the spiritual application, we see that New Testament gatekeepers, such as overseers or shepherds, believers with a supervisory task, do not have light within themselves for the proper exercise of their function, but that this light must come “from outside”, from God’s Word and God’s Spirit. In that light they can see who has access to the church and who does not.

On the side pillars are “palm tree ornaments”. They are mentioned in the same breath as the windows. Among other things, a palm tree speaks of kingship and victory (Jn 12:13; Rev 7:9). The connection with the windows brings to mind that victory is the result or a fruit of living in the light.

We see this connection in what Paul says to the Ephesians: “The fruit of the Light [consists] in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Eph 5:9). The manifestation of this fruit in a believer’s life means that victories of faith have been won over darkness. The church is a place for people who know what it is to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints and are victorious in that contention (Jude 1:3).

What we read about the gates in Psalm 118 connects to this in a beautiful way. This psalm is what can be called a “thanksgiving after victory”. We

read the following in this psalm about the gates in connection with righteousness: “Open to me the gates of righteousness, I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous will enter through it” (Psa 118:19-20). What is also nice to point out in this context is that the righteous is compared to a palm tree: “The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree” (Psa 92:12a).

### **Eze 40:17-19 | Pavement and Thirty Chambers**

*17 Then he brought me into the outer court, and behold, [there were] chambers and a pavement made for the court all around; thirty chambers faced the pavement. 18 The pavement ([that is], the lower pavement) [was] by the side of the gates, corresponding to the length of the gates. 19 Then he measured the width from the front of the lower gate to the front of the exterior of the inner court, a hundred cubits on the east and on the north.*

After measuring the east gate and all that is with it and in it, the Man brings Ezekiel into the outer court (verse 17). The phrase “then he brought me” occurs seven times (Eze 40:17; 40:28; 40:32; 40:35; 41:1; 44:4; 46:19). This outer court is entered after passing through the entire gate from the first porch, along the guardrooms and the second porch. The outer court is the area that surrounds the actual temple building. As we see in verses 28-47, the temple building has its own much smaller court, the inner court, to which the three inner gates give access.

When Ezekiel stands in the outer court, he sees thirty chambers. The chambers lie on a pavement that surrounds the court. This pavement is next to the three gates and is as wide as the gates are long (verse 18), that is, fifty cubits (verse 15). It is further noted that this is “the lower pavement”, because the inner court, which is higher, also has a pavement.

It is not mentioned, how these chambers are allocated over the pavement. It is obvious that they are equally allocated over the whole pavement on the three sides with the three gates. There will be ten chambers on the south side, ten on the east side and ten on the north side, thirty in total. As a further allocation, we can imagine that there will be five chambers to the left and five to the right of each of the three gates.

Nor is there any mention of the purpose of these chambers. It can be assumed that sacrificial meals were held there by the people or that they were used as repositories of revenue for the temple. In the temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel after the return from exile, such a chamber was given to an enemy of God's people. Nehemiah is outraged by this and throws that enemy out (Neh 13:4-9).

The Man also takes the measure of the outer court (verse 19). In doing so, he starts from the "lower gate", that is the outer gate, which is lower than the inner gate. He calculates from the gate side that is directly adjacent to the outer court to the outer side of the inner court. Its width is exactly a hundred cubits. The same is true of the east gate and the north gate (verse 23).

### **Eze 40:20-23 | The Outer North Gate**

*20 [As for] the gate of the outer court which faced the north, he measured its length and its width. 21 It had three guardrooms on each side; and its side pillars and its porches had the same measurement as the first gate. Its length [was] fifty cubits and the width twenty-five cubits. 22 Its windows and its porches and its palm tree ornaments [had] the same measurements as the gate which faced toward the east; and it was reached by seven steps, and its porch [was] in front of them. 23 The inner court had a gate opposite the gate on the north as well as [the gate] on the east; and he measured a hundred cubits from gate to gate.*

After the east gate, it is the north gate's turn to be measured (verse 20). The description here is done globally, because this gate is exactly the same as the east gate in dimensions and layout (verses 21-22). A new detail is that the stairs to this gate have "seven steps".

The description concludes with the measure of the outer court, but counting from the gate of the inner court (verse 23). As already indicated in verse 19, the distance from gate to gate is a hundred cubits.

### **Eze 40:24-27 | The Outer South Gate**

*24 Then he led me toward the south, and behold, there was a gate toward the south; and he measured its side pillars and its porches according to those same*

*measurements. 25 The gate and its porches had windows all around like those other windows; the length [was] fifty cubits and the width twenty-five cubits. 26 [There were] seven steps going up to it, and its porches [were] in front of them; and it had palm tree ornaments on its side pillars, one on each side. 27 The inner court had a gate toward the south; and he measured from gate to gate toward the south, a hundred cubits.*

The Man leads Ezekiel toward the south (verse 24). There he sees a gate toward the south. The measurements taken by the Man give the same results as the measurements of the two previous gates. The structure of the south gate is also the same as that of the other gates, as is the length of the outer court that lies between the outer and inner south gate (verses 25-27).

### **Eze 40:28-31 | The Inner South Gate**

*28 Then he brought me to the inner court by the south gate; and he measured the south gate according to those same measurements. 29 Its guardrooms also, its side pillars and its porches [were] according to those same measurements. And the gate and its porches had windows all around; it [was] fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. 30 [There were] porches all around, twenty-five cubits long and five cubits wide. 31 Its porches [were] toward the outer court; and palm tree ornaments [were] on its side pillars, and its stairway [had] eight steps.*

From the outer south gate, the Man together with Ezekiel crosses the outer court to the inner south gate directly opposite, which gives access to the inner court (verse 28). This gate forms the connection between the outer and inner court. That inner south gate has the same dimensions as the outer south gate. The layout is also the same (verses 29-30).

Yet there are also some differences between the two gates. A first difference is the location of the porch of the gate (verse 31). The porch of the inner gate is not adjacent to the inner court, but to the outer court. Thus, the inner gate is a mirror image of the outer gate, because at the outer gate the porch is on the side of the outer court and not on the side where one enters the gate. In other words, the porch of the outer gate (the lower gate) and the porch of the inner gate are both adjacent to the same space, namely the outer court.

Another difference with the outer gate is that the staircase to the inner gate has eight steps, while the staircase to the outer gate has seven steps. Thus, because of the staircase, the temple building is even higher than the outer court, and the outer court is again higher than what borders it on the outside. That a staircase with eight steps leads up to the temple indicates that a new area is being entered. The number eight speaks of a new beginning without end, after the finishing of something that is complete, of which the number seven speaks. That fits in with where we are now: in the direct presence of God, so at the highest level.

### **Eze 40:32-34 | The Inner East Gate**

*32 He brought me into the inner court toward the east. And he measured the gate according to those same measurements. 33 Its guardrooms also, its side pillars and its porches [were] according to those same measurements. And the gate and its porches had windows all around; it [was] fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. 34 Its porches [were] toward the outer court; and palm tree ornaments [were] on its side pillars, on each side, and its stairway [had] eight steps.*

After the south gate, Ezekiel is taken by the Man to the east gate. As with the outer gates, the east gate is also here the main entrance. The measurement of that gate shows that it has exactly the same dimensions and layout as the south gate just measured.

### **Eze 40:35-37 | The Inner North Gate**

*35 Then he brought me to the north gate; and he measured [it] according to those same measurements, 36 [with] its guardrooms, its side pillars and its porches. And the gate had windows all around; the length [was] fifty cubits and the width twenty-five cubits. 37 Its side pillars [were] toward the outer court; and palm tree ornaments [were] on its side pillars on each side, and its stairway had eight steps.*

Then Ezekiel is taken by the Man to the north gate, where the measurements and layout give the same result as of the previous gates.

**Eze 40:38-43 | Objects for Sacrificial Service**

*38 A chamber with its doorway was by the side pillars at the gates; there they rinse the burnt offering. 39 In the porch of the gate [were] two tables on each side, on which to slaughter the burnt offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering. 40 On the outer side, as one went up to the gateway toward the north, [were] two tables; and on the other side of the porch of the gate [were] two tables. 41 Four tables [were] on each side next to the gate; [or], eight tables on which they slaughter [sacrifices]. 42 For the burnt offering [there were] four tables of hewn stone, a cubit and a half long, a cubit and a half wide and one cubit high, on which they lay the instruments with which they slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice. 43 The double hooks, one handbreadth in length, were installed in the house all around; and on the tables [was] the flesh of the offering.*

Ezekiel is here at the north gate at the inner court (verse 40), which is near the place where, according to Leviticus 1, the burnt offering from the flock is to be slaughtered (Lev 1:11). Near the side pillar of the (inner) gate on the north side is a chamber for rinsing the burnt offering (verse 38; cf. Lev 1:9; 2Chr 4:6). In the porch of the gate, where one comes after climbing the eight-step staircase, there are two tables on each side (verse 39). On them the burnt offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering can be slaughtered.

There are also two tables on each side of the staircase of eight steps that leads to the inner gate (verses 40-41). There are thus eight tables that serve to slaughter the sacrifices. It is noteworthy that the staircase is not mentioned as such, but that it is spoken of “as one went up to the gateway toward the north”. Furthermore, there are four tables on which the instruments are placed with which the burnt offering and the sacrifice are slaughtered (verse 42). Of these tables, the material is mentioned: they are “of hewn stones”. Their dimensions are also mentioned: a cubit and a half long, a cubit and a half wide and one cubit high.

Another thing that seems to relate to the sacrificial service are “the double hooks, one handbreadth in length” installed in the house all around (verse 43). These hooks are probably intended to hang the slaughtered sacrifices on them so that the blood can run out.

The sacrifices offered in the realm of peace are a remembrance of Christ's work, a reflection on it. They do not diminish the perfection of Christ's sacrifice and the complete forgiveness of sins on the basis of His sacrifice. Everything that is said about the sacrifices, the preparation, the place of sacrifice, and the instruments reminds believers of the sacrifice that the Lord Jesus made for them. He hung on the cross, outside the gate, to open the way for His own into the presence of God. The believers of the church remember this during the Christian era in the celebration of the Lord's Supper at the Table of the Lord.

### **Eze 40:44-47 | Chambers for the Singers and the Priests**

*44 From the outside to the inner gate were chambers for the singers in the inner court, [one of] which was at the side of the north gate, with its front toward the south, and one at the side of the south gate facing toward the north. 45 He said to me, "This is the chamber which faces toward the south, [intended] for the priests who keep charge of the temple; 46 but the chamber which faces toward the north is for the priests who keep charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who from the sons of Levi come near to the LORD to minister to Him." 47 He measured the court, a [perfect] square, a hundred cubits long and a hundred cubits wide; and the altar was in front of the temple.*

Immediately following what has to do with the sacrifices is a description of the chambers of the singers and the priests (verses 44-46). This indicates that sacrificial service is accompanied by praise and is done by priests (cf. Heb 13:15). Of the chambers we are given only the location. No measurements are given. The chambers of the singers are located "from the outside to the inner gate" (verse 44). The chambers at the north gate are on the south side of it.

The Man and Ezekiel are now standing in the inner court near the north gate. There the Man breaks the silence for the first time (verse 45). He explains to Ezekiel that the chamber "which faces toward the south" is for the priests. Here, for the first time, the priests are mentioned. Of them, the Man still mentions that they "keep charge of the temple".

The front of this chamber faces south. Another chamber, the front of which faces toward the north, is for the priests “who keep charge of the altar” (verse 46). One chamber is connected to the temple and the other to the altar. We see here how temple and altar belong together.

For this priestly service the LORD has destined “the sons of Zadok”. They may draw near to Him to minister to Him as priests. They are given this wonderful ministry as a reward for their faithfulness to David (2Sam 15:24; 1Kgs 1:8-10; 2:35; cf. Eze 44:15; 43:19; 48:11).

Then the Man measures the (inner) court (verse 47). In the middle of it is the altar. The court is a square, a hundred cubits long and a hundred cubits wide. Emphasis is placed on the location of the altar: it is in front of the house or the temple. Only through the altar is there a view of and access to the house or the temple.

The inner court forms the center of the complex. Together with the inner gates, this center is eight steps higher than the outer court with the outer gates. The altar is exactly in the center of the center. In turn, the outer court and outer gates are seven steps higher than the area outside the temple complex which, according to Ezekiel 45 is open space or pasture land (Eze 45:2).

### **Eze 40:48-49 | The Porch**

*48 Then he brought me to the porch of the temple and measured [each] side pillar of the porch, five cubits on each side; and the width of the gate was three cubits on each side. 49 The length of the porch [was] twenty cubits and the width eleven\* cubits; and at the stairway by which it was ascended [were] columns belonging to the side pillars, one on each side.*

\*The Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, writes twelve here. This seems to be the correct reading when we consider the total length of the house which is a hundred cubits (cf. Eze 41:13).

The Man now takes Ezekiel to the porch of the temple or the house (verse 48). Here begins the description of the actual temple building, the house in which the glory of God will dwell. The porch of the temple is the front

porch of the holy place. The Man begins by measuring a side pillar of the porch. The side pillar is five cubits thick on both sides and three cubits deep.

The porch behind the side pillars is twenty cubits long and eleven (twelve) cubits wide (verse 49). To get to the porch a staircase must be climbed. Near the side pillars are two columns. These columns are very reminiscent of the two pillars in Solomon's temple (2Chr 3:17), one called Boaz (meaning "in Him is strength") and the other Jachin (meaning "He will confirm"). The pillars here have no name, but their (symbolic) function is clear: the temple and the service in it are sustained by the *strength* of the LORD and are a *confirmation* of His promise that He dwells in the midst of His people.

## Ezekiel 41

### Introduction

In this chapter, the Guide takes the prophet to the temple itself. He gives the measurements of the side pillars and doors, both of the holy place and the most holy place (verses 1-4). He continues with the measurements of the wall of the house and a description of the side chambers (verses 5-11). Then we hear about the location and measurements of the building west of the temple (verse 12). Then the house is measured (verses 13-15a) and the materials and decorations of the house are mentioned (verses 15b-21). Then the wooden altar is described (verse 22). The chapter ends with a description of the doors of the house and the latticed windows (verses 23-26).

### Eze 41:1-4 | The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place

*1 Then he brought me to the nave and measured the side pillars; six cubits wide on each side [was] the width of the side pillar. 2 The width of the entrance [was] ten cubits and the sides of the entrance [were] five cubits on each side. And he measured the length of the nave, forty cubits, and the width, twenty cubits. 3 Then he went inside and measured each side pillar of the doorway, two cubits, and the doorway, six cubits [high]; and the width of the doorway, seven cubits. 4 He measured its length, twenty cubits, and the width, twenty cubits, before the nave; and he said to me, "This is the most holy [place]."*

The Man leads Ezekiel further and further into the temple complex. Ezekiel is now brought "to the nave", i.e. the main inner hall of the building (verse 1). There He measures the side pillars. These are six cubits wide on both sides of the entrance. "The width of the side pillar" is literally "the width of the tent". According to some, the fact that the side pillars have "the width of the tent" emphasizes the great glory of this temple in comparison to the tabernacle. The width of the two side pillars together is twelve cubits. That is as wide as the tabernacle as a whole, that is, the eight boards on the west side of one and a half cubits each, which is twelve cubits, which is the total "width of the tent" (Exo 26:16,25).

The entrance, which is the space between the two side pillars, is ten cubits wide. The two sides (of the side pillars) of the entrance are five cubits each (verse 2). After the entrance, the Man and Ezekiel enter the space before the most holy place, which in the tabernacle is called “the holy place” (Exo 26:33). That space is forty cubits long and twenty cubits wide. Those are also the dimensions of Solomon’s temple (1Kgs 6:2-3).

Ezekiel, as a priest, is allowed to go with the Man into the holy place. When the Man enters the most holy place, we do not read that Ezekiel goes in with Him. Ezekiel is not a high priest and therefore may not enter the most holy place (cf. Heb 9:6-8). The Man therefore enters alone (verse 3).

For us, access to God in the most holy place has been opened through the work of Christ (Heb 10:19-22a). We know God as Father and have access to Him through Christ by one Spirit (Eph 2:18).

The side pillar of the entrance is two cubits. This is significantly narrower than that of the entrance to the holy place. The width of the entrance is given in two measures. The opening itself is six cubits and the wall next to the opening is seven cubits on both sides, which is twenty cubits together. The width of the entrance gets smaller the further into the building one goes. At the porch, the entrance is fourteen cubits, which is twenty cubits minus twice three cubits (Eze 40:47-48). The next entrance is ten cubits wide (Eze 41:2). The entrance to the most holy place is seven cubits wide (Eze 41:3).

Both the length and width of the most holy place is twenty cubits (verse 4). A height measure is not given. Here the Man breaks the silence for the second time. He tells Ezekiel that that space is “most holy [place]”. As a priest, Ezekiel will surely have known that. That the Man says it emphasizes the holiness of that place. Ezekiel will have been deeply impressed by what he sees from the holy place. Aaron was allowed to enter the most holy place only once a year, not without blood (Heb 9:7) and enveloped as it were by the smoke of incense (Lev 16:12-13).

