

# **Getting Into The Promised Land Without Falling Asleep In Leviticus**

## **14. The Exile Ezekiel and Daniel**

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**A Teaching Commentary  
of the Old Testament**

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# 1 Introduction

Thus far we have considered the history of God's people from the time of creation through the calling of Abraham, the time of enslavement in Egypt, the Exodus and the taking of the Promised Land, the period of the judges, the formation of the monarchy, the split into two kingdoms, the fall of the Northern Kingdom, and finally the fall of the Southern Kingdom. Significant dates in this progression include:

1290-1270 BC	Probable date for the Exodus
Around 1020 BC	Saul became king
Around 1000 BC	David became king
961 BC	Solomon became king
922 BC	Split into Northern and Southern Kingdoms
722 BC	Northern kingdom fell to Assyria
597 BC	Jehoiachin surrenders to Babylon, first deportation occurs. Among those exiled at this time is Ezekiel.
589 BC	Zedekiah rebels against Babylon
586 BC	Southern kingdom fell to Babylon. Jerusalem is destroyed. The second deportation occurs.
582 BC	A third deportation occurs

In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. They tore down or burned down everything significant, including the temple. This is considered to be the date of the fall of the Southern Kingdom.

Warfare with Babylon began before the first deportation. There were those who were taken captive prior to 597 BC. Daniel was probably among those who were captured in smaller groups prior to the first major deportation. Three major waves of deportation occurred. The majority of the people of Judah were taken as captives to live in exile in Babylon. The poor and the weak were left behind and were given control of the land of Judah. The majority of Jeremiah's prophecy took place between the first and second deportations.

Among the exiles in Babylon were Ezekiel and Daniel. Their prophecies were delivered from Babylon. The first part of Ezekiel's prophecies is dated before the fall of Jerusalem and foresees this disaster. The latter part focuses on the restoration of Jerusalem that would occur after Ezekiel's time.

Nebuchadnezzar is the most prominent Babylonian king mentioned in the Old Testament. History records that there was a progression of Babylonian kings, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar.

Nabopolassar 627 - 605 BC  
Nebuchadnezzar 605 - 562 BC  
Evil-Merodach 562-560 BC  
Neriglissar 560 - 556 BC  
Labash-Marduk 556 BC (2 months)  
Nabonidus 556 - 539 BC  
Belshazzar 553 - 539 BC

Belshazzar was regent, acting for his father, who was actually the king. Belshazzar was the ruler in the book of Daniel who saw the handwriting on the wall. Belshazzar ruled when the Babylonian Empire was conquered.

In 540 BC, Babylon was besieged by the Persians and the Medes. The kingdom fell. In 539 BC, the Persian king Cyrus issued the decree allowing the exiles to return to Judah and to begin rebuilding. This fulfilled many prophecies, including those of Isaiah, who had identified Cyrus by name. Among those who would return to help with the rebuilding were Ezra and Nehemiah. Prophets who ministered during this post-exilic period included Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

In 515 BC, the new temple was dedicated.

Several Persian kings reigned during this post-exilic period. They influenced the events of the Old Testament and they appear as figures in some of the writings. They are:

Cyrus	559-530 BC	He was king when Babylon was conquered. He issued the edict to allow the Jews to return and begin rebuilding. Nearly 200 years earlier, Isaiah had identified Cyrus by name as the king who would allow the Jews to return and rebuild.
Cambyses	530-522 BC	
Smerdis	522 BC	
Darius I	521 - 486 BC	Both Haggai and Zechariah prophesied during his reign. The temple was completed during his time.
Xerxes	485 - 465 BC	Xerxes was also known as Ahasuerus. He is mentioned in the book of Ezra. He is also the king who made Esther queen.
Artaxerxes I	464 - 424 BC	Artaxerxes I is also known as Artashasta. He is mentioned in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. He was king at the time Malachi prophesied.

During the reign of Artaxerxes I, the writing of the books of the Old Testament was completed. God's work among his people was far from complete. The voices of the prophets were stilled, however, during this time that has become known as the Intertestamental Period. Around 400 years of silence occurred. This silence was finally broken when the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist, began to call the people to repentance. Then, in the fullness of time and the apex of history, Jesus came to bring about the fulfillment of everything that God had promised through these Old Testament writings.

And now, onto the exile.

## 2 Ezekiel

The book of Ezekiel contains some of the weirdest images to be found anywhere in the Bible. It opens with a vision of winged creatures with four faces who ride about on a wheel-in-a-wheel. Chapter 37 has the well-known vision of the valley of dry bones that come back to life. A person does not have these sorts of dreams at night and then wake up the next day feeling rested. Ezekiel was a man of dramatic and significant visions from God. So who was Ezekiel?

Ezekiel was born in Judah. In 597 BC Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and the first deportation occurred. Ezekiel was taken to Babylon at this time. It was 11 years before Zedekiah's rebellion brought final destruction to Jerusalem. Ezekiel 1:3 tells us that Ezekiel was a priest and thus a descendant of Levi. More than anything, Ezekiel was a man who heard the voice of God and did what he said to do. He was faithful to carry God's message to those who needed to hear it. He was a man who loved and feared God and responded in obedience. That is what made him special. Each of us should respond to whatever revelation that we have from God with love, fear, and obedience as well. There is a precedent for such behavior.

### 2.1 *The Call of Ezekiel*

Ezekiel 1-3

God is not always subtle.

In the fifth year of the exile (around 592 BC) Ezekiel had a very dramatic vision. The description in chapter 1 is so extraordinary that some have suggested it was a UFO sighting. I personally find it impossible to entertain that explanation, but it was undoubtedly material for the Babylonian Enquirer.

Ezekiel saw four creatures. Each had four faces and four wings. Each had a face of a man, a face of a lion, a face of an ox, and a face of an eagle. The four faces seemed to be on four different sides of one head. This seems to signify the omniscience of God – there was a set of eyes facing all directions. Each creature could see 360 degrees at a time. Since it could see in all directions, it did not turn when it moved about. If it wanted to change directions, a different set of eyes would take over – the body would not rotate. This was also facilitated by the fact that each creature was on a wheel-in-a-wheel. This apparatus allowed them to go in any direction (again, without turning). They also seemed to fly – allowing the creatures to rise from the earth and descend again when appropriate. This motion seems to signify the omnipresence of God – he can move wherever he wants whenever he wants without having to turn. These creatures followed the Spirit of God wherever he went.

Many people have written lengthy explanations of the significance of the four faces – the man, the lion, the ox, and the eagle. Many have suggested the meaning of the wheel-in-the-wheel. Many have attached significance to the four wings. Many have explored the other details in Chapter 1. Because of the fact that these people come up with different explanations for these things, most or all of them must be wrong. The one thing that we do know is that Ezekiel had an overwhelming vision and it got his attention.

In the midst of all that Ezekiel saw, there was a throne. A voice spoke to him from the throne. The voice told Ezekiel that he was being sent to a rebellious and stubborn people – Israel. He was to faithfully deliver the message that he would be given. The people may or may not obey the message, but they would be sure that a prophet had been among them. Ezekiel was not to

fear anything that they might want to do to him. He also was cautioned not to join them in rebellion.

At the beginning of chapter 3, Ezekiel is given a scroll containing the word of God. He is told to eat the scroll. When he does, it tastes as sweet as honey in his mouth. This is an image that we see repeated in Revelation 10, when John is given a scroll and told to eat. He also found that it tasted sweet as honey, but he also found that it turned bitter in his stomach.

The image may be interpreted to mean that the word of God is something that we should consume. The word should not be something that we keep external to us. It should become part of us. We should be filled with it. The word of God is truth and life. If we taste it in its entirety, it is sweet. In John's case, it produced a bitterness in his stomach because of the immediate events revealed to him. The words given to John included a vivid portrait of the final judgments being poured out on the earth. It was enough to make anyone queasy.

Ezekiel is told that he is being sent as a prophet to Israel. He was not being sent to foreign people, as was true with Jonah. His ministry was among his own. He is also told to expect them to be obstinate. They would not yield to his message. They would not heed the word of God. Ezekiel would be hardened against their rebellion.

All of this was overwhelming to Ezekiel. He had just had this sci-fi caliber vision. He had just been told that his people were a rebellious and obstinate race who had angered God and that he was going to be pitted against them as God's spokesman. Then in 3:12 the Spirit of God lifted him up and transported him to a city named Tel Aviv (not the modern city) and left him sitting by the river Kebar. He sat there stunned for seven days.

In Ezekiel 3:16-21 we encounter a passage of scripture that may be somewhat frightening to those who are called of God.

At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.

"Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself."

Whoa! Does this mean what it looks like it means? When did I become responsible for all the sin that other people commit? Is this unfair or what?

The passage does mean what it says. It does not mean what it does not say. It would be easy and unfortunate to interpret this passage to mean that it is my responsibility to set myself up as judge and to spend my life telling everyone else what is wrong with his or her life. The key to this passage is found in the first paragraph. It says: "Hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, ..." God is the judge. Ezekiel was charged with delivering messages from God, not with sitting in judgment over other people's lives. If God told Ezekiel to deliver a message and Ezekiel failed to do it, then would he be held accountable. This is not so hard to understand.

If I am standing by a road and see someone about to be run over by a diesel truck and I simply stand there and watch, then it is not hard to see that I share the blame for his injury or death. No, I was not driving the truck and no I did not force him out into the street. The courts would not be able to convict me of any wrongdoing. But the Holy Spirit sure could.

In like fashion, God was telling Ezekiel that he was going to give him messages to relay to people. If those people did not heed those messages, they would physically die (remember that the Babylonian sword was swinging far and wide at this time). If Ezekiel did not deliver the messages, it was the same as standing by the side of the road and watching the diesel truck hit the pedestrian.

The latter part of chapter 3 warns Ezekiel that his message would fall on hardened ears. There were times when God would tell him to speak and other times when God would still his mouth. Note that verse 26 indicates that there would be times when Ezekiel would want to rebuke Israel and God would not let him. This supports the conclusion that verses 16-21 do not tell us to set ourselves up as judges.

Ezekiel had a mission. When God told him to speak he was to speak. When God told him to be silent he was to be silent. He was to do this even in the face of an unreceptive audience. It is not so different than the mission given to each of us.

## **2.2 Judgment on Jerusalem**

Ezekiel 4-5

In chapters 4-5, Ezekiel is told to perform acts that would symbolize the coming destruction of Jerusalem. The first act, in Ezekiel 4:1-3, is the construction of a physical model representing Jerusalem. He was to build ramps up against it, construct camps surrounding it, put battering rams around it, etc. One almost gets the image of Ezekiel out in the streets playing with toy soldiers. It was a very physical representation of the way that Jerusalem would be besieged.

In 4:4-8, the next symbolic act is described. It is a bit hard to understand. Ezekiel was told to lie down on his left side for 390 days – one day for each year of the sin of Israel. When that time was finished, he was to lie on his right side for 40 days – one day for each year of the sin of Judah. During the 40 days, he was to face Jerusalem and prophesy against her. He would be bound with ropes to symbolize the manner in which Jerusalem would be bound during its siege.

We know from the text that Ezekiel did not lie in the street 24 hours per day for 430 days straight. He spent some time each day lying in the street for each of the 430 days. Still his presence there would have been very obvious and it would have drawn attention to God's message. We also do not know the significance of the 390 vs. 40 day split. The Northern Kingdom only existed as a nation for 200 years. Because of that, the translators of the Septuagint changed the 390 to 190. Still, the Hebrew text says 390. We are unable to identify the 390-year period to which this applies. In like manner, it is hard to find only 40 years of unfaithfulness on the part of Judah. Any interpretation of these numbers is conjecture. The point is that Ezekiel was demonstrating to the Jews the reason for the siege that was depicted in the 4:1-3.