### **Eze 41:5-11 | The Side Chambers**

*5 Then he measured the wall of the temple, six cubits; and the width of the side chambers, four cubits, all around about the house on every side. 6 The side*

*chambers were in three stories, one above another, and thirty in each story; and the side chambers extended to the wall which [stood] on their inward side all around, that they might be fastened, and not be fastened into the wall of the temple [itself]. 7 The side chambers surrounding the temple were wider at each successive story. Because the structure surrounding the temple went upward by stages on all sides of the temple, therefore the width of the temple [increased] as it went higher; and thus one went up from the lowest [story] to the highest by way of the second [story]. 8 I saw also that the house had a raised platform all around; the foundations of the side chambers were a full rod of six long cubits [in height]. 9 The thickness of the outer wall of the side chambers [was] five cubits. But the free space between the side chambers belonging to the temple 10 and the [outer] chambers [was] twenty cubits in width all around the temple on every side. 11 The doorways of the side chambers toward the free space [consisted of] one doorway toward the north and another doorway toward the south; and the width of the free space [was] five cubits all around.*

Then the Man measures the thickness of the wall of the house (verse 5). The wall is six cubits thick. The thickness of the wall seems to be important because of the side chambers that are mentioned immediately after. These side chambers are built all the way around the house, that is, along the north, west, and south sides, against the wall (cf. 1Kgs 6:5-6).

These side chambers are built in three stories with thirty side chambers per story (verse 6). In all, there are ninety side chambers. To attach them to the house, there are niches in the wall. These niches serve as bearing surfaces, for the wall itself is not allowed to have bearing surfaces.

The second story, the middle row of side chambers, is wider than the side chambers at ground level and protrudes out over it. The second story, the upper row of side chambers, is again wider than the second story. The top row of side chambers protrudes further out over the middle row of side chambers (verse 7). A staircase leads from the bottom story to the middle story and through the middle to the top story. The staircase connects the three stories of side chambers. The text mentions that the chambers increase “the width of the temple as it went higher”, meaning that the chambers are an essential part of the house and not just an appendage to it. They help form the house.

Spiritually, it means that we can increase in spiritual understanding of heavenly things. This happens when we seek “the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” and when we set our mind “on the things above” (Col 3:1-2). It “increases” our thinking about the church of God so that it becomes more in line with His view of it. We go upward when we read in God’s Word and allow the Spirit to enlighten us in it. We recognize the three “stories” of spiritual growth in the three stages of growth mentioned by the apostle John in his first letter. If all is well, a believer grows up from baby (“ground story”) to youth (“middle story”) and from youth to father in Christ (“top story”) (1Jn 2:12-18).

Ezekiel sees (“I saw”) that the house stands on an elevation, making it higher than the court around it (verse 8). That elevation is formed by the foundations of the side chambers. It underscores the close relationship between the chambers and the house. The height of the foundations is six cubits.

The part of the wall against which the side chambers are built is five cubits wide (verse 9). The gallery of thirty side chambers does not run unbroken around the house, but is interrupted somewhere by a space of twenty cubits (verse 10).

The side chambers have two entrances, one in the northern and one in the southern direction (verse 11). In front of those two entrances is a free space of five cubits. The free space runs around the entire building. It is like a sidewalk in front of a row of houses. Over this sidewalk the priests can reach their chambers. It is at the same time the connection between the chambers, expressing the unity of and connection between the single chambers. Each has a chamber, but can visit another chamber via the pedestrian path. It points to the mutual fellowship of the priests.

### **Eze 41:12 | The Building West of the Temple House**

*12 The building that [was] in front of the separate area at the side toward the west [was] seventy cubits wide; and the wall of the building [was] five cubits thick all around, and its length [was] ninety cubits.*

Here we read that at the back of the temple, that is on the west side, there is another building. That building belongs to the temple complex. It lies in front of “the separate area”, a term that occurs seven times (Eze 41:12,13,14,15; 42:1,10,13). What that building is for is not said. If we look at Solomon’s temple, that temple also has such a building on the west side (1Chr 26:18). There is “the gate of Shallecheth”, which means “gate of casting out” (1Chr 26:16). The building possibly serves to store garbage, for subsequent removal from the holy temple building.

We can apply this to a local church and to the body of the individual believer as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 3:16; 6:19). Therefore, we must also remove from the local church and from our personal lives and thinking anything that is not in accordance with the holiness of God the *Holy Spirit*.

In connection with our “temple service”, it may happen that there are thoughts about the Lord Jesus that are contrary to Scripture, for example that He could sin, although, it is then said, He did not. If we personally or communally become aware that such a thought is not according to Scripture, we must remove it through the ‘gate of casting out’, that is, judge it before God.

### **Eze 41:13-21 | Sizes, Materials and Decoration**

*13 Then he measured the temple, a hundred cubits long; the separate area with the building and its walls [were] also a hundred cubits long. 14 Also the width of the front of the temple and [that of] the separate areas along the east [side totaled] a hundred cubits. 15 He measured the length of the building along the front of the separate area behind it, with a gallery on each side, a hundred cubits; [he] also [measured] the inner nave and the porches of the court. 16 The thresholds, the latticed windows and the galleries round about their three stories, opposite the threshold, were paneled with wood all around, and [from] the ground to the windows (but the windows were covered), 17 over the entrance, and to the inner house, and on the outside, and on all the wall all around inside and outside, by measurement. 18 It was carved with cherubim and palm trees; and a palm tree was between cherub and cherub, and every cherub had two faces, 19 a man’s face toward the palm tree on one side and a young lion’s face*

*toward the palm tree on the other side; they were carved on all the house all around. 20 From the ground to above the entrance cherubim and palm trees were carved, as well as [on] the wall of the nave. 21 The doorposts of the nave were square; as for the front of the sanctuary, the appearance of one doorpost was like that of the other.*

The Man also measures the actual temple, the house (verse 13). The length is a hundred cubits, which is measured from east to west, wall to wall. The width of the house, from north to south, is also a hundred cubits (verse 14). Length and width of the house are a hundred cubits, making it perfectly square. The same length of a hundred cubits has the building on the west side (verse 15a).

What Ezekiel passes on here are not just dead numbers. As a priest, he has the deepest interest in the temple as the place of the presence of God. Ezekiel must have felt the same kind of excitement as the apostle Paul when he writes to the Corinthians: “According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1Cor 3:10-11). And a little further on he writes: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1Cor 3:16).

We may join Ezekiel in being impressed that God for His earthly house, the temple, gave the measure of everything (in some translations verse 17 ends with “everything had its measure”). For us, it means that we are impressed that in God’s house now, the church, every member is in the right place and can function there as He determines. “One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (1Cor 12:11). To exercise the gift in the right place, time and manner, each member grace is “given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph 4:7).

Any violation of God’s order causes disorder. We see this in church history. Many human institutions that have been introduced into the church – sometimes with the best of intentions – have pushed God’s order aside.

It is not any longer God Who has the say in His house, but man who wants to regulate and govern things himself. But God never gives up His rights to His house. He still makes clear in His Word today how we are to conduct ourselves in His house, “which is the church of the living God” (1Tim 3:14-15).

With verse 15b, a new section begins. It points out the material of the interior of the temple, the porches of the court, the threshold, the latticed windows, and the galleries: everything is “paneled with wood all around” (verses 15b-16a). It is further said that against all the wall up to a certain height, that is, “over the entrance”, are panels all around, both inside and outside (verses 16b-17). This means that the walls of the three sections of the temple building – the holy place, the most holy place, and the porch – are inside paneled with wood.

Height measurements are not given here. On the one hand, the temple is on earth, an earthly building. On the other hand, the temple is in direct connection with heaven, it is as if it reaches into heaven, to a height that cannot be expressed in numbers. Because the glory of the LORD dwells there, a height measure falls away. Because of His presence on earth, heaven and earth are connected. It is striking that silver and gold are not mentioned either. Could that be because the glory of the LORD makes the temple radiant, so that even gold pales in comparison?

The inner and outer walls are decorated with cherubim and palm trees (verse 18). Of the cherubim it says that they have two faces. One face is “a man’s face”, the other “a young lion’s face”. Each of the two faces looks to one side, that is, one face looks to the left and the other to the right. Since there is a palm tree between two cherubim each time, both the man’s face and the young lion’s face are looking at a palm tree (verse 19). These cherubim and palm trees are on “the wall of the nave”, that is in the holy of holies (verse 20). We also see them in Solomon’s temple (1Kgs 6:29,32,35; 7:36).

The cherubim recall the holiness of God (Gen 3:24). The human face recalls the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man to Whom the Father has given “authority to execute judgment, because He is [the] Son of Man” (Jn 5:27). The young

lion's face brings to mind the dignity and majesty of the Lord Jesus as the Ruler in the realm of peace. He is "the Lion from the tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5). The palm trees are a picture of peace and victory and its fruit obtained through Christ's work on the cross. They also speak of the coming victory in the end time and the subsequent peace with its enjoyment after the great tribulation.

The doorposts of the temple – that is, the entire doorway with its side posts, lintel, and threshold – are square (verse 21). When Ezekiel looks at the entrance to the holy of holies (the sanctuary), it looks the same as the front of the temple. It indicates that both access to the church on earth (the temple, the house) and access to the sanctuary in heaven (the most holy place) is based on the Lord Jesus as "the door". Faith in Him gives access to the one and to the other.

### **Eze 41:22 | The Altar in the Temple**

*22 The altar [was] of wood, three cubits high and its length two cubits; its corners, its base and its sides [were] of wood. And he said to me, "This is the table that is before the LORD."*

Then attention is turned to the only object that seems to be in the temple, "the altar of wood". It is a different altar than the altar of burnt offering, for that is in the court (Eze 43:13-17). These two altars are the only objects in the entire temple building that are explicitly mentioned: an altar in the sanctuary and an altar in the inner court.

This altar has a position where in the tabernacle and in Solomon's temple the golden altar of incense stood (Exo 30:1-2; 1Kgs 7:48). Only this altar is larger and made only of wood. Additional emphasis is placed on the material by pointing out again in its description that its corners, length, and sides are "of wood".

There is no mention of gold in the description of this altar, which is the case with the altar of incense in the tabernacle and in the temple, for they are both overlaid with it (Exo 30:3; 1Kgs 6:20). This is not to say, however, that it will not be used. The prophet Haggai says that the latter glory of the house – by which he refers to the temple described here – will be greater

than the former glory of the house. By this he is referring to the temple of Solomon (Hag 2:9). From this it can be concluded that it is not inconceivable that precious metals will be used in the actual construction.

The entire room is empty except for this small altar. It is the only object in the holy place. In the most holy place there is no ark, but there the glory of the LORD dwells. In the holy place of the tabernacle and the temple there are also the table of showbread and the lampstand. Those are missing here. Here there is only mention of the altar. Here the Man interrupts the silence for the third time by noting that this altar "is the table that is before the LORD".

From what He says about the altar, it is clear that it is about fellowship with God. A table is a picture of fellowship. Of the table He says that it "is before the LORD", emphasizing that it is about fellowship with God, fellowship in His presence. It is mainly about what the altar represents, its symbolism, and that indicates drawing near to God to have fellowship with Him.

It is noteworthy that this altar is called "table". This is also how the altar of burnt offering is called (Eze 44:16; cf. Mal 1:7,12). As mentioned, a table speaks of fellowship. It is therefore not surprising that Paul uses this picture in connection with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, speaking of "the table of the Lord" (1Cor 10:21). There, in contrast to the table (wooden altar) in the temple in the realm of peace, is a people who come together and have fellowship with one another and with God and with the Lord Jesus.

What is striking about this wooden altar is that we do not read about priests serving at this altar. We may wonder why that altar, that table, is there. The general idea with an 'altar' is 'sacrifice' and with a 'table' it is 'fellowship'. This 'altar-table' is there to offer sacrifices to God and to express fellowship with Him. But the priests do not come there. It seems as if God is indicating in this temple that no matter how privileged the priests who belong to Zadok's family are in the realm of peace, there is something that is not given to these earthly priests.

There is an inner sanctuary with a symbolic altar that indicates that in the inner sanctuary there is a company that has fellowship with God on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ, around the Lord Jesus. It is the table that stands before His face. This is the privilege of the church. This may already be a reality when the church comes together.

### **Eze 41:23-26 | The Doors**

*23 The nave and the sanctuary each had a double door. 24 Each of the doors had two leaves, two swinging leaves; two [leaves] for one door and two leaves for the other. 25 Also there were carved on them, on the doors of the nave, cherubim and palm trees like those carved on the walls; and [there was] a threshold of wood on the front of the porch outside. 26 [There were] latticed windows and palm trees on one side and on the other, on the sides of the porch; thus [were] the side chambers of the house and the thresholds.*

The two rooms of the temple, the holy place and the most holy place, have a door each (verse 23). The doors are described in their form and operation (verse 24). At the doors, as on the walls, cherubim and palm trees are made (verse 25). The doors in God's house are a picture of the Lord Jesus. He is "the door" (Jn 10:7,9). Only through Him is it possible to come to the Father (Jn 14:6; Eph 2:18). The cherubim on the doors symbolize the holiness of God. The palm trees symbolize victory and fruit.

On the front of the porch, above the door, there is also "canopy of wood" [as "threshold" also can be translated], a kind of awning. Its purpose will be to protect priests who want to enter, but have to wait a while, from the sun or the rain. God makes sure that the entrance into His house is shielded from influences that are a hindrance to entering it.

On both sides of the porch are latticed windows and palm trees (verse 26). These are also on the side chambers and the canopies. God's house is a place where there are windows that let in light, but where because of the latticework nothing can come in that doesn't belong there. This applies to the house and the chambers connected to it.

## Ezekiel 42

### **Introduction**

The prophet has already received much detailed information, and we with him, but there is more to come. In this chapter, Ezekiel receives information about the priestly chambers of the temple (verses 1-12), the purpose of these chambers (verses 13-14), and the measurements of the area surrounding the temple complex (verses 15-20).

Again, of this section, the translation is not universally certain. This has been noted before (see the introduction to the explanation of Ezekiel 40-48), but it is good to point it out again here. This requires caution in interpretation and application. It also requires extra vigilance on the part of the reader. He will do well to imitate the believers in Berea, who received “with great eagerness” what they heard from Paul, “examining the Scriptures daily [to see] whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

### **Eze 42:1-12 | The Priests’ Chambers of the Temple**

*1 Then he brought me out into the outer court, the way toward the north; and he brought me to the chamber which [was] opposite the separate area and opposite the building toward the north. 2 Along the length, [which was] a hundred cubits, [was] the north door; the width [was] fifty cubits. 3 Opposite the twenty [cubits] which belonged to the inner court, and opposite the pavement which belonged to the outer court, [was] gallery corresponding to gallery in three stories. 4 Before the chambers [was] an inner walk ten cubits wide, a way of one [hundred] cubits; and their openings [were] on the north. 5 Now the upper chambers [were] smaller because the galleries took more [space] away from them than from the lower and middle ones in the building. 6 For they [were] in three stories and had no pillars like the pillars of the courts; therefore [the upper chambers] were set back from the ground upward, more than the lower and middle ones. 7 As for the outer wall by the side of the chambers, toward the outer court facing the chambers, its length [was] fifty cubits. 8 For the length of the chambers which [were] in the outer court [was] fifty cubits; and behold,*

*[the length of those] facing the temple [was] a hundred cubits. 9 Below these chambers [was] the entrance on the east side, as one enters them from the outer court. 10 In the thickness of the wall of the court toward the east, facing the separate area and facing the building, [there were] chambers. 11 The way in front of them [was] like the appearance of the chambers which [were] on the north, according to their length so was their width, and all their exits [were] both according to their arrangements and openings. 12 Corresponding to the openings of the chambers which were toward the south was an opening at the head of the way, the way in front of the wall toward the east, as one enters them.*

The Man brings Ezekiel out of the porch again outside the temple into the outer court, into the north side of it (verse 1). With his back turned to the north side of the temple house, Ezekiel looks north and sees a building with chambers. The length of the building is a hundred cubits and the width fifty cubits (verse 2). The building is on the other side of the pavement of the inner court twenty cubits north of the temple. It has three stories or galleries (verse 3).

Before the chambers runs a wide corridor or space ten cubits wide (verse 4). This probably divides the building into two parts. The entrances to the building face north. The stories of the building are shorter or narrower toward the top (verse 5). The first or middle story is narrower than the ground story and the second or top story is again narrower than the middle story. This is because of the stability of the building, for it does not rest on pillars (verse 6). The idea is probably that each story is the foundation of the next story.

The design of the three stories of this building is the reverse of the way the three stories of the side chambers on the outside of the temple are built (Eze 41:6-7). If we try to consider what the spiritual application might be here, it is obvious to think of the reverse here as well. There is spiritual growth, an increase "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2Pet 3:18), when we study in God's Word. As we do so, there will be a growing awareness of how great He is and how small we are in comparison to Him, how little we know in relation to Him Who is the Omniscient.

We may immerse ourselves in His love, to know it, and at the same time we will realize that this love is beyond our knowledge (Eph 3:19; Rom 11:33-36), so that we will strongly feel our littleness. Paul, who has been taught by God in a special way about spiritual blessings, says this aptly of himself thus: "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8).

In front of the chambers facing the outer court runs a wall fifty cubits long (verse 7). This length corresponds to the length of the chambers belonging to the outer court (verse 8). It has been assumed that this wall serves to hide the priests, when they change their clothes, from the view of those who are in the outer court. The building of chambers that stands on the side of the temple is a hundred cubits long. The chambers have an entrance on the east, so that they can be entered from the outer court (verse 9).

On the south side of the temple, in the same arrangement and with the same dimensions, are chambers similar to those on the north side (verses 10-12). Their sizes, exits, furnishings, and entrances are similar to the northern chambers.

### **Eze 42:13-14 | What the Priests' Chambers Are for**

*13 Then he said to me, "The north chambers [and] the south chambers, which are opposite the separate area, they are the holy chambers where the priests who are near to the LORD shall eat the most holy things. There they shall lay the most holy things, the grain offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering; for the place is holy. 14 When the priests enter, then they shall not go out into the outer court from the sanctuary without laying there their garments in which they minister, for they are holy. They shall put on other garments; then they shall approach that which is for the people."*

Then the Man speaks for the fourth time. He explains to Ezekiel what the chambers of the north and of the south that He has just measured are for (verse 13). They are for the priests who approach the LORD to eat the offerings there. They are "holy chambers" because the "most holy things" are eaten there (cf. Lev 6:26). The priests may eat of "the grain offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering" (Lev 6:17,24-29; 7:6). The peace offering

is not mentioned here because the people may also eat of it. The burnt offering is also not mentioned, because this offering in its entirety is for the LORD.

When the priests have finished eating, the Man further declares, they are to take off the garments in which they have been serving and put on their ordinary garments again (verse 14). The priestly garments are to be worn only in the temple and in the inner court, that is, only when the priests are on duty. When they are in the midst of the common people, they must wear ordinary garments. Priestly garments are of linen, with a linen turban and linen pants (Eze 44:17-19).

Eating refers here to fellowship with God. Eating is also food that strengthens our bodies. When we come together to do priestly service, we engage in the most sacred thing there is. We wear sacred garments in a sacred environment in a sacred atmosphere. We are the same persons there as in everyday life, yet in a special way.

We can apply the garments of fine linen worn in God's presence to the garments of salvation, to being clothed with Christ. In Him we are perfect, holy, and spotless, and can thus appear before God. We come into His presence not by virtue of our own righteousness, but as made pleasing in His Son (Eph 1:6). In that clothing we can serve and honor Him for all eternity.

These garments are not meant for the world. This is symbolized in taking off those garments and putting on garments appropriate to our behavior in the world (to avoid misunderstanding, of course, it does not mean that we adapt to the world). We are commanded to let our light shine and show good works, adorning the teachings of Christ and proclaiming the virtues of God.

Garments symbolize what is seen of us, either by God or by men. One kind of garments symbolize our position and behavior in the sanctuary and the other kind of garments symbolize our behavior in the world. In the sanctuary we are a holy priesthood; in the world we are a royal priesthood (1Pet 2:5a,9a). In the sanctuary we stand before God and speak to Him about the Lord Jesus. Of that priesthood the world understands nothing. In the

world we stand before people and we show them Who God is. We do this in the family, in the environment where we live, at work and at school.

### **Eze 42:15-20 | The Holy Area Around the Temple Grounds**

*15 Now when he had finished measuring the inner house, he brought me out by the way of the gate which faced toward the east and measured it all around. 16 He measured on the east side with the measuring reed five hundred reeds by the measuring reed. 17 He measured on the north side five hundred reeds by the measuring reed. 18 On the south side he measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed. 19 He turned to the west side [and] measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed. 20 He measured it on the four sides; it had a wall all around, the length five hundred and the width five hundred, to divide between the holy and the profane.*

When the measuring of the interior of the house, that is, the holy place and the most holy place and what belongs to them, is completed, the Man brings Ezekiel back to the starting point of the tour (verse 15; Eze 40:5). They go out the east gate. Then the Man goes to measure an area to the four sides of the temple (verses 16-19). To each side He measures five hundred reeds, which is over a kilometer and a half. This creates a kind of third court, as it were.

In verse 20a it says as a summary that of the temple grounds the four sides – literally the four winds, that is, the four directions of the wind – are measured. This completes the description of the temple grounds. Everything that can be measured has been measured.

The wall mentioned in verse 20b is the wall where the Man began to measure (Eze 40:5). We are back to the beginning. The wall is mentioned again to point out its function: it serves to distinguish between the holy and the profane.

The detailed description of this perfect temple underscores the importance of this sanctified building for the exiles. Through the temple, God's presence in the world becomes, as it were, tangible. Everything about the temple – the perfect proportions of all the parts in relation to each other, the decorations, the lofty building – is impressive. Yet, like the valley of dry

bones (Ezekiel 37), there is no life in the buildings without the presence of the LORD. The house waits for its Occupant. In the next chapter, He comes.

## Ezekiel 43

### **Introduction**

Ezekiel has seen the new temple in the two previous chapters. In this chapter the Owner and Occupant takes up residence there. That Owner and Occupant is the LORD in His glory, Who had to leave His temple, which earlier had been profaned by men. A clear message to the people is attached to His return. Ezekiel is given this message with the command to pass it on to the people. The purpose is that they will be touched in their conscience by these words and return to God with repentance in their hearts for their unfaithfulness. Further, the law for the house is given, the dimensions of the altar of burnt offering are given, and it is said how it is to be consecrated.

### **Eze 43:1-5 | The Glory of the LORD Returns**

*1 Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; 2 and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. 3 And [it was] like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city. And the visions [were] like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. 4 And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east. 5 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house.*

The Man leads Ezekiel back to the east gate (verse 1), which is one of the three entrances to the temple complex described in Ezekiel 40. Ezekiel saw how the glory of God left Solomon's temple to the east (Eze 9:3; 10:4,18-19; 11:22-25). That glory did not return in the temple that Zerubbabel rebuilt after returning from exile (cf. Hag 2:3). Now Ezekiel sees the breathtaking sight of "the glory of the God of Israel", probably using the same throne chariot with which he saw the glory disappear. He is an eyewitness to the coming of God's glory "from the way of the east" (verse 2).

God's glory is returning to dwell in His temple. The sound that accompanies that return is reminiscent of "the sound of many waters". This recalls the powerful and majestic sound of the wings of the cherubim, reinforcing the thought of the throne chariot (cf. Eze 1:24; Rev 1:15; 14:2). The glory of the LORD casts its radiance upon the earth which is thereby illuminated (cf. Eze 1:4,27; Deu 33:2; Isa 60:1-3; Hab 3:4; Rev 18:1).

The glory of the God of Israel comes from the east. In that direction, Ezekiel saw that glory disappear from the temple in a vision eighteen years earlier (verse 3; verse 1). On that occasion he announced the destruction of the city.

He calls the destruction of the city here an act done by the LORD, when in fact the city was destroyed by the Babylonians. The Babylonians have thus executed God's judgment, so that in reality it is God Who has destroyed the city.

He sees the glory of the LORD coming "into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east" (verse 4; cf. Exo 40:34-35; 2Chr 7:1,3). This vision is perhaps the highlight of his ministry. That he may see and pass on that the glory of the LORD is returning to His house can be surpassed by nothing. When we consider that Ezekiel is a priest 'by birth', this will undoubtedly make him forget all previous lack of being able to serve as a priest. At this sight he falls down in worship to the ground (cf. Eze 44:4). From the return of the glory of the LORD speaks great grace.

After seeing the glory, the Spirit lifts Ezekiel up (cf. Eze 3:12) and brings him into the inner court, to the temple entrance (verse 5). There he can see that the glory of the LORD has filled the house. The glory of the LORD also fills the tabernacle and temple when they have been built (Exo 40:34-35; 1Kgs 8:10-11).

### **Eze 43:6-12 | The LORD Among His People**

*6 Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me. 7 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 among the sons of Israel forever. And the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name, neither*

*they nor their kings, by their harlotry and by the corpses of their kings when they die, 8 by setting their threshold by My threshold and their door post beside My door post, with [only] the wall between Me and them. And they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger. 9 Now let them put away their harlotry and the corpses of their kings far from Me; and I will dwell among them forever. 10 "As for you, son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the plan. 11 If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write [it] in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes and do them. 12 This is the law of the house: its entire area on the top of the mountain all around [shall be] most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.*

Ezekiel then hears "one", that is the LORD, speaking to him "from the house" (verse 6). It indeed is amazing that the LORD speaks to Ezekiel "while a man" – that is the Son of God Whom we know as the Lord Jesus, Who is also the LORD – is standing beside him. That the LORD is going to "speak" to Ezekiel, determines us that He is communicating His plans through His Word.

The LORD tells Ezekiel that here, in this place, He has established His "throne" (verse 7). From this place He rules. It is also the place of "the soles" of His feet, which means that He has a right to it and is asserting that right (cf. Isa 66:1; Acts 7:49; Jos 1:3). It is the place of His rest, in which all may share who are in the realm of peace. This is the place where He will "dwell among the sons of Israel", His people, "forever", that is during the realm of peace (cf. Exo 29:45-46; Psa 132:13-14).

The temple has three aspects. First, the temple is a textbook on the holiness of God. Second, the temple is the dwelling place of God, a holy dwelling place that cannot be defiled again. Third, the temple is a place of worship and gathering. These aspects are also expressed in the church, the spiritual temple in the time in which we live. In the gathering of the church we may experience His presence in holiness and we may worship Him there. For us, this is not bound to a geographical place (Jn 4:21).

The LORD can dwell among His people because His people will no longer defile His holy Name, neither they, nor their kings. It will be finished forever with their harlotry, which is their idolatry, just as it will be finished with the defilement by the corpses of their kings near His house (Jer 16:18; Zec 13:2). This defilement is a result of their previous idolatry committed in their own houses – “their threshold” and “their doorpost” – by which they set aside and replaced the LORD (verse 8).

Whoever is over the threshold is in the house. In the ‘threshold’ we can see a certain condition that must be met in order to enter. God’s people have made their own conditions, in addition to the condition that God applies, in order to enter His house. For God, it is enough that a person believes in order to belong to His house. People have additionally made membership in a church or agreeing to a man-made confession an additional condition. These man-made thresholds will no longer be there in the realm of peace, nor should they have any place in what is now God’s house.

We recognize the placing of their doorpost next to His doorpost in the introduction of human ordinances into the house of God next to the ordinances He has given for His house. We can think, for example, of the introduction of forms of worship that are man-centered. As long as the worship feels good, then God will be satisfied with it as well, they think.

We can also see the teaching of commandments of men that render the Word of God powerless as placing one’s own doorpost next to God’s. We see this everywhere where tradition is the measure of serving God and not His Word. The roman catholic church is the epitome of this. What is also widely accepted today is to adapt the liturgy to the taste of the church. Above all, a meeting should be fun. Marketing principles are leading, and not the statutes of God. Thus, one’s own doorpost is placed next to the doorpost of God.

The wall around the temple that is supposed to stop the people from approaching God in the temple at their whim is only an outward separation. In their hearts and in their homes they have adhered to idols. Thus they defiled the holy Name of the LORD and He had to consume them in His

anger. All that uncleanness has been purged out and is gone forever (verse 9). He can dwell among them forever.

Ezekiel, again addressed as “son of man”, is commanded to describe his fellow citizens “the temple” or “the house” (verse 10). The point of this is that they will be ashamed because of all their iniquities. They are to measure the design of the house, that is, to be intensely concerned with how the LORD designed it.

That reflection will correct their thoughts about His house and bring them into line with how He thinks about it. They will come to know the standard of God’s holiness that is evident in the design and construction of the temple. That reflection will also make it clear to them how much they have defiled the first temple, Solomon’s, and in what ways they have deviated from the precepts given by the LORD. When they see this, they will be ashamed of what they have done to the first temple.

If we want to know God’s thoughts about the church as His house, we must look at the house in its first glory or the house in its final, ultimate glory. In the book of Acts we see the house in its first glory. Then everything is still fresh and powerful. God’s Spirit works mightily in the church. Because of the unfaithfulness of the believers, decay soon set in and the church dilapidated. When the Lord Jesus has taken up the church to Himself, she will fulfill God’s purpose. We see this in the book of Revelation.

The birth of God’s house, the church (Acts 2:1-4), and its completion when the Lord Jesus comes to take up the church (1Thes 4:14-18), show God’s plan for the church. Between its creation and completion, we see the building of the church on earth as a responsibility entrusted to us (1Cor 3:10-15). When we compare our work in building the church as a house in which God can dwell with God’s plan, we see how great the difference is. If the difference comes to us properly, we will be ashamed of what we have made of God’s house.

In that mind of shame and confession, God’s people are able to receive further announcements about the house of the LORD (verse 11). The prophet will then show the people a plan of the temple and explain it in more detail. By “the design of the house” we can think of its general appearance,

the view of the whole. We can apply that to the worldwide church (Eph 2:21-22; 1Pet 2:5). The church has no national boundaries and no denominations. There is only one church. Local churches should be a miniature representation of that worldwide church (cf. 1Cor 12:27).

“Its structure” refers to the various buildings and chambers. We can apply this to the local churches. The church in Corinth is different from the one in Ephesus and different again from the one in Colossae. But all local churches must act on the teaching that Paul taught “everywhere in every church” (1Cor 4:17; 7:17; cf. Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22).

“Its exits” and “its entrances” indicate life and liberty (cf. Jn 10:9). The exits are mentioned first, before the entrances (cf. Psa 121:8). In light of the holiness of that place, this seems to emphasize that whoever appears there before the LORD also comes out alive from His presence (cf. Exo 24:9-11). For those who have been made fit to be in His presence, that place is not awesome (cf. Gen 28:16-17). He or she goes in confidently and comes out full of joy and strength.

The church is a place or organism to which people, having accepted the Lord Jesus in faith, have been added. They have, so to speak, “entered” it and may worship God there (1Pet 2:5). The believer’s life also takes place in the world. They go out – without, of course, leaving the church, for that is not possible – to show there in their daily activities Who God is (1Pet 2:9). They show that they have repented of their sins and idols and now live for Him Who died and rose for them and that they expect Him from heaven (1Thes 1:9-10).

“All its designs” is everything that serves for decoration, as the cherubim and palm trees. “All its statutes, and all its laws” [M.T. repeats “and all its designs” after “statutes”] concerns everything that must be observed during a service in the temple. It should all help to bring “all its designs” more clearly before the attention. In the application to the church, we can think of the meetings where the church gathers to celebrate the Lord’s Supper or to pray (Acts 2:42). We can also think of the commandment to love one another (Jn 13:34-35) and also to maintain the holiness of God’s house (1Cor 5:13b). From “all its design” a testimony will go forth into the world.

Everything that Ezekiel has seen in the previous chapters, and what he will still see in the following chapters about the arrangement of and the regulations for the service, he is to communicate to his compatriots. Also, he is to write it down in their sight. It is not only meant for them to think about, but also that it will change their minds. Everything that he has said and written down is to be kept in faith and have an effect in their lives, so that their lives may become to the glory of God.

The application of the foregoing is not difficult to make. God reveals His thoughts about His house, the church, to those who are humble and with their whole hearts focused on Him. He can make known all the details about the truth of the church to believers who have cleansed themselves of uncleanness and are ashamed that they have been so unfaithful. We need to be deeply impressed again by the holiness of God's dwelling place.

The law for the house of God is: the holiness of the house (verse 12). God's house is "on the top of the mountain" (Isa 2:2-3). As a result, the entire temple area is "most holy" which emphasizes the separation of the entire area from the entire land around it. The new temple will be open to all nations. Sin and evil will not be tolerated there. Therefore, holiness is also the hallmark of this temple. Likewise, we too are called to be holy in all areas of our lives (Heb 12:14).

### **Eze 43:13-17 | The Altar**

*13 "And these are the measurements of the altar by cubits (the cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth): the base [shall be] a cubit and the width a cubit, and its border on its edge round about one span; and this [shall be the height] of the base of the altar. 14 From the base on the ground to the lower ledge [shall be] two cubits and the width one cubit; and from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge [shall be] four cubits and the width one cubit. 15 The altar hearth [shall be] four cubits; and from the altar hearth shall extend upwards four horns. 16 Now the altar hearth [shall be] twelve [cubits] long by twelve wide, square in its four sides. 17 The ledge [shall be] fourteen [cubits] long by fourteen wide in its four sides, the border around it [shall be] half a cubit and its base [shall be] a cubit round about; and its steps shall face the east."*

The altar (verse 13) is the altar of burnt offering. The altar is located in the inner court, in front of the temple house. This altar, like the altar in the previous temples, is the center of worship. Around the altar a base or a trench is dug in the ground. It is used to absorb the blood of the sacrificial animals. First there is an elevation of one cubit and then there is an elevation of two cubits (verse 14).

“The altar hearth” is at a height of four cubits (verse 15). In direct connection with the altar hearth, it is mentioned that the altar has four horns (cf. Exo 27:2; Psa 118:27). The altar hearth indicates the judgment that afflicts the sacrifice. The four horns indicate the power of the sacrifice and the number four its scope: the result of the sacrifice is offered to all, to the ends of the earth (Rev 7:1). One of the names of God is “Rock” (Psa 18:2). He is the guarantee that whoever has accepted the sacrifice of Christ will never lose salvation. The sacrifice always and unchangeably holds its value.

The altar hearth is a square twelve cubits long and twelve cubits wide (verse 16). Surrounding the altar is a ledge fourteen cubits long and fourteen cubits wide (verse 17). Finally, there is a staircase on the east side of the altar. The east side is the side the sinner has gone to, away from God (Gen 4:16; 11:2). From that side he comes when he returns to God. God is approached from the east. When the priest is at the top of the steps, he is looking to the west, to the temple, which means that his gaze is directed to God’s dwelling place when he sacrifices.