The third demonstration has to do with food. During the 390 days, Ezekiel was told to bake bread from a certain combination of grains. To bake the bread, he was to burn human excrement. It was not totally uncommon to use excrement for fuel back then. It did burn, but it gave off a very unpleasant odor when it did. Human excrement was seldom used, however. To Ezekiel, this would be unthinkable. He was a priest and tried to keep himself ceremonially clean

at all times. Handling of human excrement would have made him unclean. He raised this concern to God and God allowed him to use cow manure instead. It was still unpleasant but it did not make him ceremonially unclean. Why all this talk of excrement? The image was clear. The people of Jerusalem were going to be defiled once they were conquered. There would be no more worry about ceremonial cleanliness. Their focus would be on simple survival. Ezekiel was only allowed to eat a certain amount of this bread every day. In fact, his total consumption during this time was limited to about 8 ounces of bread and less than a quart of water. His eating and drinking of his meager portions were to be done publicly at set times of the day. This image was clear as well. When Jerusalem was besieged, there would be a very limited food supply. The people would experience famine. We know from history that when the siege did occur some of the people resorted to cannibalism due to the scarcity of food. Times were going to be rough.

The next image involved Ezekiel's hair. He was told to shave his head and his beard. We would not be as impressed by such an act as Ezekiel's counterparts surely were. Shaving was an act that victors in war did to their captives as an act of humiliation. The people of Jerusalem were to become captives, subject to the whims of their captors. Ezekiel was given instructions about what to do with the hair. (Ezekiel 5:12 explains the significance of the actions.) He was to take a third of it to the center of town and burn it. This symbolized the fact that a third of the people of Jerusalem would die in the city from the famine during the siege. Next he was to take a third of the hair and travel around the city, striking it with a sword. This symbolized that another third of Jerusalem would die by the sword once the city fell. He was to take the other third, reserving a few hairs, and scatter them to the wind. This symbolized that the remaining third of Jerusalem would be scattered, taken into captivity. The few hairs that were reserved represented the remnant that would be saved. Ezekiel was to take a few of those and throw them into the fire. Things would be painful, even for the remnant.

Thus, through Ezekiel's actions, God has shown that there will be a siege, why the siege was necessary, what life would be like in Jerusalem during that time, and the fate of the people as a result.

5:7-17 expressed God's great disfavor with his people. The root cause of all that they are about to experience is idolatry. Because of the way that they have rejected him and chased after other gods, he will bring this entire calamity upon them. They will be made a reproach to other nations – an example of what it is to reject God. What a tragedy. They, among all peoples, had the opportunity to be an example to the world of what is to be faithful to God and to enjoy his favor.

### **2.3 *Pronouncement of Woe on Judah***

Ezekiel 6-7

Chapters 6-7 contain a pronouncement of the destruction of Judah. The people are being punished in a mighty way. It is a result of their idolatry, their arrogance, and their love of money. They will face sword, plague, and famine. When the destruction comes, it will be complete. There will be no question that the source is God himself.

### **2.4 *Vision of Jerusalem***

Ezekiel 8-11

In chapter 8, Ezekiel was transported via a vision to the city of Jerusalem. A messenger – presumably an angel – took him to the temple complex and began to show him people – all classes of people, from the elders of Judah to the women (fairly low on the social totem pole) – worshipping idols. God expressed his anger and contempt for them.

The angel summoned six guards, each of which had a weapon in hand. He also summoned a man with a writing instrument. The man with the writing instrument was told to go throughout Jerusalem, putting a mark on the forehead of anyone who has been grieved by the idolatry in the city. The six guards were told to follow and kill everyone who did not receive the mark on the forehead. They started in the temple and moved out into the city from there. As they carried out the instructions, the massive numbers of those who were killed filled the streets. As Ezekiel witnessed the slaughter he cried out to God. God replied that these people had brought this on themselves and that God would no longer tolerate their behavior.

The image that is portrayed here reminds us of two other events in the Bible. One is the Passover. The angel of death moved throughout the land and slaughtered the firstborn of every house that did not have the sign on the doorpost. The other is in the book of Revelation. Those who follow the antichrist receive the "mark of the beast" on their hands or foreheads. When the first "bowl judgment" is poured out on the earth, it is aimed at those who have received the "mark of the beast." What do all of these images mean?

Every day of life we have to make choices between good and evil. Every time we make such a choice, we are etching a mark on our foreheads. Over time, we take the mark of those who are grieved by evil or we take the mark of the beast.<sup>1</sup> The choice is ours. The ramifications of the choice are great and eternal.

The "wheel-in-a-wheel" creatures reappeared in Ezekiel's vision. This time they came to minister to God himself. The glory of God rose from the holy of holies and met the creatures (which are now identified as cherubim). The glory of God began to move out from the temple.

Ezekiel then saw the elders of Israel. God revealed to Ezekiel that they are telling people that it will soon be time to build houses, implying that the Babylonian threat was not to be taken seriously. They were saying that they are as safe as meat in a pot. God said that by such talk they were leading people to their deaths. Remember the prophecies of Jeremiah, who told Jerusalem that the only safe course for them to follow would be to peacefully submit to Babylon. Because of their false advice to the people, God promised to drive the meat out of the pot – to drive these men from the safety of the city into the hands of the Babylonians. While Ezekiel is watching, one of these elders dies.

Ezekiel is struck by this and cries out for the welfare of the remnant in Jerusalem. God tells Ezekiel that the remnant has been removed from Jerusalem and is being cared for in exile in Babylon. God promises Ezekiel that the day would come when those in exile would be allowed to return and reclaim their land. At that time they would purify it from its defilement.

Ezekiel then sees the image of purification in his vision. The cherubim remove coals from the brazen altar of the temple and begin spreading the coals out over the city. This would be a symbolic act of purification of Jerusalem.

The glory of the Lord then left the city altogether. It departed to the east and stopped over the Mount of Olives. This has major significance. For years, Jerusalem had abandoned God. Now God abandoned Jerusalem. Any hope of protection or deliverance that she had was now gone. The one thing that made her unique was lost. God was no longer there.

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<sup>1</sup>At the end of the time, there may be a literal mark of the beast, but even now people take sides by the choices that they make. When the time comes to take the literal mark of the beast on the forehead, it will be those who have already abandoned God who will freely receive it. That does not happen in a moment. That happens through a lifetime of choices.

Hundreds of years later, Jesus reentered the city from the east on Palm Sunday. The Jews are still awaiting the return of the Messiah, whom they expect to enter the city from the east.

The Spirit of God returned Ezekiel to Babylon. He shared his vision with the exiles there.

## **2.5 *Prophecy and False Prophecy***

Ezekiel 12-13

At the beginning of chapter 12, God told Ezekiel to pack his belongings as if he were about to go into exile and to dig a hole in a wall and go through it. When people asked him what he was doing, he was to tell them that the prince of Jerusalem was about to sneak through a hole in the wall of Jerusalem and attempt to escape. He would be caught and brought to Babylon, although he would never see the land. He would die there.

The ruler in Judah at this time was Zedekiah. The people considered the real king to be Jehoiachin, who was living in exile in Babylon. Thus they considered Zedekiah to be a prince rather than a king. We know from the book of Jeremiah that he did try to escape from the city. He was caught by the Babylonians. They blinded him and brought him to Babylon, where he died.

God then came down hard on the false prophets in Judah. Remember that the false prophets there were telling everyone that the Babylonian problem would pass quickly and that they should not worry about it. They were telling people "peace" when there was no peace. God said that their prophecies were like a weak wall with a nice coat of whitewash on it to make it look acceptable. God was going to bring a strong storm against that wall. He would wash away the whitewash and knock down the wall. Basically he was saying that he would soon show their words to be false. The true prophecy – as was being brought by Ezekiel and Jeremiah – would be shown to be true.

## **2.6 *Prophecy Condemned***

Ezekiel 14

At the beginning of chapter 14, some men come to Ezekiel, asking him to inquire of God on their behalf. God's reply is that he will no longer communicate to idolatrous men. Until people's hearts are turned back to the Lord, his voice will be turned from them. If false prophets among them pretend to speak to them on God's behalf, God will punish both the one delivering the false prophecy and the one who sought it. God's desire is that people will long to hear from him once again so that they will turn away from their idols and back to him.

Verses 14:12-14 begin a new thought:

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men — Noah, Daniel and Job — were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord.

The identity of "Daniel" in this passage is uncertain. The prophet for whom the book of Daniel is named was not a well-known figure at the time this was written. He was a contemporary of Ezekiel but his ministry really followed that of Ezekiel. Furthermore, the spelling of "Daniel" in the Book of Daniel differs in Hebrew from the spelling of "Daniel" in Ezekiel 14:14. From the

context, we can only assume that this is some righteous man, in the same league as Noah and Job. The identity of Daniel has little to do with the passage, anyway. The point is that God is going to bring judgment on the land. The people as a whole have become so vile that the few righteous in the land may be able to save themselves, but they will be helpless to save others. This thought is carried through the rest of the chapter. God will bring sword or famine or wild beasts or plague on the land in judgment. There will be massive destruction. Ezekiel can take comfort in the fact that there will be survivors, however. The righteous will be spared. Their conduct and their actions will be their protection.

## **2.7 *The Useless Vine***

Ezekiel 15

The image of Israel as a vine is common throughout the Bible. A vine is useful for one thing only – producing fruit. Wood from a vine is of very low quality. It is not useful for building. About the only thing that one can do with it is to burn it.

Because of her unfaithfulness, Israel is a fruitless vine. She is useless. As a result, she will be burned.

## **2.8 *Judah, the Prostitute***

Ezekiel 16

Chapter 16 is a very graphic and very blunt condemnation of Judah, reminiscent of the book of Hosea. Judah is like a child abandoned at birth. God took notice and nurtured her into womanhood. God made her his queen and adorned her with fine things. Judah took her beauty and fine clothes and jewelry and turned herself into a prostitute, chasing after other lovers. She chased the affections of Egypt, Assyrian, and Babylonia. She was worse than a prostitute. A prostitute normally collects a fee for her "services." Judah was paying her lovers for their attention. Judah had become a worse prostitute than her sisters, Sodom and Samaria. Because of this, God was going to humiliate Judah in front of those whose affection she had sought. He was going to strip her of her fineries and leave her naked. He would punish her until his anger subsided. After the destruction and the wrath, restoration would come. 16:59-63 says:

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant. Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both those who are older than you and those who are younger. I will give them to you as daughters, but not on the basis of my covenant with you. So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the Lord. Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign Lord."

God would restore Judah. Her sisters, Samaria and Sodom, would find shelter under her, as daughters. The people of Judah would remember the shame of the exile and it would keep them faithful to God. He would forgive them.

Chapter 16 contains a verse that is sometimes interpreted in a very strange way. 16:49 says:

Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.

Undoubtedly Sodom was a place where the rich did not take care of the needy. That was not the only thing wrong in Sodom. Genesis 19 tells of the time when the messengers from God visited the city of Sodom. Men of Sodom wanted to commit homosexual rape of these angels. Some people attempt to harmonize this with Ezekiel 16:49 and end up with some rather twisted proof texting. They say that homosexual rape occurred in Sodom, but Ezekiel 16:49 says that the sin of Sodom was failure to take care of the poor and needy. Thus they conclude that homosexual behavior is not a sin. In fact, Genesis 19:6 describes the acts of these men as wicked. Their behavior is what actually triggered the destruction of Sodom. Genesis teaches us that the attempted rape by these men was a sin worthy of death. Ezekiel gives us further information, telling us that Sodom was also a place where the rich did not take care of the poor.

God is offended at idolatry – which has to do with how men treat him. He is also offended when men mistreat other men, whether it be through sexual sin or economic oppression. The two big issues with God are how we relate to him and how we relate to each other. It was in the beginning. It continued to be in the time of Ezekiel. It still is.

## **2.9 The Parable of the Two Eagles**

Ezekiel 17

Chapter 17 contains a parable and an explanation of that parable. The parable is found in 17:3-10:

A great eagle with powerful wings, long feathers and full plumage of varied colors came to Lebanon. Taking hold of the top of a cedar, he broke off its topmost shoot and carried it away to a land of merchants, where he planted it in a city of traders.

He took some of the seed of your land and put it in fertile soil. He planted it like a willow by abundant water, and it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine. Its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out leafy boughs.

But there was another great eagle with powerful wings and full plumage. The vine now sent out its roots toward him from the plot where it was planted and stretched out its branches to him for water. It had been planted in good soil by abundant water so that it would produce branches, bear fruit and become a splendid vine.'

Say to them, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Will it thrive? Will it not be uprooted and stripped of its fruit so that it withers? All its new growth will wither. It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it up by the roots. Even if it is transplanted, will it thrive? Will it not wither completely when the east wind strikes it – wither away in the plot where it grew?"

The first eagle is Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. In 597 BC, he had conquered Judah and had taken Jehoiachin and many of the nobles into captivity in Babylon. This is the meaning of taking a shoot from the top of a cedar and replanting it in a city of traders. Nebuchadnezzar also set up Zedekiah as regent in Judah. As long as the land lived in submission they could live in peace. This is the meaning of planting a vine in "your land." As Jeremiah taught, all of this happened by God's design. The best course for the people of Judah to follow was to live in submission to Babylon.

Unfortunately, a second eagle, which was Egypt, sought the attention of the vine, or the people in Judah. Egypt encouraged Judah to rebel against Babylon. (Note that Ezekiel wrote this

before Zedekiah's rebellion had started.) Because the vine paid attention to the second eagle, it would be uprooted and destroyed.

The verses that follow the parable explain its meaning. God promises that when Judah follows Egypt's advice and rebels, Egypt will not be able to offer her protection. Judah will be wiped out and Zedekiah will die in Babylon. Although this will take place at the hands of the Babylonians, God will be the source of the punishment.

The chapter does end with a positive promise, however. 17:22-24 says:

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I the Lord bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish."

"I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it."

This promise looks forward to the day when the Davidic line will be reestablished in Judah. A kingdom of righteousness will be established and other nations will seek shelter in it. This promise looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. The hope and the promise never died.

## **2.10 Individual Accountability**

Ezekiel 18

Chapter 18 of Ezekiel bears a striking resemblance to part of chapter 31 of Jeremiah. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both quote the same saying. Jeremiah 31:29-30 says:

In those days people will no longer say,  
"The fathers have eaten sour grapes,  
and the children's teeth are set on edge."

Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes —his own teeth will be set on edge.

Ezekiel goes on to explain that the people of Israel will stand individually before God to account for their sins. They will be judged individually for their acts. Those who defy God will receive his judgment. Those who have been faithful will be rewarded.

To us, this concept seems fairly obvious. To the people of Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's time, it was a new concept. By and large, God had dealt with the Jews corporately. There was a hierarchy of kings and priests in place. The people related to God through their leaders. The priests made sacrifices on behalf of the people. Although sin and responsibility were personal things, the relationship with God was primarily corporate. This was before the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out to minister individually to believers.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel both were told to prepare the people for the time when they would have personal relationships with God. This would involve personal accountability to God.

Some people in the church still have not really caught onto this. In your relationship with God, you don't hide behind the coat tails of a preacher or a home group leader. You don't hide behind

a husband or wife. You don't hide behind an intellectual pursuit of doctrine or Biblical knowledge. You don't hide by busying yourself out with "serving God." You stand before a God who created you in love and who longs to interact with you. You stand before the God who gave you the talents and traits that make you unique, and he wants to enjoy those characteristics in you. You also stand before a God who had standards for you to follow. You have to meet those standards before you can enjoy his presence. You get to decide whether or not you are willing to be separated from those things in your life that keep you from him. If so, he is willing and anxious to purify you. If not, then you choose your own path to judgment and destruction.

Nothing has really changed since the days of Ezekiel.

## **2.11 Lament for the Rulers of Judah**

Ezekiel 19

Chapter 19 of Ezekiel contains a lament for the rulers of Judah. It talks of a lioness who has cubs. One is raised to be a strong fighter and then is taken off into Egypt. Another is raised up in its place. It is then taken off to Babylon. Jehoahaz is the one that was taken to Egypt. The one taken to Babylon could have been either Jehoiakim (who was promptly killed there) or Jehoiachin (who lived in captivity there).

## **2.12 God Will Not Answer**

Ezekiel 20

Ezekiel 20 starts very much like Ezekiel 14. The elders of Israel come to Ezekiel and ask him to inquire of God on their behalf. What follows in verses 2-38 is God's stern refusal to speak to these men through the prophet. He gives a long list of crimes committed by the nation, which have at their heart idolatry (including child sacrifice) and man mistreating fellow man. He reminds them that he led them from slavery in Egypt into a Promised Land, but that everything he promised to do for them was contingent upon their obedience. Instead of obedience they gave rebellion. Several times he specifically mentions their failure to observe the Sabbath. 20:12 says:

Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the Lord made them holy.

The Sabbath was a time when God demanded the attention of the people. He demanded it on a regular basis. Willingness to give God one day out of seven was an act of faith and devotion. It was a cornerstone in building the relationship between God and his people. Yet the people would not give him this day.

God is intensely jealous because his people chase after idols. The Passover was one of the greatest events in their history. In this, God defeated the Egyptians and their gods. In perhaps the greatest show of power that God ever gave to Israel, the firstborn of Israel were granted life when the firstborn of Egypt met their death. How ironic and tragic that some of the Israelites were taking their children and sacrificing them to idols. It infuriated God.

So now, when the elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to seek counsel from God, the answer was "NO." If you want God, you need to be prepared to have him all of the time. God is not something you take out of a box whenever you need him and put away when you are through.

In verse 39, attention turns to the future. God tells of a time when he will have refined his people and he will return them to their land. The relationship will be restored. The people will serve him in faithfulness. They will despise the way that they behaved in the past.

In verse 45, God turns his attention towards the land of Judah. He tells Ezekiel to pronounce the coming of a forest fire in the Negev, which is the area south of Judah. The implication is that a purging blaze will devour the land. The people do not take Ezekiel seriously because they perceive that he is talking in parables. They failed to recognize the very real destruction coming on the land.

## **2.13 The Parable of the Sword**

### Ezekiel 21

Chapter 21 contains another parable of destruction. This time, the Lord is going to bring a sword against Judah. He will use it to cut down the righteous and the evil alike. The destruction will be broad in scope. God will use the sword of the Babylonians to accomplish his purpose, but he will be the one bringing the judgment of the sword.

Verse 21:3 says:

This is what the Lord says: "I am against you. I will draw my sword from its scabbard and cut off from you both the righteous and the wicked."

How does one reconcile this with passages such as Ezekiel 18:5-9, which says:

Suppose there is a righteous man  
who does what is just and right.  
He does not eat at the mountain shrines  
or look to the idols of the house of Israel.  
He does not defile his neighbor's wife  
or lie with a woman during her period.  
He does not oppress anyone,  
but returns what he took in pledge for a loan.  
He does not commit robbery  
but gives his food to the hungry  
and provides clothing for the naked.  
He does not lend at usury  
or take excessive interest.  
He withholds his hand from doing wrong  
and judges fairly between man and man.  
He follows my decrees  
and faithfully keeps my laws.  
That man is righteous;  
he will surely live,  
declares the Sovereign Lord.

The Ezekiel 18 passage says that the righteous will be spared destruction. The chapter 21 passage says that the sword will cut down the righteous and evil alike. There are several possible explanations for what may be perceived to be a contradiction.

It is possible that chapter 21 is referring to those that people consider to be righteous rather than those that God considers to be righteous. In a land that had gone totally corrupt, it would be

possible for a man to stand out above the rest and still be morally bankrupt. Those who may have been extolled by men would still be objects of God's judgment.

The other possibility is that there were indeed righteous people in Judah who would be affected by the sword coming on the land. We know that some of the people that were there when Babylon took the land were not killed but were taken into captivity. They were literally cut off from the land by the sword. In spite of the fact that they were allowed to live, as the Ezekiel 18 passage said, they were cut down as the Ezekiel 21 passage said. They were affected by the sword of Babylon even if they were not killed.

The judgment of God would affect all people of the land. Some may have survived the judgment but none of them were untouched. The righteous had the advantage of a faith relationship with God that sustained them through the tragedy. Today we still have no guarantee that we will not endure tragedy in our lives. We still have available to us a faith relationship with God that will sustain us through anything.

## **2.14 The Gross Moral Failure of Judah**

### Ezekiel 22

Chapter 22 expounds on the sins of Judah. Interestingly, scattered through the discussion we find:

- They have had other gods before God (22:4).
- They have made graven images (22:4).
- They have taken God's name in vain (22:26).
- They have not remembered the Sabbath or kept it holy (22:8).
- They have dishonored their parents (22:7).
- They have killed (22:9).
- They have committed adultery (22:11).
- They have stolen (22:12).
- They have borne false witness against neighbor (22:9).
- They have coveted (22:11).

This list should look familiar; they have broken all Ten Commandments. Their sin was not confined to breaking all Ten Commandments, however. They have committed every kind of sexual sin. They have mistreated orphans and widows. They have engaged in dishonest business practices. Their priests have led them into unfaithfulness. They have failed to honor God. 22:29 says, "The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice." In short, they have broken their relationship with God and they have mistreated their fellow man – the two recurring themes that we have seen in the prophets.

Because of this, God is going to scatter many of them to other nations (22:15). The rest he is going to gather into Jerusalem like metal into a furnace and then he is going to pour out the fire of his wrath until they are pure. It is not going to be a comfortable experience.

Sadly, God wanted to avoid what was about to happen. 22:30-31 says:

"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done," declares the Sovereign Lord.

God looked for a leader among the people who would work with him to turn things around. There was none. This does not imply that there were no righteous people in the land. We know, for instance, that Jeremiah was there trying to turn the people back to God. Jeremiah was not in a position of leadership, however, and was not able to lead the people into righteousness. None of the people who were in power in Judah were up to the task. Therefore God's only choice was to pour out his wrath and to refine them.

## **2.15 Two Prostitutes**

Ezekiel 23

In chapter 23, Ezekiel returns to a theme that he explored in chapter 16, that of spiritual prostitution. Chapter 23 of Ezekiel contains what is probably the most graphic language in all of Scripture. These verses are not likely to be chosen for memorization in children's Sunday School. The crudity of the language does not compare with the vulgarity of the people's acts, however. Ezekiel was graphic and even offensive in his language because he needed to call attention to how God felt about the people's behavior.

Two sisters, which represent Samaria and Jerusalem, belonged to the same husband, which represents God. They both became prostitutes. God handed the first woman, Samaria, over to the lover she had chased, Assyria. Assyria stripped her, killed her children, and then killed her. The other sister watched all of this happen. Still the other sister did not turn from her ways. She chased after the same lover, Assyria, but also chased after Chaldeans and Babylonians. She became more flagrant in her promiscuity than her sister had been.

For this, God will stir up against Jerusalem those lovers she has sought. They will come for her with weapons. They will disfigure her and kill her children. They will take away all of her fineries. She will be left worthless and unattractive, so that no lover will ever want part of her again. This is what it will take to put an end to her prostitution.

23:48-49 says:

So I will put an end to lewdness in the land, that all women may take warning and not imitate you. You will suffer the penalty for your lewdness and bear the consequences of your sins of idolatry. Then you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord.

The Jews were God's chosen priests to the rest of the world. The example that they set was one of idolatry and unfaithfulness. If they were allowed to get away with this sort of behavior, then what chance did the rest of the world have to know how to be faithful to God. If they would not be an example to the rest of the world, then God would make them an example to the rest of the world. It is not the way he wanted it, but his will will eventually be done.

## **2.16 The Boiling Pot**

Ezekiel 24:1-14

The beginning of chapter 24 is dated as being given on the very day that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem.

In Ezekiel 11, we saw that there were false prophets telling the people of Jerusalem that they were as safe as meat in a cooking pot. Chapter 24 takes that same image and turns it around. Choice pieces of meat are put into the pot and it is brought to a boil, but the pot turns out to contain impurities. Thus the meat in the pot must be discarded because it is unfit for

consumption. God intends to turn the heat up under the pot until the impurities are melted and burned away.

The pot is Jerusalem. The impurity is lewdness. God is going to burn the pot until the impurity is gone.

## **2.17 Ezekiel's Wife**

Ezekiel 24:15-27

God told Ezekiel that he was about to take from him the delight of his eyes. When it happened, Ezekiel was not to publicly mourn. In the morning, Ezekiel told the people what God had told him. That evening Ezekiel's wife died. As instructed, Ezekiel did not carry out the customary public mourning for her.

The people wanted to know what the meaning of this was. God was about to take from them the delight of their eyes – the temple. It would be desecrated. Furthermore the people that they left behind in Judah would fall by the sword. When news came of these events, the people were not to mourn. These events were God's will. The people were to submit to it.

It is hard to understand why God would not allow Ezekiel to mourn for his wife or the people to mourn for the loss of Jerusalem. The exiles in Babylon had loved ones in Judah. Even if they were terrible people, it would only be natural to mourn their loss. Why were they not allowed to do so?