The staircase is needed to sacrifice on this large altar. The altar is like a large building with three square stories. Each higher story is two cubits narrower than the story below it, making the altar look like a tower. We could also call it a monument. On top, the priests work.

In the realm of peace, this great monument symbolizes the work of Christ. This work is highlighted emphatically by this altar for the entire duration of the realm of peace. In picture, this means that there will remain a constant remembrance of Golgotha. That remembrance will be expressed in the animal sacrifices that will be offered again during the peace kingdom.

These animal sacrifices are not a denial of the work of Christ, but a reference to His great sacrifice. They are brought in remembrance of the fin-

ished work. These animal sacrifices can be compared to the Lord's Supper, which is also a meal of remembrance. We also bring (spiritual) sacrifices, which refer to His work. We do it in remembrance of Him, we think of Him, we think back to what He has done.

A remembrance is also a memorial, a monument that makes visible what happened at the time. The memorial is not only a remembrance but also a proclamation. The request of the Lord Jesus "do this in remembrance of Me" (1Cor 11:23-26), not only implies the request to remember Him, that we may never forget, but also means to bear witness to the world to what He has done. The LORD "has made His wonders to be remembered" (Psa 111:4a).

In the meetings of the believers we celebrate the Supper to His remembrance, whereby the Supper is also, as it were, a monument to His death, to which we owe everything. It is God's will that there is a memorial of the work of His Son, Who is in the midst of the church as the Risen and Living One.

### **Eze 43:18-27 | The Consecration of the Altar**

*18 And He said to me, "Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'These are the statutes for the altar on the day it is built, to offer burnt offerings on it and to sprinkle blood on it. 19 You shall give to the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok, who draw near to Me to minister to Me,' declares the Lord GOD, 'a young bull for a sin offering. 20 You shall take some of its blood and put it on its four horns and on the four corners of the ledge and on the border round about; thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it. 21 You shall also take the bull for the sin offering, and it shall be burned in the appointed place of the house, outside the sanctuary. 22 'On the second day you shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering, and they shall cleanse the altar as they cleansed [it] with the bull. 23 When you have finished cleansing [it], you shall present a young bull without blemish and a ram without blemish from the flock. 24 You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD. 25 For seven days you shall prepare daily a goat for a sin offering; also a young bull and a ram from the flock, without blemish, shall be prepared. 26*

*For seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it. 27 When they have completed the days, it shall be that on the eighth day and onward, the priests shall offer your burnt offerings on the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you,' declares the Lord GOD."*

The Lord GOD gives Ezekiel special "statutes for the altar" (verse 18), that is, about how it is to be used, how sacrifices are to be offered on it. On the day when the altar is ready to offer burnt offerings on it and sprinkle blood on it, Ezekiel is to give "the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok" who draw near to the LORD to minister to Him, a sin offering (verse 19). That it is an important command is evident from the repetition "declares the Lord GOD".

Here Ezekiel comes to an exercise of his service as a priest, a service he was never able to perform. It is noteworthy, however, that his service consists of giving an offering to the priests. He does not sacrifice himself. This is reminiscent of the service of Moses who also gives to Aaron and his sons what is necessary to perform their service as priests (Lev 8:2,14). Ezekiel will be allowed to do this work in the resurrection (cf. Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2-3,13). This must have been another special encouragement to this priest-prophet.

Ezekiel is addressed as "son of man", reminding us of the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus gives those whom He has redeemed cause to honor God. He is as the Risen One in the midst of the redeemed and He Himself leads in honoring God. We see this in Psalm 22, where we see Him as the sin offering. After He has completed the work for sin described in that psalm (Psa 22:1-21a), He calls all who fear God to praise and worship God (Psa 22:22b-23). Thus He makes (spiritual) sacrifices available to His own.

The LORD determines which animal will serve as the sin offering. The sin offering must be a young bull (cf. Lev 4:3; 4:14; 16:3; Num 8:8; Eze 43:25). Ezekiel is to put the blood of that sin offering on the four horns of the altar (cf. Exo 29:12; Lev 4:7,18; 16:18) and also on four corners of the ledge around the altar (verse 20). By doing so, the altar will be cleansed and atonement will be made for it (cf. Exo 29:36).

In order to apply the blood to the four horns of the altar, Ezekiel must stand on top of the altar and make a circumambulation around it. Thus he sees the altar in its powerful effect in all directions and that this effect can be there by virtue of the blood of the sin offering, the Lord Jesus. Spiritually, we make the circumambulation around the altar when we consider the versatility of the work of Christ and the scope of His atoning work, what His work means both to God and to the world (Psa 26:6-8).

After applying the blood of the sin offering, Ezekiel is to take the animal to be burned by one of the priests of the sons of Zadok “in the appointed place of the house, outside the sanctuary” (verse 21; cf. Lev 16:27; Exo 29:14; Lev 4:12; Heb 13:13).

This does not complete the consecration of the altar. On the second day, “a male goat without blemish” must be offered “for a sin offering” (verse 22). This serves, like the young bull, to cleanse the altar. This “finished cleansing”, but not yet the consecration (verse 23). A young bull and a ram from the flock, both without blemish, must still be offered. They must be offered “before the LORD” (verse 24).

Before they are offered, the priests must throw salt on the young bull and on the ram. This is already commanded under the old covenant (Lev 2:13c). Salt is the sign of the covenant (Num 18:19; 2Chr 13:5). Salt is preserving and repels spoilage and is therefore an appropriate symbol, not only of the old, but also of the new covenant.

The prescription for the consecration of the altar continues with the instruction that a goat should be prepared for sacrifice every day for seven days as a sin offering (verse 25). Also, a young bull and a ram from the flock, without blemish, are to be prepared for sacrifice. For seven days – this refers to a complete period – atonement must be made for the altar, cleansing it and consecrating it for use (verse 26; cf. Exo 29:35; Lev 8:33).

After the seven-day period is completed, an eighth day follows as the beginning of all the days, “and onward” (verse 27). An eighth day is the continuation of a completed period of seven days and is thus also the beginning of a new period, and this is a period without end, all the days, “and onward”. The eighth day indicates eternity. On the eighth day it is finally

time for the altar to do the service for which it was made. That service continues for all eternity. In heaven we will continue our priestly service in a perfect and endless way.

The priests will offer their burnt offerings and peace offerings on this altar. We hear no more about sin offerings. The burnt offerings speak of the work of the Lord Jesus that He performed completely for God. The peace offerings speak of the fellowship that exists with the Father and the Son and with one another on the basis of His work. Both sacrifices speak of the pleasure that God has in His own on the basis of the sacrifice of His Son.

As has already been noted, the fact that literal sacrifices will again be offered in the realm of peace does not contradict the once-for-all work of Christ. For our time, all Old Testament sacrifices have found their fulfillment in Christ and what He accomplished (see the letter to the Hebrews). In the time of the realm of peace, when God has taken up the thread with His earthly people, Israel, those sacrifices will be a reminder of Christ's once-for-all accomplished work. It is similar to the Lord's Supper in our day, which is also a meal of remembrance.

The Israelite in the realm of peace will be perfectly certain of the forgiveness of his sins on the basis of the blood of Christ once shed (Heb 8:10-12). The sacrifices will then no longer mean a continual remembrance of sins, as was the case under the old covenant (Heb 10:1-4).

This wonderful section on the consecration of the altar concludes with the words "and I will accept you", declares the Lord GOD". The sacrifice of Christ will always be before God's attention. God looks upon us, who are priests, in Him. Therefore, He can accept us. All that we are and all that we receive, we owe only to Him on Whom God's pleasure rests. We are accepted "in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6). God has testified of Him: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Mt 3:17). We heartily agree and offer Him the fruit, or bulls, of our lips (Heb 13:15; Hos 14:2-3) by saying to the Father from the bottom of our hearts: "He is Your beloved Son, in Whom we also are well-pleased."

## Ezekiel 44

### **Introduction**

The empty temple complex of Ezekiel 40-42 comes to life, that is, persons now come forward to serve there. When the LORD has returned to the temple (Ezekiel 43:1-12), His people can draw near to Him there. The laws that demand our attention in Ezekiel 44 underscore that the temple described in Ezekiel 40-42 is not an inanimate monument. That temple is the center of worship and priestly service. Having already focused attention on the altar as the center of worship (Eze 43:13-27), Ezekiel now speaks of the worshipers (Ezekiel 44:1-45:8) and the regulations regarding worship (Ezekiel 45:9-46:24).

After a brief discussion of the prince's relationship to the sanctuary (verses 1-3), Ezekiel goes on in this chapter to talk about the characteristics of the temple servants (verses 4-14), the regulations for the priests (verses 15-27), and the provisions for the priests (verses 28-31). In the first verses of the next chapter, he speaks further about the allotment of land to the priests (Eze 45:1-8).

### **Eze 44:1-3 | The Shut East Gate**

*1 Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces the east; and it was shut. 2 The LORD said to me, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut. 3 As for the prince, he shall sit in it as prince to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by way of the porch of the gate and shall go out by the same way."*

Ezekiel, who is in the inner court, is brought by the Man to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces the east (verse 1). That gate appears to be shut. The LORD lets Ezekiel know that that gate is shut because "the LORD God of Israel" has entered through that gate. Therefore, the gate must remain shut (verse 2; Eze 43:1-4). The way He goes cannot be gone by anyone else. There remains that holy distance between Him and His people.

That shut gate also means that God will never leave His sanctuary again (cf. Eze 43:7,9). Seeing that shut gate may thus be quite a reassurance to His people. For our personal lives, the Lord Jesus said that He remains with us to the end of the age (Mt 28:20; Heb 13:5b).

Although the east gate is shut, it will still have a function (verse 3). For the prince will sit in the porch of the gate to eat bread before the LORD. By this bread is meant the part of the peace offering that is for him. He will sit there in the porch, which he will reach through the north or south gate. The east gate also remains shut to him, for he cannot enter or exit through that gate. He will have to leave the outer court again through the north or south gate.

The person of the prince mentioned here is not the Messiah. Messiah as “Prince” has been spoken of before (Eze 34:24; 37:25). He is the Prince of Israel in the realm of peace. The prince, however, whom we meet here in connection with the new temple is mentioned here for the first time. We meet him several times after this. Then we see that his job is to provide the priests with sacrifices to offer on his behalf (Eze 45:17; 46:1-7).

That this prince is not the Messiah is evident from some of the characteristics given of him. For example, this prince must offer sacrifices for himself (Eze 45:22; cf. Heb 5:3; 7:27). Furthermore, it also appears that he has sons, thus is married and has a family (Eze 46:16). He also has an earthly domain, a piece of land that is his (Eze 45:7; 46:17-18). He dwells on earth, with his own houses and his own pastures.

### **Eze 44:4-9 | The Sanctuary Not Profaned Again**

*4 Then He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the house; and I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD, and I fell on my face. 5 The LORD said to me, “Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes and hear with your ears all that I say to you concerning all the statutes of the house of the LORD and concerning all its laws; and mark well the entrance of the house, with all exits of the sanctuary. 6 You shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel, 7 when you brought in foreigners,*

*uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to profane it, [even] My house, when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void—[this] in addition to all your abominations. 8 And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set [foreigners] to keep charge of My sanctuary.” 9 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary.*

Although the tour of the temple is finished, the Man continues to accompany Ezekiel. He then takes him through the inner north gate to the front of the house (verse 4). There Ezekiel sees once more, and now for the last time, the glory of the LORD. Again, this leads him to prostrate in worship before the LORD. The LORD has instructions for Ezekiel, telling him to mark well everything He will speak to him by looking closely at it and listening carefully (verse 5). The instructions concern the statutes of His house and all the laws pertaining to them. Ezekiel is also to mark well those who enter the house as well as anyone who is not allowed to enter it.

After this general and also penetrating announcement, the LORD tells Ezekiel what to say to the rebellious people (verse 6). The abominations committed are charged to the whole people. What the abominations consist of is clearly stated (verse 7). They have profaned the house of the LORD in a horrible way by bringing into it people who are completely outside the covenant of the LORD with His people. They have allowed them to participate in the holy sacrifices. It is already forbidden for the Israelite to eat the fat and blood (Lev 7:22-27), let alone the foreigner. The fat and the blood belong entirely to the LORD. Thus they have broken the covenant of the LORD with their abominations.

The same is true for us. It is impossible to have a common service together with unbelievers, who have no connection with the Lord Jesus, to honor Him and celebrate the Supper (2Cor 6:14-18; 7:1). No fellowship is possible between a believer and an unbeliever. After all, unbelievers do not have new life. New life is obtained only through repentance and conversion to God and faith in the Lord Jesus. The heart of unbelievers is not pure. Therefore we must also see to it that only children of God are received at the Lord’s Supper. For the sake of completeness, it must be added that it

must also be clear that these children of God reject sin in their doctrine and life and do not want to be associated with it as well.

Furthermore, the Israelites themselves did not observe their task in the holy things of the LORD (verse 8). They had that task done by others, possibly by their slaves. They themselves have no interest in the LORD, but they still want to give the impression that they are religious. Thus, in various ways they have shown their contempt for the LORD and His service. We see such contempt in our day, for example, in groups that hire unbelieving musicians to accompany worship services or appoint or maintain a pastor who denies that God exists.

The LORD insists that this behavior will not be displayed again (verse 9). No stranger, one who has no part in the covenant of the LORD, may enter His sanctuary. Only those whom the LORD has called may do service at the altar. Nowhere is the earthly sanctuary more holy than in the realm of peace when everything breathes God's holiness.

#### **Eze 44:10-16 | Unfaithful and Faithful Levites**

*10 But the Levites who went far from Me when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, shall bear the punishment for their iniquity. 11 Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering in the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them 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 against them," declares the Lord GOD, "that they shall bear [the punishment for] their iniquity. 13 And they shall not come near to Me to serve as a priest to Me, nor come near to any of My holy things, to the things that are most holy; but they will bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed. 14 Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the house, of all its service and of all that shall be done in it. 15 "But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons 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; they shall come near to My table to minister to Me and keep My charge.

By the Levites spoken of in verses 10-14 are meant the descendants of Levi, except the sons of Zadok. The sons of Zadok are spoken of in verses 15-16. First the LORD speaks of the unfaithful Levites. During the periods when the people have gone astray from Him, instead of calling the people back to Him, they have kept themselves far from Him (verse 10). That is their iniquity. They have not sided with the LORD against the people who have gone after the stink gods. This is a culpable negligence. They even preceded the people in idolatry, becoming a stumbling block to the people (verse 12).

Their negligence and bad example does not mean that they are now barred from serving in God's house. In fact, the LORD obliges them to do service in His sanctuary (verse 11). However, they will be given a lesser task; they will be degraded, so to speak. They have not served the LORD but the Israelites and done according to their wishes and desires (verse 12). Therefore, the LORD has had to turn against them and swear that they will bear their iniquity.

They will be allowed to serve in the new temple, but they are not allowed to draw near to the LORD as priests (verse 13). Nor may they come close to the sanctified things, to the most holy things, for there is reproach upon them. Their unfaithfulness has profound consequences for their service. The appointment they receive from the LORD is for a task *on behalf of* the house, in the outer court, not *in* it, not in the higher located inner court where the altar of burnt offering stands (verse 14). It can also be the case with us, that we lose (part of) our service through unfaithfulness.

Then the LORD starts speaking about the sons of Zadok (verse 15). In the temple that Ezekiel has described, the sacrificial service is performed by the sons of Aaron who are descendants of Zadok. Zadok, the son of Ahitub, is a descendant of Eleazar, the third son of Aaron (1Chr 6:3,50-53).

During the time of Absalom's rebellion against David, Zadok does not side with Absalom, but remains loyal to David (2Sam 15:24). Later, he anoints Solomon and opposes Adonijah, Solomon's brother, who wants to remove

Solomon from the throne (1Kgs 1:32-34). Abiathar, who descends from the line of Ithamar, has sided with the rebel Absalom. Solomon therefore dismisses him as high priest and gives this office to Zadok (1Kgs 2:27,35). Thus, Zadok becomes the first high priest in the first temple, Solomon's, built shortly thereafter.

The LORD speaks of the sons of Zadok with joy and emphasis. He says all that *they* may do for Him. They owe these privileges to their faithfulness to the LORD during the time when the Israelites had strayed away from Him. Just as unfaithfulness means 'degradation', so faithfulness means 'promotion'. Zadok's sons may come near the LORD to serve Him. They may offer Him fat and blood, which He calls "My bread" (verse 7), which are destined only for the LORD.

The Lord GOD says emphatically that they may enter His sanctuary and that they may come near to His table (verse 16). It is most likely that the altar of burnt offering is meant here. As we have seen, the wooden altar of incense is also called "table" (Eze 41:22). On it, however, the fat and blood of the sacrifices are not brought, which is what happens here. In the picture, this means that they have fellowship with God on the basis of the blood and work of Christ, which He accomplished with the use of all His energy, of which the fat speaks. Thus they will serve Him and fulfill their task for His sake. Their task is specially focused on the LORD because they have been focused on Him during the time when the people have gone astray.