First of all, God did not tell them that they could not mourn privately. Certainly they did. But the exiles were being called back into faithfulness to God. As part of that, they needed to start viewing the world through the eyes of God. If they had that outlook, then they would understand that the destruction of Jerusalem was an act of purification. It was ridding the land of spiritual prostitution. It was a good thing in spite of the pain that it brought. The people had no business going about publicly weeping and wailing and mourning the purification of their land. To do so would have been yet another affront to God.

And as for Ezekiel, I am sure that he mourned his wife in private. He did not mourn his wife publicly because God needed him to serve as an example to the rest of the people. No, it was not an easy thing for him to do. Did God take Ezekiel's wife simply to give an object lesson to the rest of the people? From the text one can infer that this may be true. Is this fair? Is this just? The only standard of justice that we have is the word of God. He is sovereign. He created the universe and it serves his purpose. Taking Ezekiel's wife may have been hard for Ezekiel but it was not unjust.

Ezekiel knew that serving God did not mean being shielded from difficult or painful circumstances. But Ezekiel also knew the God that would sustain him through such times and give him comfort and assurance in spite of the pain.

The wages of sin is death. At times it is painted with a very broad brush.

## **2.18 Prophecies Against Nations**

We have commonly seen in the writings of the prophets oracles against nations who have been enemies of Israel at some point in time. Ezekiel is no different. The next eight chapters contain

pronouncement of judgment upon Israel's neighbors. There are four short oracles followed by lengthy prophecies against Tyre and Egypt.

### 2.18.1 Ammonites

Ezekiel 25:1-7

Because the Ammonites rejoiced over the destruction of Judah and the temple, God will bring judgment upon them. They will be handed over to an unnamed "people of the East." They will be plundered by other nations.

### 2.18.2 Moab and Seir

Ezekiel 25:8-11

In like manner, Moab and Seir were glad to see the fall of Judah. For this they will be punished by the same "people of the East."

### 2.18.3 Edom

Ezekiel 25:12-14

Because Edom has sought revenge on Judah in the past, they will face judgment. This time it will be at the hand of a restored Israel.

### 2.18.4 Philistines

Ezekiel 25:15-17

Because the Philistines committed malicious acts upon Judah in the past, God will stretch out his hand against them and bring vengeance.

### 2.18.5 Tyre

Ezekiel 26-28

Three chapters are devoted to Tyre. 26:2-3 says:

Son of man, because Tyre has said of Jerusalem, "Aha! The gate to the nations is broken, and its doors have swung open to me; now that she lies in ruins I will prosper," therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring many nations against you, like the sea casting up its waves."

Tyre was a city to the north of Israel, in what today is the nation of Lebanon. It was a port city and a center of much commerce. It did not have a history of constant warfare with Israel. In fact, the people of Tyre had assisted in the building of Solomon's temple.

Tyre and Israel had vied for economic control of the area. Tyre dominated sea trade in the area, but Israel had dominated commerce by land. When Judah finally fell, Tyre rejoiced, because its only economic competition in the region was no more. The sin of Tyre was greed and arrogance. God looks harshly at a heart that will rejoice over the calamity of another because of

an economic opportunity that it might create. On an individual level, he has dealt harshly with rich people who oppressed the poor. Now on a national level, he will deal harshly with a rich nation that seeks to oppress a downtrodden neighbor.

The walls and towers of Tyre will be pulled down. The ports that once serviced ships of commerce will become desolate places for fishermen to spread nets out to dry. A sword will be brought against her people. 26:14 says that the place will never be rebuilt.

Historically, we know that Nebuchadnezzar advanced to Tyre right after he destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. He inflicted massive destruction on Tyre during his campaign. It was finally devastated by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. Although some of the neighboring areas have been rebuilt, the original city of Tyre itself remains a desolate ruin to this day.

Chapter 27 contains a lament for Tyre. Those who have traded with her in the past will miss her. This is similar to the lament for Tyre found in Isaiah 23. The chapter does give us an interesting glimpse into the kinds of goods exported by various nations in that day.

Chapter 28 is a lament for the king of Tyre. This is similar to the passage in Isaiah 14, which is directed at the king of Babylon. As we discussed when we looked at Isaiah 14, many have interpreted these passages to be descriptive of the fall of Satan. Ezekiel 28 would lend itself to that interpretation more than Isaiah 14, because it talks of a very beautiful guardian cherub who walked about in Eden. At some point, he began to see himself as a god. For this, he was cast out of his position and driven from the presence of God.

This may indeed be the way that Satan had his start. He may have been a very ornate and high-ranking angel who let his beauty and power go to his head. The problem is that this passage does not present itself as describing the fall of Satan. It says it is talking about the king of Tyre. Contextually it is found in a section talking about the judgment of Tyre. On the "flip side" of the argument, we know that the king of Tyre was not an angel who walked about in Eden. Either way you take the passage, some interpretation must be superimposed on the passage because it cannot be taken completely literally (unless you accept that the king of Tyre is a fallen angel).

In such a situation, the safest interpretation of Scripture is the one that requires the least amount of interjection and supposition and the one that makes the most sense in context. That being the case, this passage seems to be saying that the king of Tyre was a beautiful and powerful individual, much like an ornate cherub in Eden. He began to take himself too seriously and began to see himself as a god. For this, God will humble him and cast him down. Such an interpretation is entirely consistent with what we know about the nature of man and the nature of God. We have seen from the incident in the Garden of Eden that man has spent eternity trying to elevate himself to the position of deity. We have also heard the voice of God say "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." We have seen him spending eternity enforcing that standard and dealing sternly with idolatry.

## 2.18.6 Egypt

### Ezekiel 29-32

The longest oracle in this section is against Egypt. It spans four chapters. Israel's relationship with Egypt is well-known. Centuries before they held the children of Israel in slavery – the condition that prompted the exodus. Since that time, there had been cycles of warfare and alliances. At times hostilities flared between the two peoples. At other times they found themselves allies in war against other nations. God had never approved of these alliances. He also detested the fact that his people learned to worship the gods of the Egyptians.

God is going to bring judgment against the land of Egypt. It will be overrun. Its people will be scattered into exile, just as will happen to the people of Judah. At the end of forty years, they will be allowed to return to their land.

Egypt was attacked and subdued by Babylon. Although we have no record of widespread deportation like what happened to Judah, it was the *modus operandi* of Babylon to carry at least some of its conquered people off into captivity. More than likely, the Egyptians were allowed to return by Cyrus just as were the Jews.

The section continues to say that God will use the armies of Nebuchadnezzar to bring judgment upon Egypt. The land and the people will see devastation. The gods of Egypt will be defeated and destroyed. The nation will never again be a power of the magnitude that it had been in the past. History does indeed record that Egypt never again returned to the sort of strength that it had in the pre-Nebuchadnezzar days.

Chapter 31 holds up Assyria as an example to Egypt. Assyria was a powerful and majestic nation, full of natural beauty. It became proud, wicked, and ruthless. For this, God threw it to the ground. Egypt is on the very same course and can expect the same fate.

Chapter 32 contains a lament for Egypt. Her neighboring nations will be shocked at what will happen to her and will lament her death. She will join Assyria, Elam, Edom, and other nations in the grave of the uncircumcised who fell by the sword of God.

## **2.19 The Watchman Charge Repeated**

Ezekiel 33:1-20

In Ezekiel chapter 3, God gave Ezekiel the charge of being a watchman for his countrymen. God would give him messages and warnings to deliver to the Jews. God would hold him accountable for faithfully doing so. Essentially the same charge is delivered in chapter 33. Why is it repeated?

The charge in chapter 3 seems to have been part of Ezekiel's initial calling to the role of prophet. As best we can tell, he had faithfully carried out that role. It is possible that Ezekiel's fervor had waned and he may have needed a bit of recharging. Remember that his wife just died. The personal cost of being God's prophet may have begun to overwhelm him. The other possibility is that God was fortifying him for what was about to happen. Immediately following this section, a messenger comes with news of the fall of Jerusalem. This would send shock waves among the exiles, even among those who fully expected it to happen. It is possible that God knew that Ezekiel would need an extra measure of strength and resolve, and he provided it to him by renewing his call.

As part of this, God gave Ezekiel a new message to deliver to the people. Part of it is found in Ezekiel 33:11-16:

Say to them, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"

Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, "The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness." If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be

remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. And if I say to the wicked man, "You will surely die," but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right — if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live.

God is a God of second chances. If evil people will repent, they will find favor with God. God is NOT a God who wants people to "rest on their laurels." Righteousness is a way of life, not something that one does to "get it over with." If you were a righteous person last year but now abide in wickedness, God only sees that you are a person abiding in wickedness.

Walking with God is to be a way of life and not an event. It was true for the exiles in Babylon. It is true for us.

## **2.20 News of the Fall of Jerusalem**

Ezekiel 33:21-33

In the twelfth year, tenth month, and fifth day of exile, a man arrived at the place where Ezekiel was. He had escaped from Jerusalem and brought news of the fall of the city to Nebuchadnezzar's army. The people were in shock. They were also indignant. After all, God had given them this land. Who was Nebuchadnezzar to take it away from them?

In Ezekiel 33:23-26 we read:

Then the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, the people living in those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession.' Therefore say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Since you eat meat with the blood still in it and look to your idols and shed blood, should you then possess the land? You rely on your sword, you do detestable things, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?'"

The land had been given to the people contingent on their faithfulness. They were not faithful. Therefore they did not get to keep the land. It was simple, but hard for the people to accept. God again promised to bring real desolation upon the land.

## **2.21 Bad Shepherds and Fat Sheep**

Ezekiel 34

Ezekiel 34 has a theme common in the prophets. God promises to judge the leaders who have taken advantage of the people. They are bad shepherds who feed off of the sheep but do not care for them. Because of this, the sheep are scattered all over the earth with nobody to care for them.

God promises to rescue his sheep from the nations where they are scattered and to tend them as his own flock. He will give them the care that the bad shepherds did not. This is a promise of return from exile.

God then turns his attention towards the flock. Ezekiel 34:17-19 says:

As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?"

God does not like the rich who take advantage of the poor. He does not like the sheep who drink the clear water for themselves and then muddy it for everyone else. God's standard is for men to take care of each other. He promises to bring judgment on those who take advantage of the less fortunate.

God is going to rescue the innocent of his flock and bring them into their own pastureland. Ezekiel 34:22-24 says:

I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.

This is a promise to bring the people back to their own land from their exile and to plant a Davidic king over them to rule them in righteousness. He will bring prosperity and fruitfulness to the land. Verse 26 promises "showers of blessing." The people will live in safety under this Davidic king. This is a Messianic prophecy.

## ***2.22 Prophecy Against Edom***

Ezekiel 35

Chapter 35 seems like it ought to be part of chapter 25. It contains more prophecy against the Edomites. Because the Edomites rejoiced over the fall of Israel and Judah, God will bring judgment upon them.

## ***2.23 Prophecy to Israel***

Ezekiel 36

God now speaks to the nation of Israel. Because they have borne the scorn of other nations, God will uphold them. God will restore them to their land and make them fruitful and numerous. No longer will they suffer the ridicule of their neighbors. God also makes it very clear to them why he is going to restore them. Ezekiel 36:18-23 says:

So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols. I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, "These are the Lord's people, and yet they had to leave his land." I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have

profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes."

They are not being restored because they deserve it. They were punished because they profaned God's name by their conduct. Bringing them back into their land and making them fruitful once again is a demonstration of God's grace to them and to the surrounding nations. It is God's way of restoring dignity to his name. If the people would not do it for him, he would take care of it himself.

## **2.24 The Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones**

Ezekiel 37

Chapter 37 contains one of the best known visions in the Bible. Ezekiel saw a valley full of dry bones – human remains. As he watched, God joined the bones back together into complete skeletons and then gave them tendons, muscle, and flesh. God breathed life into them and they became a vast army of living human beings.

The bones represent Israel/Judah. The nation was as dead as the bones. The people's hope for life was as dead as old dry bones. God promised that the day will come when he would knit them back together into a nation that would be faithful and serve him.

Beginning in verse 15, Ezekiel has another visual lesson. He is told to take a stick and to write on it, "Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him." He was to take a second stick and write on it, "Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him." He would then take the two sticks and hold them in one hand. They would be joined into a single stick into his hand. God told Ezekiel that the people would ask the meaning of the sticks. He was to tell them that God was going to take the refugees from Israel and the exiles from Judah and join them back into a single nation. They would be one people, faithful to one God. They would have one Davidic king over them. God would reestablish his presence and his sanctuary among them.

When was this prophecy fulfilled? Under Cyrus, the exiles from Judah returned from Babylonian captivity and began to rebuild. The nation was reestablished, but there was no substantial population from Israel included. The descendants of the Israelites who were still in the land were the Samaritans, and they were hardly embraced as part of the new nation. The prophecy may have been fulfilled in the twentieth century with the establishment of modern Israel. If that is the case, then we have yet to see the building of the promised sanctuary and we have yet to see a nation wholly devoted to God and living under a Davidic king. We cannot pinpoint the fulfillment with certainty.

## **2.25 Gog, of the Land of Magog**

Ezekiel 38-39

Chapters 38 and 39 envision a future time when God's people have been regathered from other nations and are living back in the Promised Land. There will be a time when they are living in safety and peace. Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, will mount a war against the Israelites. Many of the surrounding nations (Persia, Cush, and Put) will join him.

Who is Gog? The years have produced a great amount of speculation as to who this ruler is. There are a few things (ONLY) that we know for sure from the text. This would be a future ruler

from Ezekiel's perspective. He would come after the nation had been reestablished (after the fulfillment of the dry bones vision in Ezekiel 37). Furthermore he would come from the north. Just about anything else is speculation.

There is a fairly common interpretation of this passage that sees a modern fulfillment of this prophecy. They see Gog from the north as being from one of the nations of the former the Soviet Union (when most of the books that espouse this interpretation were written, the Soviet Union still existed). Persia, Cush, and Put were Iran, Ethiopia, and Libya (those are the modern names of these ancient nations). They see a coalition of these nations attacking Israel and they view it as part of the tribulation described in Revelation. Some of the commentators go to great lengths trying to prove this theory, saying for instance that "Meshech" means "Moscow," etc. Because we have seen no historical fulfillment of this prophecy, it is possible that such an interpretation is accurate. We may well be perched on the wrap-up of history as we know it and these may be the nations that will invade Israel as one of the last big battles.

When the invasion occurs, Ezekiel says that God will intervene on Israel's behalf. He will come down in a supernatural way and defeat the invading armies. There will be so many killed that it will take months to bury their bodies. The Jews, along with all of the nations of the world, will witness the power and glory of God. His relationship with his people will be renewed. They will understand that they were exiled for their sin and that they were regathered because of God's mercy and grace. God will pour out his Spirit on his people.

Note that Revelation 20 again mentions Gog and Magog. Revelation 20:7-8 says:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – to gather them for battle.

After the millennial reign of Christ, Satan will be loosed for one final rebellion. He will summon the leaders of the nations, referred to as Gog and Magog, to join him in battle. This does not seem to be a reference to the same battle described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Instead, the Revelation passage uses a symbolic reference to the Ezekiel passage. Ezekiel established Gog and Magog as specific rulers who would oppose Israel militarily. Revelation treats that as a fulfilled, historical reality and uses Gog and Magog to refer generically to rulers who would be willing to join Satan in a rebellion against God.

## ***2.26 The New Temple and the New City***

Ezekiel 40-48

Chapter 40 opens with:

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 fall of the city – on that very day the hand of the Lord was upon me and he took me there.

God transported Ezekiel (probably in a vision) to Jerusalem and gave him a glimpse of the future. It began with a tour of the new temple. Ezekiel is given a measuring rod and told to measure the various dimensions of the new temple. Chapters 40-42 give a very detailed description of the temple and surrounding buildings seen by Ezekiel on this day

In chapter 43, Ezekiel sees the presence of God come to the temple. He says that it was like the vision he had seen by the river Kebar (the wheel-in-a-wheel vision). The glory of God entered the new temple from the east. Remember that in chapters 10-11, the glory of God had departed

from the temple and had exited to the east. (Recall also that on Palm Sunday, Jesus entered the city and the temple from the east.) God makes it known to Ezekiel that he intends to take up residence here once again. His people will return to be with him there and they will forsake their former idolatrous ways.

Chapter 43 then gives instructions about resuming the sacrifices at the new temple. There will be a series of offerings, including sin offerings, made to dedicate the new temple.

The vision continues in chapter 44. There is further admonition to turn from their sinful ways and live in righteousness. There are instructions to the Levites who will serve at the temple. These are in line with the Levitical laws given concerning the priests.

Chapter 45 contains instructions about allotment of land for the prince of Israel. It gives instructions to this leader about leading the people properly. There are admonitions that people should engage in honest business practices. There are instructions about special offerings expected from the prince. There are instructions for Passover observance.

Chapter 46 gives further instructions concerning the festivals and feasts and the sacrifices to be made at them.

Chapter 47 talks about a river that flows out of the temple area and waters the entire land. It supports considerable marine life. Trees grow on its banks. Fishermen can stand along its banks and cast their nets. The land along the river will be divided up among the twelve tribes of Israel. There is a new land inheritance prescribed for each tribe, with a special allotment given for the temple area. Chapters 47-48 describe the manner in which the land will be apportioned, including the land for Jerusalem itself. The book closes with:

And the name of the city from that time on will be:

THE LORD IS THERE.

This vision of Ezekiel in these last nine chapters raises some interesting questions. What is this temple? When the exiles returned from Babylonian captivity, a new temple was built, but the description of it does not match what we see in these chapters. From the description in the text, this river is not the Jordan, so where is this river? When was a new allotment given to the twelve tribes? It has not happened yet.

All this being the case, this must describe some future temple. But if that is the case, why does the text prescribe sin offerings and guilt offerings to be made in the new temple? Why would God require sin offerings post-Jesus? Christianity rests on the promise that the sacrifice of Jesus took care of the sin problem once and for all.

The answer to this question may be implied by 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, which says:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Lord's Supper is a time when the church remembers the sacrifice of Jesus. It is not a time when Jesus is sacrificed again. The church was instructed to carry out this observance periodically because those who have already been saved by the blood of Jesus need to be

reminded of the high price that was paid for their salvation. However, the 1 Corinthians passage says "you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." When Jesus returns, this observance will cease. There is no indication, however, that the need to remember the sacrifice will go away.

One possible explanation is that when this future temple is built, the sacrificial system will resume, but it will have a new meaning. The sacrifices will not be for atonement. They will serve as a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ, just as the Lord's Supper will have done from the time he ascended until the time he returns.

Ezekiel saw a time in the future when God's temple will be reestablished in Jerusalem and he will dwell in the midst of his people. This gave hope to the people in exile in Babylon. It gives hope to us today. As we sit back and watch God's history continuing to unfold, we can excitedly look forward to the day when we can all live in a city whose name is "THE LORD IS THERE."

### 3 Daniel

In the English Bible, Daniel is included in the section that contains the writings of the prophets. This is not true in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible has three major groupings. The first are the books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The second grouping is the prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 and 2 Samuel are one book in Hebrew), Kings (1 and 2 Kings are one book in Hebrew), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The last grouping is the writings: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles (1 and 2 Chronicles are one book in Hebrew). Its positioning indicates that the people who organized the Hebrew canon of Scripture considered Daniel to be more of a book of history than a book of prophecy. Notice that it is grouped with the historical exilic and post-exilic books of Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

In fact, Daniel is a book of history and of prophecy. The book contains twelve chapters. The first six contain a historical narrative. The last six are apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature is prophetic in nature. The word "apocalyptic" comes from a Greek word meaning "removed from being hidden." It is a revelation, an unfolding of the future. Apocalyptic literature is normally a recording of a dream or a vision. Such was the case with Daniel. Other sections of Scripture that are apocalyptic in nature include the book of Revelation, the latter part of the book of Ezekiel (roughly chapters 37 - 48), and most of the first seven chapters of Zechariah.

The apocalyptic sections of Daniel have challenged commentators and students of the Bible for years. Pick up any two commentaries and you will find at least two different interpretations between them. Be wary of anyone who will offer a sure-fire infallible explanation of the images in the vision. The fact that so many people confidently disagree on their meaning indicate that this is not a place for dogmatic interpretations. Still, the images have been given to us for a reason and they are worthy of our attention and study. We will seek to understand them as best we can.

Since the book opens with a historical narrative, it gives a fair amount of information about who Daniel is and the circumstances of his life.

#### **3.1 *Deportation and Rise to Position of Influence***

Daniel 1

The book opens by setting itself historically. Daniel 1:1-2 says:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

The first major wave of deportation to Babylon began under the reign of Jehoiachin. There were smaller groups of captives taken prior to that first major wave. Among those taken captive in the smaller, earlier groups was Daniel.

In the third year of Jehoiakim (which would have been 605 BC), Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and subordinated Jehoiakim. Some of the treasures of Judah were taken to Babylon.

In addition, Nebuchadnezzar ordered that some of the nobility of Judah be brought to Babylon. Among those were four individuals named Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. From this we know that Daniel (and his friends) were among the nobility of Judah. He was a member of the royal family.

Those who were taken to Babylon were brought there to be educated in the ways of the Babylonians and then to be brought into the service of Nebuchadnezzar. They were given Babylonian names. Daniel became Belteshazzar; Hananiah became Shadrach; Mishael became Meshach; and Azariah became Abednego.

The king ordered that the captives be given three years of training. During this time, they would eat food from the king's table. Daniel refused to eat the food, presumably because it did not conform to Jewish dietary laws. The official in charge of Daniel was sympathetic with his desires, but was concerned about his own well being. If he allowed Daniel to eat food other than what the king had ordered and Daniel became weak as a result, the official could be killed for disobeying the king.

Daniel and his three friends made a deal with the official. They asked to be fed only vegetables and water for ten days. At the end of the ten days the official could assess their health. If there was a problem, they would eat as he had asked. If not, he should let them continue with their chosen diet. So they did this. At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his companions were healthier than any of the other men who had been brought to Babylon. All of the captives were put on the same diet as Daniel and his friends.

At the end of the three years of training, the men were brought before Nebuchadnezzar. He interviewed them all and found Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to be superior to all others. They entered the service of the king. They were the wisest of the wise men in the king's court.

Verse 1:21 says that Daniel remained in service until the first year of king Cyrus. This gives us some clue as to his age. Cyrus came to power around 540-539 BC. Daniel was taken to Babylon around 605 BC. Thus he lived in captivity for around 65 years. One would assume that he was a young man (rather than a child) when he was taken captive. If he was fifteen when that happened (he would probably have been older) then it means that he must have lived and served at least until age 80. Daniel lived a long and important life, serving and influencing the most important men of his time.

What may have seemed like a tragic turn of events (being taken captive in the first place) was God's plan for positioning his man of influence in a strategic place at a critical time in history.

### **3.2 *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream***

#### Daniel 2

Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream. The image bothered him such that he could not sleep. He summoned his wise men and astrologers so that they could interpret the dream. (Daniel does not seem to be included among those who came to the king at this time.) The wise men and astrologers made a rather logical request. They asked Nebuchadnezzar to tell them what the dream was so that they could explain it. Nebuchadnezzar wanted some sort of sign that their interpretation was valid. To assure himself that they were genuinely inspired and not speaking simply from human wisdom or conjecture, he would not tell them the dream. In fact, he required them to tell him what the dream was and to explain what it meant. They told him that nobody could explain to him what his dream meant if he would not tell them the dream. Only a god could do such a thing. Nebuchadnezzar told them to do it or he would have all of them put to

death. They continued to protest and he went into a rage and ordered the execution of all the wise men and astrologers in Babylon.

We assume that the execution process began and that some men were killed. We know from the text that one of the king's officials came looking for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, since they were considered to be among the wise men in Babylon. When the official came to bring them in for execution, Daniel asked what was going on. The guard told him what had happened. Daniel went to the king and asked him to give Daniel a bit of time so that he might explain the king's dream. Nebuchadnezzar decided to give Daniel a chance.

Daniel and his friends prayed to God to reveal to them the dream and its meaning. God did. Daniel went back to Nebuchadnezzar and told him that he could explain the dream. The executions were stopped.