### **Eze 44:17-27 | The Holiness of the Sons of Zadok**

*17 It shall be that when they enter at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and wool shall not be on them while they are ministering in the gates of the inner court and in the house. 18 Linen turbans shall be on their heads and linen undergarments shall be on their loins; they shall not gird themselves with [anything which makes them] sweat. 19 When they go out into the outer court, into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers; then they shall put on other garments so that they will not transmit holiness to the people with their garments. 20 Also they shall not*

*shave their heads, yet they shall not let their locks grow long; they shall only trim [the hair of] their heads. 21 Nor shall any of the priests drink wine when they enter the inner court. 22 And they shall not marry a widow or a divorced woman but shall take virgins from the offspring of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest. 23 Moreover, they shall teach My people [the difference] between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. 24 In a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances. They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts and sanctify My sabbaths. 25 They shall not go to a dead person to defile [themselves]; however, for father, for mother, for son, for daughter, for brother, or for a sister who has not had a husband, they may defile themselves. 26 After he is cleansed, seven days shall elapse for him. 27 On the day that he goes into the sanctuary, into the inner court to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering," declares the Lord GOD.*

The LORD gives the priests of the new temple precise precepts about a number of things. The first precept concerns their garments (verses 17-19). They are to wear their priestly garments only when they serve in the inner court (verse 17). Their garments must be of linen. They are not allowed to wear woolen garments. Wool attracts dirt. Also, insects can easily nest in wool. The chances of contamination are high. Linen offers no opportunity for insects to nest in it.

Linen speaks of righteousness (cf. Psa 132:9a; Rev 19:8). To be in the presence of God, they must have garments that expresses that they are in agreement with God, appropriate to be there. Their turban must be of linen and also their undergarments (verse 18). They must wear these in a way that does not make them sweat.

Sweat is first found after the fall into sin. It is a result of the Fall and associated with the laborious work of man (Gen 3:19). After Christ accomplished the work, He was laid in a tomb and His face cloth, or sweat cloth, was rolled up in a place by itself (Jn 20:7). With the Lord, Who is without sin, the sweat cloth is the symbol of His laborious suffering on the cross where He was made sin. That work was accomplished, so the sweat cloth was no longer needed and could remain in the tomb. Wool comes from the flesh of

a sheep. It speaks of what comes forth from the natural man. Sweat speaks of man's effort. Neither can God endure in His presence.

When the priest has finished his service, he must change his garments before going among the people into the outer court (verse 19). He is to lay down the removed garments in the holy chambers (Eze 42:14). Any mixing of the holy and unholy must be avoided. If the holy comes into contact with the unholy, the unholy is sanctified by it (cf. Lev 6:18), but without changing anything in the essence of the unholy in this case. This precept is meant to prevent people who are not allowed to enter the sanctuary from getting the wrong impression that the sanctuary is coming to them, making holiness a general thing and losing its true meaning for staying in God's house.

The garments in which the priests served is not suitable for wearing in everyday life. Our service as priests in the sanctuary is of a different order than our stay in the world. When we are in daily life, we should not and cannot pretend to be in the sanctuary. The holiness of our stay in the sanctuary is not transferable to others, for example, our children. We must be careful not to give them the impression that they can 'piggyback' on our dealings with the Lord and be accepted by Him on the basis of our Godliness.

We can also apply this to the various meals in which we can participate. We can participate in the Lord's meal, the Lord's Supper, at His table. The way we participate in that meal will be different from the way we have our meals at home. The Corinthians need to be admonished that they have relegated the Lord's meal to a mere meal (1Cor 11:20-22). The Lord's meal involves the highest holiness. No unbelievers should participate in that meal.

Our meals at home we use in a different, looser, way than the Lord's meal. Unbelievers may also participate in this and we may even invite them to it. For what we eat and drink, we thank the Lord, because we realize that we get it from Him (1Tim 4:3-5). We also set the mood at the meal. Compared to the Lord's meal at His table, the meal at our house table is of lesser holiness.

Then there is the meal to which we may be invited by an unbeliever (1Cor 10:27). Such a meal is an even lesser form of holiness. If we decide to go there – we will discuss this with the Lord – we may eat what is set before us. We will use the opportunity to testify to Whom we belong and Whom we serve, which we will do, for example, by giving thanks to the Lord before our meal.

The second precept concerns their head hair (verse 20). The priests must not shave their heads, but they must not let the hair grow freely either (Lev 21:5,10). The head hair must be cut short.

The third precept is about drinking wine (verse 21). Drinking wine is not forbidden to the priest. However, the priest is forbidden to drink wine when he goes to do service in the inner court (cf. Lev 10:9). This prohibition is intended to prevent the slightest degree of intoxication in the service of the LORD. Any ecstasy or loss of consciousness, of self-control or self-discipline must be excluded. We are to be sober in all things (2Tim 4:5). Service of the LORD should be done with clear understanding.

Then, fourth, comes a precept about marriage, purity in the marriage relationship (verse 22). In the law, marriage to a widow is forbidden only to the high priest (Lev 21:7,13). Here this prohibition is extended to all priests. The only exception to this prohibition is that he may marry the widow of a priest. It does show how the LORD watches over the holiness of those who draw near to Him. The priest may only enter into a marriage covenant with one who belongs to the people of God and is still a virgin. This precept includes, of course, the prohibition of pre-marital intercourse.

Then follow various regulations for the service of priests among the people. The sons of Zadok are to teach God's people about the difference "between the holy and the profane" and "between the unclean and the clean" (verse 23; Lev 10:10-11; Deu 33:10; Mal 2:7). They will have to demonstrate this difference first and foremost by their walk, but additionally in their teaching. For our time, we can apply this to the teachers the Lord Jesus has given to the church. They are to show those who belong to the church the difference between sound doctrine, which promotes spiritual health, and

error, which proliferates like the cancer resulting in spiritual death (Tit 1:9-11; 2:1).

The priests are also to act as judges when there are disputes (verse 24). Occurring court cases they are to conduct in accordance with the LORD's provisions. They are not to act according to their own judgment. This also applies to us who live in the kingdom of God that now exists in hidden form. Every believer must be able to administer justice between brothers who have disagreements with one another (1Cor 6:1-4).

With regard to the appointed feasts, which the LORD calls "My appointed feasts", He tells them to keep them in accordance with His laws and His statutes. His sabbaths they must sanctify. This refers back to creation, where God sanctified the seventh day (Gen 2:3). This intention of God finds its full fulfillment in the realm of peace. The realm of peace is a millennial sabbath.

A final precept is that the priest may not touch a dead person, for death defiles (verse 25; Lev 21:1-3). Some exceptions where he does get to touch a dead person involve immediate family members. That touch equally defiles, but in those cases the LORD provides an opportunity for cleansing (verse 26). If he is clean, he must wait seven more days (Num 19:11). Then he may enter the inner court to serve in the holy place, but he must first "offer his sin offering" to the LORD (verse 27).

### **Eze 44:28-31 | The Inheritance of the Sons of Zadok**

*28 "And it shall be with regard to an inheritance for them, [that] 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 The first of all the first fruits of every kind and every contribution of every kind, from all your contributions, shall be for the priests; you shall also give to the priest the first of your dough to cause a blessing to rest on your house. 31 The priests shall not eat any bird or beast that has died a natural death or has been torn to pieces.*

The sons of Zadok, like the tribe of Levi before them, will not have a piece of land as an inheritance (Num 18:23b; Deu 10:9; Jos 13:14). Their inheri-

tance is infinitely greater, for the LORD Himself is their inheritance (verse 28). The LORD says it twice, thereby emphasizing that they are not to be given an inheritance in Israel. It is not to be given to them.

This does not mean that they are worse off. They may eat of the sacrifices offered to the LORD (verse 29). The application for us who may be priests in this age is that we may have close fellowship with God in the sacrifice of Christ. Everything that has been struck with the spell and thereby is consecrated to the LORD, the LORD gives to the priests.

The words "all" and "every" (verse 30) indicate a vast quantity (cf. 2Cor 9:8). And of that vast quantity, the priests are to receive "the first" or "the best". The people must also give the priests the first of their dough. If the people do so, blessing will rest on their house. Everything serves to promote the priestly service. Finally, as a great contrast, the priests are not to eat anything that has died an unknown or violent death (verse 31), that has not been slaughtered by human hand.

Those who have God as their inheritance need not worry about possessions and inheritances on earth. If we have God, we have everything and therefore enough. Paul confirms this truth in what he writes to the Corinthians: "So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God" (1Cor 3:21-23).

## Ezekiel 45

### **Introduction**

This chapter can be subdivided as follows:

1. The land that is for the LORD (verses 1-8).
2. Admonitions for the princes to act justly (verses 9-12).
3. The sacrifices of the people for the prince (verses 13-17).
4. The sin offerings in the first month (verses 18-20).
5. The celebration of the Passover and the Feast of Booths (verses 21-25).

### **Eze 45:1-8 | The Land That Is for the LORD**

*1 “And when you divide by lot the land for inheritance, you shall offer an allotment to the LORD, a holy portion of the land; the length shall be the length of 25,000 [cubits], and the width shall be 20,000. It shall be holy within all its boundary round about. 2 Out of this there shall be for the holy place a square round about five hundred by five hundred [cubits], and fifty cubits for its open space round about. 3 From this area you shall measure a length of 25,000 [cubits] and a width of 10,000 [cubits]; and in it shall be the sanctuary, the most holy place. 4 It shall be the holy portion of the land; it shall be for the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, who come near to minister to the LORD, and it shall be a place for their houses and a holy place for the sanctuary. 5 [An area] 25,000 [cubits] in length and 10,000 in width shall be for the Levites, the ministers of the house, [and] for their possession cities to dwell in. 6 “You shall give the city possession of [an area] 5,000 [cubits] wide and 25,000 [cubits] long, alongside the allotment of the holy portion; it shall be for the whole house of Israel. 7 “The prince shall have [land] on either side of the holy allotment and the property of the city, adjacent to the holy allotment and the property of the city, on the west side toward the west and on the east side toward the east, and in length comparable to one of the portions, from the west border to the east*

*border. 8 This shall be his land for a possession in Israel; so My princes shall no longer oppress My people, but they shall give [the rest of] the land to the house of Israel according to their tribes."*

Before the land is given to the tribes of Israel for inheritance, a holy portion of it must be offered to the LORD as an allotment or a heave-offering (Darby Translation; verses 1-4). A more detailed discussion follows later, in Ezekiel 48. The subject is already mentioned here to show the place of the temple in the whole surrounding area. The sacred area of the land is a collection that the people must remit to the LORD.

It is a holy levy. Always the LORD must receive His portion first (verse 1). That portion is 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 cubits wide. That whole area is holy portion. In that area is also the sanctuary, which has a size of five hundred cubits square (verse 2). Around it is fifty cubits of pasture land.

Again, the measurements of the piece of land are given and it is added that on this piece of land is the most holy place (verse 3). That piece of land, which is holy, that is, set apart for the LORD, is what the LORD is reserving for the priests, the sons of Zadok (verse 4). They will live there, close to the sanctuary.

The next portion, also of 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 cubits wide, is intended for the Levites (verse 5). It is their possession and serves to place twenty chambers on it, where they can dwell.

A third portion, of 5,000 cubits wide and 25,000 cubits long, is designated for the city (verse 6). This area is for all the tribes of Israel.

Thus, the entire area is 25,000 cubits long and 25,000 cubits wide, divided in width into three areas: two of 10,000 cubits and one of 5,000 cubits.

The areas west and east of the square, along the three areas, belong to the prince (verse 7). As shown at Ezekiel 44:3, this prince is not the Lord Jesus, but His representative and in that capacity does represent Him. In addition to this prince, there will be other princes (verse 8). Perhaps we can think of religious and political leaders here. These princes will not, as has often happened in the past, want to enlarge their territory at the expense of the portion given to others (1Kgs 21:7-10,15-16; Isa 5:8).

### Eze 45:9-12 | Righteous Weights and Measures

9 *“Thus says the Lord GOD, “Enough, you princes of Israel; put away violence and destruction, and practice justice and righteousness. Stop your expropriations from 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 the same quantity, so that the bath will contain a tenth of a homer and the ephah a tenth of a homer; their standard shall be according to the homer.* 12 *The shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, [and] fifteen shekels shall be your maneh.*

It is characteristic of the realm of peace that there will be acted in absolute righteousness in a mind that is in stark contrast to the mind of the princes in Ezekiel’s day. The people have been taken into exile, but the mind of the princes has not changed. They still act violently and destructively. We also see this mind in the time of the Lord Jesus (verse 9; cf. Num 7:2; 7:84; Eze 21:12; 22:6).

Ezekiel, in the light of what he has seen of the future so far, calls upon the princes of his day and those yet to come to cease their violence and to practice justice and righteousness. In this the LORD finds joy, for this is how He Himself acts and this is how Abraham, King David and King Solomon acted in the past (cf. Gen 18:19; 2Sam 8:15; 1Kgs 10:9; Jer 9:24; 22:3; 23:5; 33:15). Let them think of how it has been in the past and how it will be in the future and let them change their mind and actions. They should already be acting righteously now. The same applies to us (Rom 14:17-18).

The purity of their actions is reflected in the use of pure measures and weights (verses 10-12). This is what the LORD has always insisted on. The people in their desire for more, throughout their history, have always had a lax attitude toward this (Lev 19:35-36; Deu 25:13-16; Pro 11:1; 16:11; 20:10,23; Hos 12:8; Amos 8:5; Mic 6:10-11). Everything must be stable in value. Fair, fixed measures must be used. Likewise, we must be fair in our consideration of things and not disadvantage one and favor another based on our antipathy or sympathy.

**Eze 45:13-17 | Sacrifice for the Prince**

*13 "This is the offering that you shall offer: a sixth of an ephah from a homer of wheat; a sixth of an ephah from a homer of barley; 14 and the prescribed portion of oil ([namely], the bath of oil), a tenth of a bath from [each] kor ([which is] ten baths [or] a homer, for ten baths are a homer); 15 and one sheep from [each] flock of two hundred from the watering places of Israel—for a grain offering, for a burnt offering and for peace offerings, to make atonement for them," declares the Lord GOD. 16 "All the people of the land shall give to this offering for the prince in Israel. 17 It shall be the prince's part [to provide] the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the drink offerings, at the feasts, on the new moons and on the sabbaths, at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel; he shall provide the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel."*

The reason for taking care to use righteous measures and weights of the previous verses is now mentioned. Righteous weights and measures are to be used first and foremost to weigh before the LORD the portion due Him. If we are not to shortchange anyone, then certainly not God. The people are to bring the prince a measured offering, i.e. a heave-offering (verses 13-16). The prince is to use that heave-offering to serve in the temple and to offer to the LORD on behalf of the whole people (verse 17).

The first part of the heave-offering is a grain offering of wheat and barley. Of both grains, a sixth of an ephah from a homer must be brought (verse 13). An ephah is a tenth part of a homer (verse 11). Oil must also be brought, and again the amount is accurately indicated (verse 14). Wheat and barley point to the life of the Lord Jesus. The oil points to the Holy Spirit by Whom He was perfectly led.

For the portion of oil to be used, reference is made to a prescription. This does emphasize the importance of not deviating from that quantity. It is so important, in fact, that the measure of content to be used is confirmed in a double way: it is "ten baths [or] a homer, for ten baths are a homer". It is impossible here to use any other measure than the one indicated. In connection with the life of the Lord Jesus – of Whom we see in the prince a representation, He represents the Lord Jesus – it shows that He was always

full of and always filled with the Holy Spirit. There should be no misunderstanding about that.

Then follows the instruction as to which animal sacrifices are to be brought as a heave-offering (verse 15). Of every two hundred lambs, one lamb, that is half a percent, is to be brought. An additional feature of the lamb's origin is that it must come "from the watering places of Israel". The lamb has had a good pasture. It is a healthy lamb. The spiritual application is that we offer our sacrifices in connection with the water of the Word. By drinking from the Word, that is, by contemplating what we have seen of the Lord Jesus in it, we will express ourselves about Him in words that come from "sound doctrine".

The grain offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings are offered to make atonement. Atonement is the overall purpose of all these sacrifices. On the basis of this atonement, the LORD can dwell in His sanctuary in the midst of His people. The heave-offering that the people of the land make available to the prince is to be offered by "all the people of the land" (verse 16), no one excepted.

The prince has the responsibility to offer those sacrifices on the annual feasts, the monthly new moons, and the weekly sabbaths, meaning on all the feast days of the house of Israel (verse 17). The sacrifices consist of "burnt offerings, the grain offering and the drink offering". It is notable that in the original text the "burnt offerings" is in the plural and the other offerings are in the singular. The emphasis is on the burnt offerings, while the other offerings are not to be absent, but are to be offered together with the burnt offerings.

All of these sacrifices speak of Christ and His work. The burnt offerings represent His complete surrender to God on the cross. The grain offering refers to His life on earth that was completely devoted to God. The drink offering is an offering of wine, which speaks of the joy God found in His Son, in His work and His life. All these sacrifices serve, it is said again, to make atonement for the whole people, "the house of Israel" (cf. verse 16).

**Eze 45:18-20 | Offering on New Year**

*18 Thus says the Lord GOD, "In the first [month], on the first of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish and cleanse the sanctuary. 19 The priest shall take some of the blood from the sin offering and put [it] on the door posts of the house, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar and on the posts of the gate of the inner court. 20 Thus you shall do on the seventh [day] of the month for everyone who goes astray or is naive; so you shall make atonement for the house.*

The Lord GOD has another precept regarding the beginning of a new year, "the first [month], on the first of the month" (verse 18). This expression is also found in Genesis 8 (Gen 8:13). There it refers to the earth that has emerged after the waters of the flood have dried up, that is, an earth cleansed by judgment. God has renewed "the face of the ground" (Psa 104:30b). That is the situation we have here as well, that of the realm of peace.