When Daniel came before the king, the first thing that he did was give credit where it was due. 2:27-30 says:

Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these: As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

Nebuchadnezzar had seen a large statue. Its head was made of gold. Its chest and arms were made of silver. Its belly and thighs were made of bronze. Its legs were of iron and its feet were a mixture of iron and baked clay. As Nebuchadnezzar looked at the statue, a rock was hewn, but not by human hands. The rock rolled into the statue and smashed the feet of iron and clay. The whole statue – the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold – all smashed into little pieces that were blown away by the wind. All that remained was the rock. The rock grew and became a huge mountain that filled the earth.

Daniel explained the meaning of the dream. The head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. God had given him the position of being head over everything on earth, for a time. The silver represented a second kingdom, inferior to the gold. The second kingdom would rise to power and overthrow the first. The bronze was a third kingdom, inferior to the silver. It too would rise to power and overthrow the second kingdom. The iron represented a fourth kingdom that would be as strong as iron. It would smash everything. This kingdom would rise and overthrow the third kingdom. As represented by the mixture of iron and clay, the kingdom would be partially strong and partially brittle. The people of the kingdom would not be truly united, as clay will not truly unite with iron.

In the time of the fourth kingdom, God will set up another kingdom, represented by the rock not hewn by human hands. This kingdom will crush the kingdom of iron and clay. The first four kingdoms will cease to exist, but God's Kingdom will grow and endure forever. It will ultimately dominate the entire earth.

Nebuchadnezzar was impressed. Daniel had not only told him what he had dreamed, but he offered a logical explanation of the dream. Nebuchadnezzar said in 2:47: "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery." Daniel was given many gifts and was made a very high ranking official in

Nebuchadnezzar's court, in charge of all of the other wise men. At Daniel's request, his three friends were made administrators over provinces in Babylon.

Like Joseph before him, God allowed Daniel, a captive in a foreign land, to interpret dreams in order to put him into a position of high influence in government.

So what are the four kingdoms? Neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Daniel had any way of knowing which kingdoms these would be, because God did not reveal that. Historically we can map them, however. Babylon was overthrown by a coalition of the Persians and the Medes. They would be the kingdom of silver. Following them, the next world power was Greece, led by Alexander the Great. Greece fell from power after Alexander's death. The next great kingdom was Rome. Rome was the kingdom of iron. Rome was a powerful force and like iron, smashed everything in its way. The Roman kingdom was also a mixture of conquered and conqueror, never really united and always trying to splinter. It was both strong and brittle. While this kingdom was in place, the rock not cut by human hands was born – Jesus of Nazareth. He established his kingdom during the reign of Rome. Ultimately the debauchery of Rome was blown away by the righteousness of God. The empires of Babylon, the Persian/Mede coalition, Greece, and Rome have long ceased to exist. The kingdom of righteousness has been growing for 2000 years and has spread to the ends of the earth.

It was a good dream.

### **3.3 Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight**

Daniel 3

Nebuchadnezzar set up a 90 foot golden image. The text never identifies the nature of the image. Likely it was an image of Nebuchadnezzar. If so it was a rather immodest act. He also proclaimed that when music was sounded that everyone had to bow down and worship the image. If anyone refused, he would be cast into a furnace and burned to death.

Why did Nebuchadnezzar do such a thing? There is no good reason. It is possible that he was talked into it by people in his court who were jealous of the favorable treatment being received by Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. People probably knew that they would never bow to a statue.

Nebuchadnezzar's ordinance went into effect. Right away Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were brought before him because they defied the order. It is curious to know why Daniel was not brought with them. It is unlikely that he bowed to the statue. Possibly he was out of town when all of this happened.

Nebuchadnezzar asked the three if it was true that they did not worship the image. They confirmed that they did not and would not. Nebuchadnezzar said that if they did not go along with the order they would be thrown into the furnace. He asked them what god would be able to save them then. They replied in Daniel 3:16-18:

O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

They expressed absolute faith in God. They confessed that they did not know whether or not God would choose to save them from the furnace but that it did not matter. Even in the face of

the destruction of their flesh, they trusted their spirits to God. They would serve him and obey him even in the face of death.

This made Nebuchadnezzar very mad. He was being defied to his face. He ordered the furnace to be heated up seven times hotter than usual. He had the three tied up and thrown in the furnace. The fire was so hot that the soldiers who carried them and threw them in died from the heat. Soon Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace and saw four men walking about. There were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and a fourth man who "looks like the son of the gods" (3:24). They were all alive and well.

Nebuchadnezzar went to the furnace in amazement. He called out to the three and told them to come out of the furnace. Nebuchadnezzar examined them and saw that there was no harm to them. Not a hair of their heads was singed. They did not even smell like fire.

In 3:28-29, Nebuchadnezzar said:

Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.

Nebuchadnezzar was impressed. He promoted these three men to even higher positions in Babylon.

This story has a moral, but it is not the one that is often offered as a conclusion to the episode. Often people will quote this story and conclude that if we trust God he will protect us through the fiery furnace. That is not what the story said.

Trust God. He may choose to protect you through the fiery furnace but he may not. He may allow your flesh to be completely destroyed. That is not the issue. Do not be flesh-minded. Be spirit-minded. Trust him, obey him, and love him even in the face of death. It is the only way that you will ever have life.

### **3.4 *Nebuchadnezzar, the Madman***

Daniel 4

Chapter 4 is written from the perspective of Nebuchadnezzar. It appears that he wrote this section and Daniel incorporated it into his book or else Daniel wrote it, but simply transcribed the words of Nebuchadnezzar.

The king had another dream. None of his Babylonian wise men could interpret it. Thus he summoned Daniel. (It is hard to understand why he did not simply go to Daniel in the first place.) Nebuchadnezzar saw a large tree. It was very prominent and visible. It had beautiful leaves and abundant fruit. It provided food and shelter for all creatures – the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. While he was looking at it, a messenger from heaven came and declared that the tree should be cut down. Its branches would be removed, its leaves stripped, and its fruit scattered. Its stump and roots would remain in the ground. It would be drenched by the dew and would live among the animals and plants in the wild. Its mind would be changed from that of a man to that of an animal until "seven times" pass. All of this would be done so that all living things would know that God is supreme over all things.

The fact that the tree had the mind of a man indicated that the tree represented some human. "Seven times" is an undefined period of time, but the "seven" indicates that it is a perfect amount of time according to God's timetable.

Daniel was very hesitant to explain the dream. Nebuchadnezzar saw his reluctance and figured that it was bad news for Nebuchadnezzar, but he encouraged Daniel to tell him anyway.

Daniel said that the mighty tree was Nebuchadnezzar. His power and his kingdom were great and far-reaching. God was going to cut him down. He would be given the mind of an animal. He would live in the wild. He would be drenched by the morning dew. The fact that the stump and roots were left intact indicate that his kingdom would be restored to him, however. After "seven times" pass, i.e. when the time is appropriate, God would restore him.

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that all of this would happen in order to get Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge God. He encouraged the king to abandon any sin in his life and to be kind to the oppressed.

Twelve months later, Nebuchadnezzar was strolling on the roof of his palace. He looked around and saw his kingdom and his palace and was impressed with his own stature. He said in 4:30, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" This is not a man who is all consumed with giving God his place and with ministering to the oppressed. It was arrogance, pure and simple. As a result, the dream was immediately fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar's mind was reduced to that of an animal. He went to live in the wild. When the appropriate amount of time had passed, his mind was restored and he lifted his eyes to heaven and praised, honored, and glorified God. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was restored to him and he was greater than before. In the last verse of the chapter, Nebuchadnezzar summarizes what he learned from the experience: "And those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

All of this reminds us of the Isaiah 14 passage, which is directed at the king of Babylon. Isaiah 14:12-13 says:

How you have fallen from heaven,  
O morning star, son of the dawn!  
You have been cast down to the earth,  
you who once laid low the nations!  
You said in your heart,  
"I will ascend to heaven;  
I will raise my throne  
above the stars of God;  
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,  
on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.

Fancying oneself to be equal with God does not set well with him. Arrogance and pride will be brought low. It is still true. Those who claim credit for God's ministry will be brought down. God will take credit for the things that he does, even if he has to pry it out of our hands. It is easier on us to give it to him freely.

### ***3.5 The Handwriting On the Wall***

Daniel 5

In chapter 5 we find that Belshazzar is now king. In the introduction we noted that the progression of kings was as follows:

Nebuchadnezzar 605 - 562 BC  
Evil-Merodach 562-560 BC  
Neriglissar 560 - 556 BC  
Labash-Marduk 556 BC (2 months)  
Nabonidus 556 - 539 BC  
Belshazzar 553 - 539 BC

In fact, several men reigned between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Evil-Merodach was a son of Nebuchadnezzar who reigned only a brief time. Neriglissar was Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law and Labash-Marduk was Neriglissar's son, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson. Nabonidus was another son-in-law. Belshazzar was actually Nabonidus' son and Nebuchadnezzar's grandson. Belshazzar was coregent with his father.

Belshazzar was having a feast. For some reason, he decided that he wanted to drink out of the goblets that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem. He ordered that they be brought out and he and his guests drank from them. 5:4 says "As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone."

While they were engaged in this behavior, a human hand appeared out of nowhere and began writing on the wall. It wrote the words "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN."<sup>1</sup> People stood and watched it and were terrorized by it. The king summoned his wise men, astrologers, magicians, etc. None of them could explain it to him. The queen (who may have been Belshazzar's wife, mother, or grandmother – we are not sure) remembered that Daniel had interpreted dreams for Nebuchadnezzar. She suggested that Belshazzar summon Daniel.

Daniel was brought to the palace. Belshazzar told him that if he could interpret the writing he would give him gifts and make him the third most powerful man in the kingdom. Daniel told him to keep his gifts and power but that he would interpret the writing for him.

First he reminded him that God had humbled Nebuchadnezzar by reducing him to madness and had restored him only when Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself before God. Belshazzar knew all of this but still chose not to submit himself to God. He even had the audacity to take the articles from God's temple and use them in a feast honoring idols. This is why God sent the writing.

MENE meant that God had numbered the days of Belshazzar. His reign was coming to an end.

TEKEL meant that he had been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

PARSIN meant that his kingdom would be torn from him and divided among the Persians and the Medes.

That very night, Darius the Mede overthrew Belshazzar and took the kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Mene, Tekel, and Parsin are all Hebrew words having to do with weights, scales, or units of measurement. Mene and Parsin were both units of weight, with a Parsin equaling half of a Mene. A very rough translation would be "Your pounds were weighed and came out to be half-pounds." The image is that what existed would be divided in two, which was reflected in Daniel's interpretation.

### **3.6 The Lion's Den**

#### Daniel 6

As of chapter 6, the Babylonians were no longer in power. The captives in Babylon found themselves under the control of a Persian/Mede coalition. Babylon fell to the Persians and the Medes in 539 BC. Darius was the king of the Medes and Cyrus was the king of the Persians.

Darius appointed 120 governors over the land. He appointed three administrators to supervise the 120 governors. One of the three administrators was Daniel. Daniel was a righteous man. What he did he did very well. He impressed Darius so much that Darius intended to set him over the entire kingdom. His peers were jealous. They began to try to find a way to get Daniel in trouble. They searched but could find no fault in anything he did. There was no basis that they could use to get him in trouble with Darius. They decided that the only thing they could go after was his religion.

The other administrators and the governors went to Darius and asked him to issue a royal decree. They wanted him to decree that nobody could pray to any god except Darius for a period of thirty days. Anyone caught violating the decree would be thrown into the lion's den. Darius foolishly put this decree into law such that it could not be repealed. Daniel was not concerned with the law.

Daniel continued to go to his room at regular times during the day to bow down and pray to God. One day when he was doing this, his enemies came in, found him praying, and brought him to Darius. They reminded Darius that he had made the law and told him that they had found Daniel violating it. Darius quickly realized that he had been tricked into cooperating with them and he desired to find a way to get Daniel out of this trouble. Unfortunately the law could not be repealed and the men had the legal authority to enforce it.

They took Daniel and threw him in the lion's den. They put a large rock over the mouth of the den to seal it. As they took Daniel away, Darius said to him (in 6:16), "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

The king had a sleepless night. He did not like what had happened and he was genuinely concerned for Daniel's safety. He could not eat.

When morning came, the king went to the den and called out to Daniel. Daniel replied calmly that God had sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. He said that God did this because Daniel was innocent in his sight. He had done no wrong.