Just as Noah sacrifices to God after he goes out of the ark, so too here is a sacrifice. A young bull without any blemish is to be taken as a sin offering to cleanse the sanctuary. The cleansing is done by the priest who puts some of the blood on the door posts of "the house", that is the temple, on the four corners of the circumference of the altar and on the posts of the gates of the inner court (verse 19). These actions are reminiscent of the Passover in Egypt, when a new year begins and where blood was also done on the door posts (Exo 12:2,7).

With the dawning of the realm of peace and the dwelling of the LORD in His temple, a new period in the history of the people begins. The people are now truly the people of the LORD. That new relationship is grounded in the work of the Lord Jesus. But even in the realm of peace people can still sin (Isa 65:20). The work of the Lord Jesus still applies then, especially to someone who cannot have fellowship with God because of unintentional, unconscious sin (Lev 4:13; Num 15:22) (verse 20). Through the blood, reconciliation has been established and God no longer sees the sins. Thus, atonement takes place twice a year: on the first day (verse 18) and on the seventh day (verse 20a) of the first month.

In our time, with every conversion that takes place, a new period in a person's life begins. The same is true for a child of God who has gone astray, but returns to Him. Every restoration – which is the beginning of a new period – can only happen on the foundation of Christ's sacrifice.

### **Eze 45:21-25 | The Great Annual Feasts**

*21 "In the first [month], on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover, a feast of 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 bull for a sin offering. 23 [During] the seven days of the feast he shall provide as a burnt offering to the LORD seven bulls and seven rams without blemish on every day of the seven days, and a male goat daily for a sin offering. 24 He shall provide as a grain offering an ephah with a bull, an ephah with a ram and a hin of oil with an ephah. 25 In the seventh [month], on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall provide like this, seven days for the sin offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering and the oil."*

The LORD then goes on to speak in these verses about three of the seven feasts that He prescribes in Leviticus 23 for His people to keep for Him. He wants these three feasts also to be kept in the realm of peace when His Messiah reigns. The big difference from the feasts He prescribed for His people through Moses is that the feasts are now prescribed for a people with whom He has fellowship on the basis of the new covenant. They will also keep these feasts wholeheartedly. Of the other feasts mentioned in Leviticus 23, nothing is said here. The three feasts mentioned here are the three great feasts on the occasion of which the people are to go to Jerusalem (Deu 16:16).

God gives His precepts for those feasts. The first feast is the Passover (verse 21). That feast is to be celebrated "seven days", indicating that the Passover is inseparable from the second feast, the Feast of Unleavened Bread of seven days (cf. Lk 22:1). This feast is the basis of all feasts and of the entire life of God's people.

The Passover symbolizes that the blessing of the realm of peace can only be enjoyed by virtue of the death of the Lamb of God. This must be borne in

mind in order to live a life in which sin has no place, which is represented in the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This has emphasis here because it only speaks of the eating of the unleavened bread and not the slaughtering and eating of a paschal lamb. Leaven is everywhere in Scripture a picture of sin (Mt 13:33; 16:6,11-12; Mk 8:15; Lk 12:1; 13:21; 1Cor 5:7; Gal 5:9).

We too, believers of the church, owe everything to our Passover, Christ. Through Him we are able – and what is also expected of us – to live an “unleavened” life. We see this in the picture of the seven days of unleavened bread, that is a life in which sin has no place (1Cor 5:7-8).

On the fourteenth day, which is the day of the Passover, the prince must provide a young bull as a sin offering (verse 22). That sacrifice is for himself and the entire population of the land (cf. Heb 5:3). Here we see clearly that this prince cannot be the Lord Jesus, for He needs no sacrifice for Himself.

On each day of the seven days of the feast of Passover, the prince must bring a burnt offering to the LORD (verse 23). It is a great burnt offering, consisting each day of seven bulls and seven rams, without blemish. That sacrifice refers to the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus dedicated entirely to God. Also, a male goat must be offered every day as a sin offering. The Lord Jesus is also the sin offering, Who both for God and for His people has put away everything that reminds of sin, so that God can be in the midst of His people.

Added to this is a grain offering along with a hin of oil which the prince must also see to it that it is brought (verse 24). This grain offering with the oil is counted per bull. This combination means that the bloody sacrifice and the non-bloody sacrifice are intimately connected. Spiritually, we also see this in the Lord Jesus, Who lived a perfect life through the Holy Spirit – we see this in the grain offering – and therefore could also be the perfect sacrifice on the cross to open the way to God and allow God to dwell with His people (we see this in the other sacrifices).

In the seventh month, “the feast”, that is the Feast of Booths, is to be celebrated (verse 25). That feast also lasts seven days. On those days the prince must do the same things and offer the same sacrifices as in the first month at the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Booths is

the last feast of the feasts of the LORD (Lev 23:34-43) and speaks of the rest of the realm of peace. That a sin offering must be brought is because sin is still present, though curbed because satan is bound.

## Ezekiel 46

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, prescriptions are given to the prince and the people in connection with the offering of sacrifices (verses 1-15). The prince is also reminded what his obligations are when he gives any of his possessions to his sons and to his servants (verses 16-18). Finally, the cooking and baking facilities (the kitchens) for preparing some of the different sacrifices are mentioned (verses 19-24).

### **Eze 46:1-15 | The Offering of the Prince**

*1 Thus says the Lord GOD, "The gate of the inner court facing east shall be shut the six working days; but it shall be opened on the sabbath day and opened on the day of the new moon. 2 The prince shall enter by way of the porch of the gate from outside and stand by the post of the gate. Then the priests shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate and then go out; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening. 3 The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the LORD on the sabbaths and on the new moons. 4 The burnt offering which the prince shall offer to the LORD on the sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish; 5 and the grain offering shall be an ephah with the ram, and the grain offering with the lambs as much as he is able to give, and a hin of oil with an ephah. 6 On the day of the new moon [he shall offer] a young bull without blemish, also six lambs and a ram, [which] shall be without blemish. 7 And he shall provide a grain offering, an ephah with the bull and an ephah with the ram, and with the lambs as much as he is able, and a hin of oil with an ephah. 8 When the prince enters, he shall go in by way of the porch of the gate and go out by the same way. 9 But when the people of the land come before the LORD at the appointed feasts, he who enters by way of the north gate to worship shall go out by way of the south gate. And he who enters by way of the south gate shall go out by way of the north gate. No one shall return by way of the gate by which he entered but shall go straight*

*out. 10 When they go in, the prince shall go in among them; and when they go out, he shall go out. 11 "At the festivals and the appointed feasts the grain offering shall be an ephah with a bull and an ephah with a ram, and with the lambs as much as one is able to give, and a hin of oil with an ephah. 12 When the prince provides a freewill offering, 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 provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings as he does on the sabbath day. Then he shall go out, and the gate shall be shut after he goes out. 13 "And 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 Also you shall provide a grain offering with it morning by morning, a sixth of an ephah and a third of a hin of oil to moisten the fine flour, a grain offering to the LORD continually by a perpetual ordinance. 15 Thus they shall provide the lamb, the grain offering and the oil, morning by morning, for a continual burnt offering."*

The LORD gives further instructions for the prince and the offerings he is to bring. The inner east gate plays an important role here. The outer east gate must always remain shut (Eze 44:2). The inner one "shall be shut the six working days", but must be opened on the seventh day, the sabbath day (verse 1). Also, this gate must be opened on the first day of each month, the day of the new moon.

The expression "working days" occurs only here in the Old Testament. It makes it clear to us that during the rest of the realm of peace, six days of ordinary and quiet work will be done. It is the restoration of the situation in paradise, where God instructs Adam to "to cultivate it and keep" the garden of Eden (Gen 2:15).

The mention of "the sabbath day" and the "day of the new moon" again clearly determines that we are entirely in the Jewish sphere and not in the Christian sphere, the sphere of the New Testament church. The sabbath will be restored in the realm of peace for God's people. The long-awaited new period of blessing has arrived for the people, which is represented in the day of the new moon (Isa 66:23).

With these days, sacrifices are also connected. These sacrifices speak of Christ and His work, for only thereby the rest of the sabbath and the blessing of the new period can be enjoyed. These sacrifices are spoken of in the following verses.

On the days when the inner east gate is to be opened, the prince must enter from outside through the porch of the gate. He walks through the gate and stands at the post of the gate adjacent to the inner court (verse 2). Under his watchful eye the priests prepare his burnt offerings and peace offerings. At that sight, he bows down in worship at the threshold of the gate in front of the altar court. Then he goes back through the gate into the outer court.

The altar is in the inner court, where the common people are not allowed to go, but only the priests. So the situation is different from the tabernacle and Solomon's temple, because there the altar is in the outer court, where the common people are also allowed to come.

However, the gate must not be closed immediately after the departure of the prince, but must remain open until evening. The people of the land are thus given the opportunity on those days to bow down in worship before the LORD at the entrance to that gate (verse 3). In doing so, they are doing what the prince did. However, they may not go through the gate to the other porch like the prince.

The burnt offering that the prince offers the LORD on the sabbath day consists of seven animals: six lambs and a ram, all of which must be without blemish (verse 4). In addition, a grain offering with oil is brought for each sacrificial animal (verse 5). The day of the new moon offering consists of a young bull, six lambs and a ram, all without blemish (verse 6). A grain offering with oil is also offered for each sacrificial animal (verse 7).

All these sacrificial animals without blemish speak of the Lord Jesus as the perfect Sacrifice. He is "without blemish", that is, He is without sin and has not known sin nor done sin (1Jn 3:5; 2Cor 5:21; 1Pet 2:22). Each animal represents different qualities of Him. The lamb shows Him in His willingness and meek surrender. The ram shows Him in His complete dedication to God to do His work. The young bull represents Him in His powerful persistence to accomplish that work. The grain offering is a picture of His

life before and on the cross being perfectly focused on God in everything and in which He was perfectly led by the Holy Spirit, of Whom the oil is a picture.

When we come together as a church, we may offer those sacrifices, that is: tell God Who Christ is. We may remember that He has brought us into the rest of His work, of which the sabbath speaks (Heb 4:9-11). The sacrifices on the day of the new moon remind us that through His work a new life has begun for us. We may also enjoy that rest again when we have returned to Him after forsaking the Lord and begin to live with Him again. All blessing is grounded in His work.

The LORD also says which way the prince must go when he enters the temple on the sabbath day and the day of the new moon and when he goes out again (verse 8). He is to go out again by the same way he went in.

For the people of the land, it is different. When they come before the LORD, they must go out again by another way (gate) (verse 9). This is first of all a practical instruction to direct the flow of people. But there is also a spiritual application for us as we gather to worship the Lord. If we have truly been in God's presence, we will leave the meeting differently than we came in. We will have become richer in spiritual experiences because we have seen more of the Lord Jesus again. You cannot have truly been in the presence of the Lord without it changing you.

In this coming before the LORD, the prince takes his place in the midst of the people (verse 10). This expresses the fact that the prince and the people are on the same level before God. The prince, as shown earlier, is not the Lord Jesus Himself, but He is a picture of Him. Similarly, the present heavenly people of God, together with the Lord Jesus, take their place before God (Heb 2:11a). When the church gathers, He is in its midst and there starts the praise to the glory of God (Heb 2:12b) .

Sacrifices are also to be offered at the festivals and the appointed feasts (verse 11). It seems that the emphasis here is on the grain offering. This is to be brought with the accompanying oil. How large the grain offering should be depends on the animal to be offered and on the ability of the one who brings the offering.

In addition to the obligatory offerings, the prince may also provide a free-will offering (verse 12). That freewill offering may consist of a burnt offering or peace offerings. On this occasion the gate must be opened for him as on a sabbath day. However, in this case the gate must be shut again immediately after he has gone out. Thus the gate may not, as it does on the sabbath, remain open until the evening (verse 2).

In addition to all the previous offerings to be offered on the various special days or occasions, the daily morning burnt offering must also be offered (verse 13; Exo 29:38-39; Num 28:2-8). This is what Ezekiel is to do. The word "you" in verse 13 and verse 14 is in the singular. The sacrifice is "a lamb a year old without blemish". The offering speaks of the Lord Jesus, of Whom John the baptist said: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). The taking away of sin, in its full fulfillment, refers to the eternal state, when there will be a new creation without sin, but we do see a pre-fulfillment of this in the realm of peace.

Emphatically, it is said, "morning by morning you shall provide it". The realization that everything is based on the burnt offering must be great for the attention of God's people every morning. The phrase "morning by morning" in Hebrew both in verse 13 and verse 14 is "in the morning, in the morning", indicating a constant repetition: "every morning" (Exo 16:21; 30:7; Lev 6:12; 2Sam 13:4; 1Chr 23:30; Isa 50:4; Eze 46:13,14,15; Zep 3:5).

There is no longer a daily evening burnt offering (cf. Exo 29:38-39). This is because in the realm of peace, in a spiritual sense, there will no longer be an evening and a subsequent night. It is continual day due to the presence of the Lord Jesus as "the sun of righteousness" (Mal 4:2), Who shines throughout the realm of peace. Every morning when the burnt offering is brought, His presence in His temple will be remembered as the result of His work on the cross. It is continual day, a day that passes into the eternal state. There is no more evening. This Sun never sets (cf. Zec 14:7).

With the lamb as the morning burnt offering, another grain offering must be brought (verse 14). The identification of the grain offering with the burnt offering is given full emphasis here because it says that the grain

offering must be made “with it”, that is, with the burnt offering. This grain offering must also be prepared with oil. It is specifically mentioned that the oil serves “to moisten the fine flour”. Thus, the oil is mixed with the flour.

These sacrifices all speak impressively of the Lord Jesus in His sacrifice on the cross and of His life that preceded His cross work. His work on the cross and His life belong together. He could never have done that work on the cross if it had not been preceded by a perfect life led by the Spirit. This must be kept in mind by the people in the realm of peace and by us in our time. They are “a perpetual ordinance”.

It is summarized in verse 15 where we see that the lamb, the grain offering and the oil together make up the “continual burnt offering”. It is also presented here as a sacrifice not only *for* the whole people, but also *by* the whole people, “*they shall provide*” it. The people here fulfill God’s purpose in their deliverance from Egypt: to be to Him a “kingdom of priests” (Exo 19:6).

### **Eze 46:16-18 | Inheritance of the Prince**

*16 Thus says the Lord GOD, “If the prince gives a gift [out of] his inheritance to any of his sons, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance. 17 But if he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his until the year of liberty; then it shall return to the prince. His inheritance [shall be] only his sons’; it shall belong to them. 18 The prince shall not take from the people’s inheritance, thrusting them out of their possession; he shall give his sons inheritance from his own possession so that My people will not be scattered, anyone from his possession.””*

After the LORD has spoken of the offerings to be brought by the prince, He speaks of the prince’s possession. He gives clear instructions on how the prince is to handle his possessions (verse 16). If he gives one of his sons any of his possessions as a gift, from that moment on it is his son’s possession. His son is then the hereditary possessor of it.

If we see in the prince a picture of the Lord Jesus, we see in the sons a picture of New Testament believers. They are “the children whom God has

given” Him (Heb 2:13). This does not mean that believers are ‘children of the Lord Jesus’. They are not called that anywhere in Scripture. They are children of God and as such given by God to His Son (cf. Jn 17:6). Together with the Son they may possess the inheritance. He gives each of them his own inheritance, to which the Father has qualified them (Col 1:12).

The prince is also free to give something from his inheritance as a gift to one of his servants (verse 17). That gift remains his inheritance. The servant may enjoy it “until the year of liberty”, reminiscent of the year of jubilee (cf. Lev 27:24; 25:10-13). Then he must return the property to the prince. Everything that belongs to the prince as inheritance remains in his family. The inheritance is all meant for his sons.

We, believers of the church, are not only sons of God but also servants of the Lord Jesus. As servants, the Lord Jesus has also given us earthly possessions. With these we may work for Him (Lk 16:8-12). We may enjoy them as we use them for Him (1Tim 6:17-19). But what He gives us to use for Him remains His. When the year of jubilee, the realm of peace, comes, we will return to Him what He has entrusted to us and He will reward what we have earned with His goods (Mt 25:20-23; 2Cor 5:10). However, the emphasis is on what we have received as sons. We have received all spiritual blessings as sons (Eph 1:3-5). These are our property and remain our property forever.

The LORD also destines that the prince must not expand his property by thrusting peoples out of their possessions (verse 18; cf. Eze 45:8). Past princes often shamelessly looted property from their subjects, as Ahab looted Naboth’s inheritance (1Kgs 21:1-3,11-16). This will not be allowed to happen in the new Israel. Here we see that despite the perfect reign of the Lord Jesus, the heart of man has not changed. The desire for more remains. The LORD warns the prince to respect the rights of others and not to abuse his position of power. Incidentally, this verse shows once again that the prince is not the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. It is impossible that God should say anything like that to Him.

The prince has his own inheritance and from that possession he may give his sons inheritance whatever he wishes. If he adheres to this and does not

infringe on the property of others, the people whom the LORD calls “My people” will remain in the enjoyment of their own property.

Just as the prince may not reduce his own property by giving part of it to servants, so he may not forcibly remove someone from his property to give it to his sons, for example. He may only give his sons an inheritance of his own property. When he displaces the people from their own property to take possession of it, he drives them away from it and scatters them. Such a course of action is completely contrary to what God has realized in the realm of peace: each will live in safety, every man under his vine and his fig tree (1Kgs 4:25).

### **Eze 46:19-24 | The Boiling Places of the Temple**

*19 Then he brought me through the entrance, which [was] at the side of the gate, into the holy chambers for the priests, which faced north; and behold, there [was] a place at the extreme rear toward the west. 20 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 that they may not bring [them] out into the outer court to transmit holiness to the people.” 21 Then he brought me out into the outer court and led me across to the four corners of the court; and behold, in every corner of the court [there was] a [small] court. 22 In the four corners of the court [there were] enclosed courts, forty [cubits] long and thirty wide; these four in the corners [were] the same size. 23 [There was] a row [of masonry] round about in them, around the four of them, and boiling places were made under the rows round about. 24 Then he said to me, “These are the boiling places where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifices of the people.”*

The tour resumes. In Ezekiel 44:4, the Man and Ezekiel are at the inner northern gate. The Man now leads Ezekiel through the entrance next to the gate into the holy chambers for the priests (verse 19; Eze 42:1,7,8,10-13). The chambers are adjacent to the north side of the outer court, but are part of the inner court. The Man explains that these chambers are the place where the priests are to boil the guilt offering and the sin offering and bake the grain offering (verse 20).

The boiling place of the priest is the place where the offerings are prepared to be offered. Preparing the offerings refers to being constantly engaged with Christ by reading the Scriptures, to see in them Who He is and what He has done. Luke, the writer of the Gospel according to Luke, is busy in the boiling place, so to speak, as he carefully examines things concerning all the things concerning the Lord Jesus about which he has heard from others (Lk 1:1-4).

Earlier we have been to the chambers, of which it is said that the priests may eat the offerings there (Eze 42:13; 44:29). In connection with the boiling place, this holds an important lesson for the Scripture researcher. After the Scripture study that takes place 'in the boiling place', the 'eating in the chambers' follows. This indicates that in fellowship with God we process in our hearts what truths we have discovered in our examination of Scripture, both about the Lord Jesus and about ourselves. It brings us to self-examination, and if necessary to self-judgment and confession, and to worship of God.

The boiling place of the priest is a place separated from the people. There is to be no contact with the people who are in the outer court. The consequence of the sanctifying effect of the offering is that the people become guilty and must pay a ransom or offer a sin offering (cf. Eze 44:19; Lev 6:11,18,27).

Then the Man brings Ezekiel out of the inner court into the outer court and leads him along its four corners (verse 21). In the four corners are what are called "enclosed courts", all of the same size (verse 22). Around each of those enclosed courts is a row of masonry and in each of them is a boiling place (verse 23).

Again, the Man explains their purpose. These boiling places are the places where the Levites boil the sacrifices that the people bring (verse 24; cf. 1Sam 2:12-17). Those sacrifices are the peace offerings. The flesh of the peace offering may be eaten by the offeror, along with the priest who offers the offering to the LORD and with the LORD to Whom the peace offering is offered (Lev 3:1,6,12; 7:19b,30-34).

## Ezekiel 47

### Introduction

Several Old Testament prophets speak in their prophecy of the coming age of the realm of peace and the far-reaching changes in nature, especially in the promised land itself. The first part of this chapter deals with one of those changes: the change brought about in the water (verses 1-12). The second part of the chapter deals with the changed boundaries of the land (verses 13-23).

### Eze 47:1-12 | The Water From the New Temple

*1 Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar. 2 He brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of [the gate] that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side. 3 When the man went out toward the east with a line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he led me through the water, water [reaching] the ankles. 4 Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water [reaching] the knees. Again he measured a thousand and led me through [the water], water [reaching] the loins. 5 Again he measured a thousand; [and it was] a river that I could not ford, for the water had risen, [enough] water to swim in, a river that could not be forded. 6 He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen [this]?" Then he brought me back to the bank of the river. 7 Now when I had returned, behold, on the bank of the river there [were] very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 Then he said to me, "These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah; then they go toward the sea, being made to flow into the sea, and the waters [of the sea] become fresh. 9 It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and [the others] become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. 10 And*

*it will come about that fishermen will stand beside it; from Engedi to Eneglaim there will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish will be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. 12 By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all [kinds of] trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."*

The Man brings Ezekiel back to the entrance of the house, which is the inner east gate (verse 1). There Ezekiel sees that water is flowing from the sanctuary. The water is coming from under the threshold of the house. As seen from the sanctuary, the water flows eastward down the right side of the house and on the south side of the altar. The water comes from "under the threshold of the house" because the house and the altar are higher than the outer court.

The house, that is, the sanctuary, and the altar are connected to the origin of the flow of water. For us, the application is that every blessing God gives is found only in the church of God (the house) and in connection with Christ and His work on the cross (the altar).

Then the Man brings Ezekiel out through the outer north gate – the outer east gate is shut as we know – and goes ahead of Ezekiel to the east, the direction of the stream (verse 2). It is also important for us to go with the flow of water of the Spirit and of the Word – this flow of water is a picture of both.

When the Man goes east, He has a line in His hand (verse 3). He has had it with Him all along (Eze 40:3), but He is going to use it now. The line is also a picture of the Word of God, and it is as the measure that God uses to pass on His teaching to us (cf. Isa 28:17a). God measures for us what we can understand from His Word. We are limited in our knowing, but can grow in understanding. Both the preacher and the hearer must realize this in passing on God's Word and listening to it.

With the line, the Man measures the first thousand cubits of the flow of water. He makes Ezekiel go through the water, with the water reaching

Ezekiel's ankles. The Man measures the next thousand cubits and makes Ezekiel go through the water (verse 4). Then the water is reaching his knees. Then the third thousand cubits is measured by the Man. The water then reaches his loins. By the fourth thousand cubits that the Man measures, the water has become a river and has reached a depth where Ezekiel cannot ford (verse 5). There he has to swim, so high the water has become.

The book of Joel mentions a spring that goes out from the temple. It must be this same brook (Joel 3:18). In Zechariah 14 it is a different one, for that living water comes from the city (Zec 14:8). Also, we should not confuse this river with the brook or river in the new Jerusalem (Rev 22:1-2).

The measuring is done in stages of a thousand cubits each. In a spiritual application we see that the Word must be "measured" and that there is interruption in the teaching. This is related to the fact that there are stages in the spiritual development of a believer (Phil 3:15-16; 1Jn 2:12-14). The Lord takes that into account in His teaching.

As we grow spiritually, in all our study of God's Word, we will experience more and more that we come to an ocean where we cannot stand. We no longer have any ground under our feet, we can no longer grasp it, but we can enjoy it intensely. We are surrounded by the blessing of the Lord; we swim, as it were, in all that He has given us.

We can also apply it to discovering the Word of God itself. Some truths in it are simple. They are easy to understand, they come down to the ankles. Other truths in it are hidden a little deeper. To know those, we have to dig deeper. They are like the water that reaches the knees or the loins.

There are also truths that we will never get to know in their fullness, that we will never understand to the bottom. There we do want very much to "dive in", knowing that they are beyond our knowledge, as it says: "To know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3:19). When we engage in this, we swim in it and enjoy it to the fullest. We do understand that God looks upon this with great joy.

Spiritual growth is worked by the Spirit of God, Who is compared to water. It is possible that the Lord Jesus is referring to this section in the book

of Ezekiel when He says: ““If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet [given], because Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn 7:37b-39; Isa 44:3). When we get into the flow of water, when we surrender our lives to God and His Word, the Holy Spirit will work to make us full of Christ and bear fruit for God.

This application brings us to yet another application. We can think of the water coming to the ankles as the cleansing effect of God’s Word applied by the Spirit to the believer’s walk. The knees are a symbol of prayer (Eph 3:14). The water reaching the knees indicates that God’s Word and God’s Spirit bring us to our knees to pray that we may understand what our blessings are. The water reaching the loins speaks of girding the loins with the truth (Eph 6:14; cf. 1Pet 1:13) and also of service (Lk 12:35-37). Swimming in the water is a picture of living fully in the sphere of the Word and the Spirit.

The Man asks Ezekiel if he has seen this (verse 6). He asks about his involvement (cf. 1Kgs 21:29; Jer 3:6; Eze 8:12,15,17). In the same way, the Lord sometimes asks us if we have seen correctly what He has said or shown in His Word. We can be busy with His Word and grow in it, as in the picture Ezekiel is busy in it and grows in the knowledge of it. Yet the real meaning may still elude us.

The Man takes Ezekiel with Him for further teaching. He leads him back to the bank of the river for that teaching. With an exclamation of surprise (“behold”), Ezekiel sees “very many trees” standing on both banks of the river (verse 7). It strikes him so much that it seems that these trees have not been there before and that both banks have been bare. The water communicates to its entire environment unprecedented fertility.

When the Lord takes us back to a place we have been before, it is more than just a reminder of a past experience. He wants to show us what has changed in our lives since that past experience, what has grown. We become aware of our spiritual growth. As we grow older, we may notice

this. Through our dealings with the Lord and the work of God's Spirit in our lives, more abundant fruit will become apparent. We can notice this, for example, in our reaction to certain events or statements. We used to be upset by some things, whereas now we see more how all things are in the hand of the Lord.

It is an encouragement to the exiles that a time is coming when the LORD will dwell again in the midst of His people. Associated with that time is a great activity of the Holy Spirit. When the Messiah reigns, God's Word through the Spirit will awaken new life and produce growth and an abundance of fruit everywhere. This is also true now spiritually, wherever believers place their lives under the full rule of the Lord Jesus and God's Spirit.

The Man speaks of the healthy effect of the water (verse 8). He points out the course of the waters. The temple river flows into the eastern area, the area between Jerusalem and Jericho. Then it enters the Arabah, the plain below, which is the Jordan plain, and then flows into the Dead Sea. When the water enters the Dead Sea, the water of the Dead Sea becomes healthy. The consequence of the healthy water is that this sea, in which no life is possible now because of the high salinity, will swarm of living beings (verse 9). It recalls the waters swarming of living beings on the fifth day of creation (Gen 1:20-21).

It speaks literally of "where the two rivers go", yet – at least here in Ezekiel – it speaks of only one river from the temple which in a short time becomes a deep river. The suggestion is made that there is talk of "two rivers", to indicate that the river flows with the force of two rivers.

"Every place" where the river comes, life arises, and "everything" that comes into contact with the river becomes alive and healthy. For us, this means that wherever the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, He works life and spiritual health. This concerns our prayer life, our family life, our church life, our daily life, our witnessing. All of this, in turn, will also result in blessing for those around us.

The abundance of fish will attract an abundance of fishermen (verse 10). There will be drying places for drag nets (cf. Eze 26:5,14). This shows the

abundance of fish. The fishermen will not use a fishing rod because only a single fish can be caught with it. There is also a great variety of fish. The fish in the river are not inferior in number and species to the fish in the Great Sea, which is the Mediterranean Sea.

Just as the waters create new life in the Dead Sea, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in those days will create new life in Israel and the nations. Wherever the Holy Spirit comes, new and abundant life will arise. It is also a symbolic representation of the life that will be awakened in dead Israel and of the swallowing up of death in victory (Isa 25:8; Hos 13:14; 1Cor 15:54-55).

There are places, however, that are excluded from the life that the river brings (verse 11). These are the swamps and marshes that are separate from the Dead Sea. The application for us is that where the Spirit is denied access, His life-giving work cannot take place. We can think of people about whom the apostle Peter writes in his second letter (2Pet 2:1; Jude 1:12-13). Such places are given up to the salt, that is, to the judgment that never ends (cf. Mk 9:49). It also shows that in the realm of peace everything is not perfect, as it will be when there will be a new heaven and a new earth (2Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-7).

The trees of verse 7 turn out to be fruit trees (verse 12). Because of the life-bringing water, the leaves always remain fresh and there will be fruit constantly, all year long (cf. Rev 22:2). Its secret and power lie in the fact that the water flows “out of the sanctuary”. The fruit, therefore, is for food and the leaves have a healing effect, all through this water from the sanctuary.

The evergreen and ever-fruited trees with their nutritious fruit and healing leaves are a picture of believers living in fellowship with Christ. The believer is compared to a tree several times in the Old Testament (Psa 1:3; Jer 17:7-8). The believer brings forth fruit, the fruit of the Spirit, and is a healing blessing to others through his testimony, of which the leaves speak.

### **Eze 47:13-20 | The Boundaries of the land**

13 Thus says the Lord GOD, “This [shall be] the boundary by which you shall divide the land for an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel; Joseph

*[shall have] two portions. 14 You shall divide it for an inheritance, each one equally with the other; for I swore to give it to your forefathers, and this land shall fall to you as an inheritance. 15 "This [shall be] the boundary of the land: on the north side, from the Great Sea [by] the way of Hethlon, to the entrance of Zedad; 16 Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer-hatticon, which is by the border of Hauran. 17 The boundary shall extend from the sea [to] Hazar-enan [at] the border of Damascus, and on the north toward the north is the border of Hamath. This is the north side. 18 "The east side, from between Hauran, Damascus, Gilead and the land of Israel, [shall be] the Jordan; from the [north] border to the eastern sea you shall measure. This is the east side. 19 "The south side toward the south [shall extend] from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the brook [of Egypt and] to the Great Sea. This is the south side toward the south. 20 "The west side [shall be] the Great Sea, from the [south] border to a point opposite Lebo-hamath. This is the west side.*

When the Lord Jesus reigns, the land promised to Abraham (Gen 15:18) will be divided "among the twelve tribes of Israel" in a whole new way (verse 13). It is foreordained that *all twelve* tribes, the two and the ten tribes, reunited, will live in the land. Because Levi has no inheritance, Joseph receives two portions, for both his sons one portion: one portion for Ephraim and one portion for Manasseh.

The LORD promises them the land as a security: they *shall* get it as an inheritance (verse 14). He adds that He will do it "each one equally with the other", meaning that He will divide it "equally among brethren", as it literally says in Hebrew. He swore an oath when He promised the land to their fathers. The matter is unshakably solid. This land will fall to them as an inheritance. This means that they will receive it by grace.

The boundaries will be quite different from the division of the land by Joshua (verses 15-20; cf. Num 34:1-15; Joshua 13-21). This is because the division between the nine and a half tribes in the land and the two and a half tribes at the other side of the Jordan will be undone. Each of the twelve tribes receives a (large) portion of the land and a (small) portion at the other side of the Jordan. This establishes the division of the land among the tribes of Israel (verse 21).

By the way, it seems that the boundaries established here are not final. They will be constantly widened by the increasing population in the realm of peace, until the promise to Abraham is fulfilled: "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates"" (Gen 15:18).

### **Eze 47:21-23 | Inheritance of the Alien**

*21 "So you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. 22 You shall divide it by lot for an inheritance among yourselves and among the aliens who stay in your midst, who bring forth sons in your midst. And they shall be to you as the native-born among the sons of Israel; they shall be allotted an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. 23 And in the tribe with which the alien stays, there you shall give [him] his inheritance," declares the Lord GOD.*

There is one more thing that needs to be taken care of and that is the inheritance for aliens who have been living in the midst of the Israelites for a long time and have a family with children in the land as well (verse 22). They are so much integrated that they are part of the people. They also receive a share of the land in the tribe in which they live (verse 23). God does not forget them, but allows them to share in the blessing He has for His people (Isa 56:3-8). In the time when the Lord Jesus reigns, it will finally be possible for Jews and Gentiles to live together in peace.

Jews and Gentiles are already living together in peace in the church in the grace period in which we live. This means, however, that the Jew ceases to be a Jew just as the Gentile is no longer a Gentile. They are both made one into a new man in Christ (Eph 2:13-16).

## Ezekiel 48

### **Introduction**

Now that the boundaries of the promised land have been defined, the prophet can begin to speak of the division of the land among the twelve tribes. Just as there will be a new exodus (Eze 20:32-38) and a new covenant (Eze 34:23-30; 37:21-28), so there will be a new division and allocation of the land to the various tribes. The people will acknowledge with great joy that the LORD Himself makes that division and allocation: “He chooses our inheritance for us, the glory of Jacob whom He loves. Selah” (Psa 47:4).

In the division of the land we see three major parts:

1. a northern part for seven tribes,
2. a middle part as an offering to the LORD,
3. a southern part for five tribes.

In the middle part is an area of 25,000 x 25,000 cubits containing

1. a northern part for the priests and the temple,
2. a middle part for the Levites,
3. a southern part for the city and for those who serve the city,
- 4./5. to the left and the right of this three-part area an area for the prince.

### **Eze 48:1-7 | New Division of the North**

1 “Now these are the names of the tribes: from the northern extremity, beside the way of Hethlon to Lebo-hamath, [as far as] Hazar-enan [at] the border of Damascus, toward the north beside Hamath, running from east to west, Dan, one [portion]. 2 Beside the border of Dan, from the east side to the west side, Asher, one [portion]. 3 Beside the border of Asher, from the east side to the west side, Naphtali, one [portion]. 4 Beside the border of Naphtali, from the east side

*to the west side, Manasseh, one [portion]. 5 Beside the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west side, Ephraim, one [portion]. 6 Beside the border of Ephraim, from the east side to the west side, Reuben, one [portion]. 7 Beside the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west side, Judah, one [portion].*

These verses list seven tribes, all of which lie north of the holy area. The area of the tribes consists of a straight strip of land running from east to west across the entire width of the land. The tribes of the northern half are listed in order from north to south.