Darius was overjoyed. He had Daniel removed from the den. He gathered up Daniel's accusers and their families and had them thrown in the den in Daniel's place. Before they hit the ground the lions crushed them.

Darius issued a decree that all people everywhere should reverence the God of Daniel.

This episode is very much like the experience that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had with Nebuchadnezzar. A king set himself up as an object of worship. Righteous men would not give that king the worship that was due God, even under a penalty of death. They did what was right and trusted their fate to God. As was true with the story of the three men in the furnace, we must be careful not to draw a false conclusion from this story. We must not conclude that if one does what is right, God will spare him from the jaws of the lions. He may not. The lesson is that we must do what is right and trust our spirits to God. He may allow your flesh to be completely destroyed. That is not the issue. Do not be flesh-minded. Be spirit-minded. Trust him, obey him, and love him even in the face of death. It is the only way that you will ever have life.

It is reasonable to believe that Cyrus had knowledge of this story. The righteousness of Daniel and his deliverance by his God may have been what impressed Cyrus to give such favor to the Jews. This may be part of what prompted Cyrus to decree that the Jews were free to return to Judah and rebuild the temple of this mighty God. We never know what far-reaching implications our choices may have.

### **3.7 Daniel's Apocalypse**

Thus far in Daniel, one section has been apocalyptic in nature – Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. Chapters 7-12 contain dreams and visions that Daniel himself had. They are all apocalyptic in nature.

Daniel had three dreams and/or visions (plus some angelic encounters). Each was accompanied by an explanation of what it meant. The explanations themselves are not crystal-clear in meaning. They require interpretation. Christians will normally interpret these explanations in light of the literature of the New Testament, with particular emphasis being given to the book of Revelation. Daniel and Revelation use much of the same imagery. They have a great deal in common. The imagery in Revelation is not crystal-clear, either. It, too, must be interpreted. When interpreting one of these books, however, one should do it in light of the other.

The church has had a feast interpreting these books, particularly in the twentieth century. Christians have divided into factions based on interpretation of end-time events. We have premillennialists who will not talk to postmillennialists unless they are joining together to criticize amillennialists. We have cessationist dispensationalists who can only see the charismatic movement as a work of the devil. We have pretribulationists who have a bit of common ground with midtribulationists but feel a passion to convert posttribulationists from their errant ways.

People get passionate about this stuff. Caught in the middle of their rhetoric is the average Christian, who finds Daniel 7-12 and all of Revelation difficult to understand, and who does not know which camp to join in the eschatological wars that prevail around him. So how does one know where to stand?

The only thing that one can know for sure is that anyone who says he has all of this figured out probably does not. Anyone who offers an explanation for the images in these books is offering his own interpretation. He may or may not be right. If his interpretation turns out to be wrong, it does not change the truth of the Scripture. We must be careful about people who offer their interpretations as dogma.

The fact is that God did not choose to give us clear-cut explanations. He gave us images and symbols to ponder. Does that mean that we should not seek to understand the images? No. It means that we have no business getting cocky about it when we think we understand what they mean.

Many plausible explanations have been offered for these books. As we go through this section, that is what we will seek – plausible explanations. I have no "thus saith the Lord" interpretations to offer.

### 3.7.1 The Dream With the Four Beasts

#### Daniel 7

Daniel's first dream came during the first year of the reign of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. It predates the events of chapter 6. The elements of the dream are as follows.

- Daniel saw a great deal of wind (the word "wind" in Hebrew can mean "spirit" – this could imply spiritual activity) blowing on the sea. Four creatures emerged from the sea.
- The first looked like a lion, but it had wings like an eagle. Its wings were torn off and then it stood upright, like a man. The heart of a man was given to it.
- The second looked like a bear. It had three ribs in its mouth (ribs of prey) and was told to get up and eat as much flesh as it wanted.
- The third looked like a leopard, with wings like a bird and four heads. It was given the authority to rule.
- The fourth beast was the most terrifying. It had large iron teeth that crushed its victims. It would trample underfoot whatever it did not eat. This beast also had ten horns on its head.
- As Daniel watched, another little horn sprang up. It uprooted three of the original ten horns. This new horn had eyes like a man and a mouth that spoke boastful words.
- A throne appeared. God came in great majesty and sat down in the throne. A book was opened before him and he sat in judgment.
- The horn continued to speak boastfully. The horn waged war against the saints of the Most High and defeated them for a period of time. The beast that had this horn was killed and its body was destroyed. The other three beasts had been stripped of their power but were allowed to live a while longer.
- One like the son of man appeared and approached God. He was given glory and power and the authority to rule. All people of every nation worshipped him. He established a kingdom that would never pass away.

Daniel did not understand the dream. He was troubled by it. As the vision continued, he approached one of the creatures in the dream (presumably an angel) and asked what it all meant. The explanation that he received included the following points.

- The four beasts were four kingdoms that would spring up from the earth.
- The saints that belong to the Most High will receive the kingdom that would never pass away.
- The fourth beast is a kingdom unlike other kingdoms. It will devour and trample the whole earth. The ten horns represent ten kings that come from that kingdom. After those ten kings, another king comes. He will subdue three of the other kings. He will speak boastfully and will oppress the saints. He will "try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time." (verse 25)
- God will judge and power will be taken away from this king. He will be completely destroyed. Power will be given the saints. The Most High will establish a kingdom that will last forever. All will worship and obey him.

As I said, the explanation given in the book requires interpretation. What follows is an explanation characteristic of one who is a premillennialist and who believes in a pretribulational rapture of the church. It is not dogma.

Daniel's dream is similar to Nebuchadnezzar's in that it contains four images representing four kingdoms. Since Babylon was still in power at the time of the dream, it seems reasonable to interpret these the same way. The kingdoms are Babylon, the Persian/Mede coalition, Greece, and Rome, with Rome being the fourth beast. Interestingly, the lion and the eagle (the features of the first beast) were the symbols of Babylon. After the death of Alexander the Great (of Greece), his kingdom split into four pieces (the third beast had four heads).

The fourth beast, which we assume to be Rome, receives the most explanation in the book and requires the most interpretation on the part of the reader. The beast seems to represent the Roman Empire. The horns seem to represent entities (individuals or nations) that emerge from the Roman Empire. When the Roman Empire reached its height of power, it encompassed the entire Mediterranean world. Its rule went from Spain, through France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Israel, Egypt, and the rest of North Africa. It extended as far north as England and as far east as the Caspian Sea. Europe was ruled by Rome. Rome fell from power in the fifth century AD, at which time the empire broke into individual nations. Many students of the Bible feel that the ten horns that emerge from the beast represent the nations (kings) that emerged from the Roman Empire. (This is obviously not the only possible interpretation. The horns could represent 10 emperors, for example. Others have suggested that the horns represented popes that emerged from the Roman church.)

So what is this eleventh horn? What do we know about this horn?

- It subdued or displaced three of the existing horns.
- It had eyes like a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully.
- He wages war against the saints.
- He will try to change the set times and the laws.
- The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.
- God will bring judgment against him. He will be stripped of power and destroyed. His kingdom will be replaced by the everlasting kingdom of the Most High.

One of the things that must be understood in order to grasp the meaning of this vision is the identity of the saints. There are two possible interpretations for who they are: the church (which would include Christian Jews) or the Jews. Some have said that this could not be the church because it was being written by Daniel, who had no knowledge of the church. If he did not know about the church then he could not have written about it. We must remember that Daniel also never heard of the Roman Empire. If this is truly apocalyptic, then Daniel could have written about anything. At this point in the book, we do not have sufficient information to know who "the saints" are. We shall revisit this question when we look at chapter 11, where we receive more information about this group of people.

Whoever the saints are, they will be harassed by the little horn for "a time, times and half a time." This is generally understood (and could possibly have been translated) "a year, years and half a year." This seems to mean three and one-half years (a year = one year, years = two years, plus half a year).

So what do we know from this vision? Daniel saw a time when a king (or emperor or pope or whatever) would arise from the remnant of the Roman Empire. He would subdue three of the existing horns, which means that he probably conquered other nations (emperors, popes, whatever) in his rise to power. He is arrogant in his speech. He will try to change the set times and the laws, which means that he will put his own government into place. He will oppress the saints – whether that means the church or the Jews – for three and a half years. He will be judged by God, stripped of his power, and destroyed. His kingdom will be replaced by God's everlasting Kingdom.

We do not have enough information at this point to infer much else about the meaning of this dream. As we consider the other dreams and visions of Daniel, more of the pieces of this puzzle will be apparent.

### 3.7.2 The Vision of the Ram and the Goat

Daniel 8

Two years later, Daniel had another vision. The elements of this vision are as follows:

- He saw a ram with two long horns. One was longer than the other, but the one that was longer grew later than the other one. The ram charged to the north, south, and west and no other animal could stand against him.
- As Daniel watched the ram, a goat appeared. The goat had a prominent horn. He came from the west. He charged the ram and shattered the horns of the ram. The ram was powerless against the goat. The goat became very great and powerful. Suddenly his great horn was broken off and four other horns grew up in their place.
- Out of the four horns, another horn emerged, small at first but it grew to be great. Its power extended to the south and the east and toward "the Beautiful Land." It grew until it reached the heavens. It threw some of the "starry host" to earth and subdued them. It set itself up as a god and stopped the daily sacrifice to God. It desecrated his sanctuary. It set itself up as an object of worship. Sacrifices were offered to it. The saints were given over to it. It became quite prosperous but there was no truth in it.
- Daniel heard someone ask how long it would take for the things in the vision to be fulfilled – "the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?" (8:13) The response was that it would take 2,300 evenings and mornings. After that the sanctuary would be reconsecrated.
- The angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel and explained the vision to him.
  - The events in the dream concern end-time events.
  - The ram with two horns is the Persian/Mede coalition.
  - The goat is Greece. The large horn is the first king of Greece.
  - The four horns represent four kingdoms that will emerge from Greece.
  - From those kingdoms, a king will arise. He will attain great power. He will bring about great destruction. He will destroy powerful people and the holy people. He will be a man of deceit. At a time when people feel secure, he will destroy them. He will oppose the Prince of princes and then will be destroyed by God.
- Gabriel assured Daniel that the things in the vision were true, but they concerned the end times. He told Daniel to "seal up the vision," which we assume to mean that he was to write it down but not to tell people about it then.

Much of this we have already seen. The Persian/Mede coalition would rise to power. It would be overthrown by Greece. The first king of Greece (the prominent horn) is Alexander the Great. After his death, four kingdoms emerged from Greece (remember the leopard in the last vision had four heads).

Alexander had no heirs. Thus when he died, his kingdom was divided among four of his generals. Ptolemy was given Egypt and parts of Asia Minor. Cassander got Macedonia and Greece. Lysimachus received Thrace and other parts of Asia Minor. Seleucus received areas including Syria, Israel, and Mesopotamia.

Around 150 years later, a man by the name of Antiochus IV Epiphanes rose to power in the Seleucid dynasty. He came to power in 175 BC by murdering the rightful heir to the throne. In 170 BC Antiochus went to war with the Ptolemies in Egypt and took control of that land (his power extended to the south). On his way back, he stopped in Jerusalem (the Beautiful Land) and desecrated the temple, took the temple treasury, and otherwise harassed the people.

Two years later, Rome forced Antiochus out of Egypt. Israel was now his southern border. Partially because he intended to tighten his control of Israel in order to secure his border and

partially because he wanted to vindicate himself after being humiliated by Rome, he attacked Jerusalem and burned it. He killed hordes of people. He forbade people to follow Mosaic law or to observe their feasts or Sabbaths. He put an end to the daily sacrifices. He set up idols and altars to Zeus in the temple. As a last act of humiliation and subjugation, on December 16, 167 BC, he sacrificed a pig on the altar of the temple. He forced the Jewish people to offer unclean sacrifices and eat pork or else be put to death.

Antiochus was obviously not a popular person with the Jews. A revolt was led by Judas Maccabeus. Late in 164 BC he reclaimed Judah as an independent state and he refurbished and reconsecrated the temple. The timing of this was right at 2,300 days after Antiochus first came to Jerusalem, burning the city and desecrating the temple. Another way of timing this would be to say that this happened approximately 1,150 days after Antiochus stopped the sacrifices, which would equate to a combined total of 2,300 evening and morning sacrifices. (By the way, the reconsecrating of the temple by Judas Maccabeus is the event celebrated by the festival of Hanukkah.)