Judah is the southernmost tribe of the north and Benjamin the northernmost tribe of the south (verse 23). These two tribes are centrally located in the land.

#### **Eze 48:8-14 | The Allotment for the LORD**

*8 “And beside the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the allotment which you shall set apart, 25,000 [cubits] in width, and in length like one of the portions, from the east side to the west side; and the sanctuary shall be in the middle of it. 9 The allotment that you shall set apart to the LORD [shall be] 25,000 [cubits] in length and 10,000 in width. 10 The holy allotment shall be for these, [namely] for the priests, toward the north 25,000 [cubits in length], toward the west 10,000 in width, toward the east 10,000 in width, and toward the south 25,000 in length; and the sanctuary of the LORD shall be in its midst. 11 [It shall be] for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray as the Levites went astray. 12 It shall be an allotment to them from the allotment of the land, a most holy place, by the border of the Levites. 13 Alongside the border of the priests the Levites [shall have] 25,000 [cubits] in length and 10,000 in width. The whole length [shall be] 25,000 [cubits] and the width 10,000. 14 Moreover, they shall not sell or exchange any of it, or alienate this choice [portion] of land; for it is holy to the LORD.*

These verses repeat what has already been said in the description of the temple (Eze 45:1-6). Here it happens in connection with the division of the land among the twelve tribes. The LORD shows that He also asserts His right to the land in the division of the land. As Creator, the whole earth belongs to Him (Psa 24:1-2). He also says explicitly in the law that the land

belongs to Him (Lev 25:23). He has designated a portion of the land as an allotment or collection or heave-offering for Himself. That portion is first and foremost allotted to the priests (verse 10). The reason is that they are in direct connection with the sanctuary where they perform their service in the presence of the LORD.

The priests are further referred to as the sons of Zadok (verse 11). They are given this excellent place because of their outstanding faithfulness to the LORD at a time when the entire people, including the Levites, have strayed away from Him. They are given the charge of the land before the LORD that will be “a most holy place” to them (verse 12). They have made themselves worthy of that position. Their territory borders the territory of the Levites.

After the priests, the Levites are assigned a portion of the area given to the LORD as an allotment or a heave-offering (verse 13). Their area is adjacent to the area of the priests and runs parallel to it. Applied spiritually, this means that the offering of sacrifices (priestly service) runs parallel to the teaching of the Word from the Scriptures (Levite service). It connects and is consistent with it.

To the Levites, it is not so much their privileges that are recited, but rather their responsibilities (verse 14). They are not to take any action that would result in their land changing hands. They must remain well aware that their land is “holy to the LORD”, which means that they may enjoy only its usufruct.

### **Eze 48:15-19 | The City and Its Area**

15 “The remainder, 5,000 [cubits] in width and 25,000 in length, shall be for common use for the city, for dwellings and for open spaces; and the city shall be in its midst. 16 These [shall be] its measurements: the north side 4,500 [cubits], the south side 4,500 [cubits], the east side 4,500 [cubits], and the west side 4,500 [cubits]. 17 The city shall have open spaces: on the north 250 [cubits], on the south 250 [cubits], on the east 250 [cubits], and on the west 250 [cubits]. 18 The remainder of the length alongside the holy allotment shall be 10,000 [cubits] toward the east and 10,000 toward the west; and it shall be

*alongside the holy allotment. And its produce shall be food for the workers of the city. 19 The workers of the city, out of all the tribes of Israel, shall cultivate it.*

Also in these verses what has already been said in the description of the temple (Eze 45:7-8) is repeated, but is now said in connection with the division of the land. The city that lies before the LORD in this portion of the allotment or heave-offering does not belong specifically to any tribe, but belongs to all the tribes (verse 15; verse 19). Each tribe may send people to serve the city. So may it also be in the church. Every believer may serve his fellow believer.

The dimensions of the city are 4,500 cubits square (verse 16). Surrounding the city is a piece of pasture land two hundred and fifty cubits on each side (verse 17), bringing the total to 5,000 cubits (= 2.625 km) square (verse 15).

The whole area of the city is 25,000 cubits (= 13.125 km) wide: the city 5,000 cubits (= 2.625 km) with both to the east and west another area of 10,000 cubits (= 2x5.25 km) (verse 18). It is emphasized that the area runs “alongside the holy allotment [or: heave-offering]”.

### **Eze 48:20-22 | The Holy Allotment**

*20 The whole allotment [shall be] 25,000 by 25,000 [cubits]; you shall set apart the holy allotment, a square, with the property of the city. 21 “The remainder [shall be] for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy allotment and of the property of the city; in front of the 25,000 [cubits] of the allotment toward the east border and westward in front of the 25,000 toward the west border, alongside the portions, [it shall be] for the prince. And the holy allotment and the sanctuary of the house shall be in the middle of it. 22 Exclusive of the property of the Levites and the property of the city, [which] are in the middle of that which belongs to the prince, [everything] between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin shall be for the prince.*

The area of the holy square of 25,000 times 25,000 cubits contains the three strips mentioned in the previous verses: for the priests (10,000 cubits), for the Levites (10,000 cubits) and for the city (5,000 cubits). Because the area of the city is said to be “for common use” (verse 15; cf. Eze 42:20), it is em-

phatically stated here that the city and the area of the city do belong to the “holy allotment [or: heave-offering]” (verse 20).

There is another area to the west and an area to the east of the holy square area that is designated as an allotment or a heave-offering to the LORD (verse 21). Both of these areas are for the prince. The holy allotment or heave-offering and the temple sanctuary are between the two areas of the prince, demonstrating his direct involvement.

The location “of the property of the Levites and the property of the city” is also attached to the area of the prince. It is said to be “in the middle of that which belongs to the prince” (verse 22). This indicates that there is a close connection between the area of the prince and that of the Levites and the people.

#### **Eze 48:23-29 | New Division of the South**

*23 “As for the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west side, Benjamin, one [portion]. 24 Beside the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west side, Simeon, one [portion]. 25 Beside the border of Simeon, from the east side to the west side, Issachar, one [portion]. 26 Beside the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west side, Zebulun, one [portion]. 27 Beside the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west side, Gad, one [portion]. 28 And beside the border of Gad, at the south side toward the south, the border shall be from Tamar to the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the brook [of Egypt], to the Great Sea. 29 This is the land which you shall divide by lot to the tribes of Israel for an inheritance, and these are their [several] portions,” declares the Lord GOD.*

Now in verses 23-28 follows the division of the land of the remaining five tribes. These tribes are south of the sanctuary and the area that is as an allotment or a heave-offering for the LORD. Like the tribes north of them, these tribes also receive a strip of land across the entire width of the land, from east to west. These tribes are also named in order from north to south.

The division of the inheritance of the tribes of Israel concludes by saying that each tribe will have its inheritance and portion (verse 29). The manner in which the inheritance is appropriated is by lot.

For us it is also important to accept the portion that has been allotted to us by the Lord and His Spirit and then to abide by it (Rom 12:3; 1Cor 12:14,18-20,27; 2Cor 10:12-18; Eph 4:7). When we abide by what we have received in terms of spiritual gifts, what the Lord has allotted to us, it will keep us from slothfulness on the one hand and from lording over others on the other. It means that we respect others in what they have been given. We may serve with what we ourselves have received and we may be served by what others have received.

### **Eze 48:30-34 | The Gates of the City**

*30 "These are the exits of the city: on the north side, 4,500 [cubits] by measurement, 31 shall be the gates of the city, named for the tribes of Israel, three gates toward the north: the gate of Reuben, one; the gate of Judah, one; the gate of Levi, one. 32 On the east side, 4,500 [cubits], shall be three gates: the gate of Joseph, one; the gate of Benjamin, one; the gate of Dan, one. 33 On the south side, 4,500 [cubits] by measurement, shall be three gates: the gate of Simeon, one; the gate of Issachar, one; the gate of Zebulun, one. 34 On the west side, 4,500 [cubits, shall be] three gates: the gate of Gad, one; the gate of Asher, one; the gate of Naphtali, one.*

The description of the temple and the land in the realm of peace concludes with a description of "the exits of the city" and the mention of the length "on the north side, 4,500 [cubits] by measurement" (verse 30). This length then applies also to the east side (verse 32), the south side (verse 33), and the west side (verse 34). The exits, which are then called "gates", are "named for the tribes of Israel", that is, of all twelve tribes (verse 31a; cf. Rev 21:12). This indicates that the city is the property of all twelve tribes. It is the city of the true people of God. The city is the capital of all the tribes. That there is mention of "exits" makes it clear that the city is the center of blessing from which blessing goes to each tribe.

The enumeration of the exits (verses 30-34) begins with the north side, just as it does with the tribes of the land (verses 1-7). Each of the four sides of the city has three exits, so that the whole city has twelve. It is noteworthy that there is mention of "the gate of Levi" (verse 31). This is possible

because there is also a “gate of Joseph” (verse 32), in which the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, are joined.

The enumeration begins with the “three gates toward the north: the gate of Reuben, one; the gate of Judah, one; the gate of Levi, one” (verse 31b). The names mentioned are those of the sons of Leah. They are also mentioned first in Moses’ blessing (Deu 33:6-8). Reuben is the firstborn in age, Judah is the king’s tribe, and Levi was chosen by God to serve Him in place of the firstborn.

Then follow the gates on the east side: “the gate of Joseph, one; the gate of Benjamin, one; the gate of Dan, one” (verse 32). Joseph and Benjamin are the two sons of Rachel. Dan is the eldest son of Rachel’s maid.

Next, the names of the gates on the south side are mentioned: “the gate of Simeon, one; the gate of Issachar, one; the gate of Zebulun, one” (verse 33). These are the names of the three other sons of Leah.

Finally, we are given the names of the gates on the west side: “the gate of Gad, one; the gate of Asher, one; the gate of Naphtali, one” (verse 34). These are the names of the three other sons of the two maids.

### **Eze 48:35 | The Name of the City; Summary of Future Events**

35 *[The city shall be] 18,000 [cubits] round about; and the name of the city from [that] day [shall be], “The LORD is there.”*

Finally, after the names of the gates of the city, which is of all Israel, are mentioned, the city itself is given a name. By that name the city is exalted to the highest state, the state of the city of God. In the last words of this book, the name of the city beautifully summarizes the purpose God has for Israel and for humanity.

Just as God will dwell in the midst of the gathered and renewed Israel, so it will be in eternity. Then God will dwell with men on the new earth (Rev 21:3). During the time of the church on earth, which is now, God dwells by His Spirit in His redeemed (Rom 8:11) and in His church (Eph 2:22).

It is also noteworthy that in Ezekiel 40-48 the name Jerusalem is not mentioned. It speaks of "the city". It is Jerusalem in the realm of peace, a Jerusalem without walls, for the LORD Himself will be a wall of fire around her (Zec 2:4-5). The city is reminiscent of the city that Abraham expected in faith: "The city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). The name of the city we read here: "The LORD is there". His Name is forever attached to that city.

## Summary of future events

### **Introduction**

The following overview is no more than an attempt to discover an order in the events of the end time on the basis of a number of Scriptures. It concerns events that directly precede and directly follow the great event of the coming of the Lord Jesus. The places of action are Israel and the countries around it or the Middle East.

The following overview does not pretend to say that the order is exactly as it is shown. Sometimes events coincide, sometimes events are so close together that it is difficult to determine what the correct order is. However, a general line can be detected in “which must soon take place” (Rev 1:1).

For a sound study of prophecy, Peter gives another important instruction at the conclusion of chapter 1 of his second letter: “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is [a matter] of one’s own interpretation” (2Pet 1:20). He is saying here that first of all (“know this first”) we should not look at a prophecy only where it is written, but always in connection with other prophecies. This means that we should always compare Scripture with Scripture.

If we don’t, there is a great danger that we will manipulate the prophetic word and bend it to our will. We will then explain it as it suits us best. The fulfillment of the prophecies takes place in the manner stated in the Word and not according to our own views. This also means that we must also see the text references in the context of the book of the Bible in which they appear.

It is therefore highly recommended to read the texts referred to after each point: “Seek from the book of the LORD, and read” (Isa 34:16). In many cases there are other texts that can clarify the point in question, but the texts referred to speak most clearly, in my opinion.

The centerpiece of prophecy is a Person: the Messiah. It is about His coming into the world. Scripture shows us two comings of the Messiah. His first coming is behind us. He came as the suffering Messiah. His second coming is before us. He is coming as the reigning Messiah. The key to understanding the prophecies correctly is Christ and His suffering and the glory to come, for “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10b).

## **Overview**

1. Although it is not a future event now, the establishment of the State of Israel, in 1948, it was for a long time. It is written about by the prophets. The establishment, in unbelief, but by the providence of God, is a proof of the truth of the prophetic Word (Isa 18:1-7; Eze 37:1-14).

NOTE Before the events listed below will take place, the church will first be raptured. This event is not mentioned anywhere in the prophecies. The rapture of the church, in which there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:14; Col 3:11), is a hidden event in the Old Testament (1Thes 4:14-18; 1Cor 15:51-54).

2. An apostate head of state, the antichrist, is given power in Israel (Jn 5:43; Dan 11:36-39; Isa 30:33; Zec 11:15-17; 1Jn 2:18,22).

3. The antichrist makes a protective covenant with the European Union (Dan 9:27; Isa 28:14-15; 57:9-11; Rev 13:11-13).

4. The dictator of Western Europe is made an idol in Israel (Mt 24:15; 2Thes 2:4; Rev 13:11-18).

5. The king of the south (Egypt) moves against Israel (Dan 11:40).

6. The Assyrians overrun Israel. God uses them as His rod to discipline His apostate people; they are supported by Gog (Russia) (Isa 8:5-8; 10:5,28-32; 28:2,14-19; Dan 9:27; Zec 14:1-2; Dan 8:24).

7. The Assyrians capture Jerusalem and Egypt is also overrun (Isa 10:24,32; 28:14-19; Dan 11:40-43; Zec 14:1-4).

8. The European armies rush to Israel's aid because of the alliance between the dictator of Europe and the antichrist (Rev 16:13-16; 17:7-14; 19:19).
9. The Lord Jesus descends on the Mount of Olives and goes to war as a Hero against His enemies; this is the beginning of His Davidic reign (Zec 14:3-7; Acts 1:11; Col 3:4).
10. The European armies are destroyed by Christ in northern Israel, at Har-Magedon (Rev 16:16; 19:11-19; Dan 2:34-35,44-45; 7:7-14).
11. The leaders of the rebellion, the beast and the false prophet, are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20-21).
12. The returned remnant from the two tribes that had fled, along with the faithful left in Jerusalem, drive the occupying force of the Assyrians out of the land (Mic 5:5-6).
13. Because of rumors from the east and north, the main force of the Assyrians returns to Jerusalem with the king of the north from Egypt (Dan 11:44-45; Isa 29:1-4).
14. Christ destroys in Edom, the greatest hater of His people, the nations gathered in Edom (Isa 63:1-6).
15. The Lord Jesus comes from Edom (Isa 63:1) to Jerusalem and destroys the Assyrians and the king of the north at Jerusalem (Isa 10:5-27; 29:1-8; 30:27-33; 31:4-8; Dan 8:20-26; 11:44-45).
16. The rest of the wicked Jews are killed (Isa 17:4-6; Zep 3:11,15; Zec 13:8-9; 14:1-15).
17. The faithful remnant of the Jews are redeemed (Isa 10:20-27; 28:16; 29:1-8; 30:18-26; Mic 5:2-9; Zep 3:12-20).
18. They judge Jordan, Arabia, the Palestinians and others (Isa 11:11-16; Joel 3:4-8; Zep 2:4-5,8-9,12-13).
19. The remnant of the ten tribes returns to Israel from all nations (Mt 24:31).

20. Israel lives as one people under one King in peace and security in the land (Eze 37:15-28).

21. The Russian powers with people from Persia, Ethiopia and Put in their ranks go up against Israel and are destroyed on the mountains of Israel (Eze 38:18-23; 39:1-8).

22. Satan is bound for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-3).

Explanation: It is not easy to determine at what point satan will be bound. It is most likely, in my opinion, that it is at this time, because with the extermination of these last hostile powers, his reign over the world will be over.

23. The Lord Jesus, seated on the throne of His glory on earth, judges the living nations; beginning of His Solomon's reign (Mt 25:31-46).

24. Enduring peace, Jerusalem the center of the earth (Isa 2:1-5; 11:1-10; 35:1-10; Jer 30:1-24; 31:1-40; Rev 20:4-6).

25. Also restoration for Assyria, Egypt, Jordan and Persia (Isa 19:16-25; Jer 46:26-27; 48:47; 49:6,39).

## Other Publications

On the website [www.oudesporen.nl](http://www.oudesporen.nl) more Bible commentaries and publications that have been translated into English are available and will become available, Lord willing. They can be downloaded for free as pdf, e-pub and mobi (for Amazons Kindle).

The commentaries on the books of the Bible can also be read on electronic devices like desktop, laptop and smartphone on [www.kingcomments.com](http://www.kingcomments.com). Bible references are linked. See 'Information' on that website.