Antiochus is clearly an evil king. Is he the person described in Daniel 8? Is he the person described in Daniel 7? (Do Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 describe the same person?)

The events surrounding Antiochus have a striking parallel to the events of Daniel 8. There is one factor missing, however. Gabriel said that this was a vision of end-time events. Gabriel also said that this person would oppose the Prince of princes, which we interpret to mean Jesus Christ. That was not fulfilled in the life of Antiochus.

This seems to imply that Antiochus was a type of one to come, the one we normally refer to as the antichrist. I interpret this "son of Antiochus" described in Daniel 8 to be the same person described in Daniel 7. If we piece together what we know of him from Daniel 7 and 8 we see the following characteristics:

- He is an arrogant ruler.
- He will put his own government into place.
- He will attain great power and will bring about great destruction.
- At a time when people feel secure, he will destroy them.
- He will be a man of deceit.
- He will oppress the saints/the holy people. He will oppress them for three and a half years. It seems that early on in that process he will force sacrifices to God to cease. He will set himself up as an object of worship. He will desecrate the temple with unclean sacrifices and force the people into unclean and lawless living. 1,150 days later (around three years and two months) the temple will be cleansed, presumably when the Prince of princes comes to overthrow this ruler. The saints/holy people will be rescued from this evil ruler. An everlasting Kingdom of righteousness will supplant the kingdom of this evil ruler.

At this point, it seems appropriate to reiterate one point. We are laying a great deal of interpretation on top of Scripture. The Scripture is inerrant. The interpretation is conjecture.

### 3.7.3 Seventy Sevens

#### Daniel 9

The events of chapter 9 take place during the first year of Darius the Mede. This would have been around the time that Daniel was thrown into the lion's den.

Daniel had heard the words of Jeremiah and had understood that the exile was to last for seventy years. This greatly disturbed him, because he longed to go back to Jerusalem. Thus he

shared his heart with God. Daniel prayed and confessed the corporate sin of Israel. He recognized that what they were experiencing was exactly what the law of Moses had promised for disobedience. The law is filled with consequences for disobedience. Remember the speech in Deuteronomy 30:15-20, which are among Moses' parting words:

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God had told them repeatedly that if they were disobedient they would be taken from their land. Daniel knew that and he knew they deserved what they were getting. Still, he cried out to God for mercy. The punishment may have been just, but it was painful.

As Daniel was praying, the angel Gabriel returned to him with a message from God. The message is in Daniel 9:24-27:

Seventy "sevens" are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens," and sixty-two "sevens." It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two "sevens," the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven." In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

We have another passage that requires a great deal of interpretation for it to make sense. Again, what follows is interpretation and not Scripture.

A few general words of explanation are in order before trying to piece together the meaning.

"Anointed One" is the Hebrew word "Messiah." In Greek this is "Christ."

It is generally accepted that the word "sevens" means "seven years." Thus, for instance, "seventy sevens" means "seventy groups of seven years," or 490 years.

The seventy sevens are divided into three groups. They are:

- Seven sevens (49 years),
- Sixty-two sevens (483 years), then
- One more seven (7 years)

The timing given in the passage is:

- The issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem
- Seven sevens (during which the rebuilding seems to take place) plus sixty-two sevens
- The Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.
- The city and the sanctuary will be destroyed.
- A ruler will arise at the beginning of the last "seven". He will confirm a covenant with many.
- In the middle of this seven, he will put an end to sacrifices and offerings. He will set up an abomination that causes desolation in the temple.
- At the end he will have the judgment of God poured out on him.

Doing simple math to add and subtract year numbers would not yield an accurate rendering of this passage. The reason is that the Jewish calendar had a 360 day year. We now reckon time according to the Gregorian calendar, which normally has 365 days in a year, but on leap years has 366, unless it is a centennial year, in which case it goes back to 365, unless it is a multiple of 400, in which case it goes back to 366. You see the confusion. But let's try to follow it through.

The cycle above begins with the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. In fact, there were four different decrees given concerning the return to and rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The first decree was issued by Cyrus. It is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and in Ezra 1:1-4. This was a decree to rebuild the temple. It has no reference to rebuilding the city. The second decree was given by Darius I and is found in Ezra 6:1-12. It is a confirmation and strengthening of Cyrus' decree. Again, it references the temple only. Artaxerxes gives a decree in Ezra 7:11-26. The focus of this is on reinstating the ordinances of the temple. The last decree that we find is that of Artaxerxes in Nehemiah 2:1-9. This decree commissioned Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the city itself, particularly the walls. Of the four decrees, this one most closely matches the reference in Daniel 9:25, because it is the only one that addressed the rebuilding of the city as opposed to the temple. This decree of Artaxerxes was issued on March 5, 444 BC. Thus the clock would start ticking at this date.

The first seven "sevens," or forty-nine years were spent rebuilding the city. The walls only took a few months to rebuild, but only after the walls were secure could the rebuilding of the rest of the city take place.

Following that is a period of sixty-two "sevens." This plus the seven "sevens" spent in rebuilding would add up to sixty-nine "sevens," or 483 years. These 483 years were reckoned according to the Jewish calendar. Thus they were 483 360-day years. This equates to 173,880 days. If one starts at March 5, 444 BC and counts forward 173,880 days, he will end up at March 30, AD 33. By no small coincidence, this is Palm Sunday of the year AD 33. This is the day that Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It is the day that he presented himself to the nation as their Messiah. It was also the tenth day of the first month of the year, according to the Jewish calendar. This was the day that the sacrificial lamb was to be selected for the Passover observance (which occurred on the fourteenth day of the month). This was the day when the Anointed One was selected to be cut off and to become the lamb that was slain for the sin of the world.

We know the events of that week. Jesus was crucified and buried. He was raised from the dead.

Jesus was crucified in AD 33. In AD 70, the Romans responded to a Jewish rebellion and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. It was burned and the temple was torn down. The next phase of Gabriel's explanation had been fulfilled. The generation that cut off the Messiah saw their city and their sanctuary destroyed.

The next item in Gabriel's message indicated that a ruler will rise at the beginning of the last "seven." It seems that when he comes to power, the temple will be rebuilt, because it says he puts an end to the sacrifices and offerings and that he sets up an "abomination that causes desolation" in the temple. For this reason, many people feel that this last "seven" refers to seven years that are yet to take place.

It seems that the temple will be rebuilt at some point. A ruler will then come into power and will "confirm a covenant with many." This probably means that at the beginning of the seven years, this ruler will make a number of treaties. This is in line with the prophecy in Daniel 8:25 ("When they feel secure, he will destroy many..."). In the beginning this leader will come across as a great maker of peace. He will lull people into a feeling of false security. This presumably includes making some sort of peace treaty with Israel, giving him a degree of power over that land.

Then, according to 9:27, things get nasty. In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifices and offerings and will set up the abomination in the temple (which probably implies that he will make himself an object of worship). This fits with the prophecies we saw in chapters 7 and 8. We have already heard about a ruler would stop the sacrifices and set himself up as an object of worship in the temple. We have heard that he would oppress the saints for three and a half years, which would be the last half of the "seven." In the end he will receive the destruction and judgment of God.

Thus far, what we know about this ruler bears a striking resemblance to the beast of Revelation 13. Revelation 13:5-8 says:

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

Because of this striking similarity, many people equate the ruler in Daniel with the beast in Revelation. The seven year period in Daniel is generally considered to be the great tribulation period in Revelation.

### 3.7.4 The Kings of the North and South

#### Daniel 10-12

Chapters 10-12 are logically one section. They tell of one last vision that Daniel had, concerning a great war. He received the vision during the third year of Cyrus. The vision must have been terrible, because Daniel mourned and fasted for three weeks after he received it. At the end of this period an angel (most likely Gabriel again, but the angel is not identified) appeared to him again. The words that the angel spoke in Daniel 10:12-13 give us some fascinating insight into the realities of spiritual warfare:

Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

The implication here is that the prince of the Persian kingdom, Michael (one of the chief princes), and the king of Persia are spiritual entities. A human prince of the Persian kingdom could not provide resistance to an angel.

We know that angels can be warriors. We have seen God send armies of angels to defeat the enemies of Israel. Here, however, we have an example of the angels of God having war with the angels of Satan. We also see that both sides have hierarchies – princes and kings. They have territories assigned to them. Many people consider these concepts to be colorful aspects of religious novels, but they are right here in Scripture. Furthermore we see that the army of Satan is able to provide formidable resistance to the army of God. The warfare is real. We see these ideas again in Daniel 10:20:

Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come;

In chapter 11, the angel gives a long and very detailed explanation of the dream/vision that Daniel had three weeks earlier.

11:2-4 tells Daniel that there will be three more kings in Persia followed by a fourth, more powerful king. This one will start a war with Greece. Then a mighty king will appear for a time. He will achieve great power and then his kingdom will be divided into four pieces and given to others, not his heirs. Historically we know that Cyrus of Persia was followed by his son Cambyses, then Pseudo-Smerdis, then Darius I Hystaspes. Following him was the much more powerful Xerxes, who did indeed start a war against Greece. The result of this war was the wrath of Alexander the Great. Alexander conquered Persia. He was a powerful king and he died at an early age (thirty-two) with no heirs. His kingdom was divided among his four generals. Among these four were the Ptolemies, who controlled Egypt, and the Seleucids, who controlled an area that included Israel.

Verses 11:5ff describe alliances and warfare between this king of the South (the Ptolemies) and king of the North (the Seleucids). The detail given in these verses was fulfilled in history with stunning accuracy. So detailed is the text and so accurate the fulfillment that many have doubted that Daniel could have been written in the 6th century BC. A better explanation for the accuracy is that it was inspired by God, who sees history from end-to-end.

In verse 11:21, we see the introduction of Antiochus IV Euphron. In 11:30, we see the time that Rome opposed his conquest of Egypt. To make himself feel better after this defeat, he turned his wrath on the holy people in Israel. He forced them to abandon their religious ordinances. He set up an altar to Zeus in the temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar. He forced the people to offer unclean sacrifices. 11:32-35 talks about those who resist him. This is the Maccabean revolt.

In verse 11:36, the narrative shifts a bit. We turn from events that have been fulfilled very literally in history to events that are yet to unfold. This is indicated by two things. First of all, what follows has not happened historically. Second, verse 36 indicates that he will be successful "until the time of wrath is completed," which has eschatological overtones.

Another king rises to power. This king seems to be neither from the Ptolemies or the Seleucids. We conclude this because in 11:40 he is engaged in war with both the king of the south and the king of the north. 11:36-37 indicates that he will have no respect for existing religious systems, but instead will set himself up as an object of worship. Aided by his gods (i.e. Satan and his angels) he will wage great war on nations around him. He will set up his own people as rulers over conquered lands. He will meet the king of the south and the king of the north in a battle in the middle east. Edom, Moab, and the leaders of Ammon will be spared but other nations will fall to him – including Egypt (11:40-43). He will establish himself in Jerusalem (11:45). He will bring great annihilation. 12:1 says "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then." Michael the prince of angels will arise to do battle against him. He will be defeated.

This figure seems to be the same ruler described in the previous chapters. As the book of Daniel progresses, we get more and more information about the nature of this man and we have a fuller picture of the manner in which the end of time will unfold.

And what about the saints/the holy people that are alive when all of this happens? 12:1-2 says:

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

There is going to be a time of great distress in the end. This is the period we normally call the Great Tribulation. Many will die – righteous and unrighteous alike. In the end, God's angels will intervene and bring down the evil ruler. This marks the conclusion of time as we know it. When that happens, those who are alive will be judged. The dead will be raised as well to face final judgment. But who are these people? As was stated in the discussion of chapter 7, this could be the church or it could refer to the Jews.

The problem with assuming that this refers to the church is that it ignores an event described in the New Testament. Although it is not called this in Scripture, it is normally referred to as "the rapture." 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 says:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

There is an event where those who belong to Christ will be taken from the earth. This does not parallel any of the events in Daniel. How does one reconcile the fact that there will be righteous saints still on earth to be judged at the end of time with the fact that those who belong to Christ will be snatched away before the end of time?

It seems that prior to Daniel's final "seven" (i.e. prior to the Great Tribulation,) the rapture will occur. The church, which would include believing Jews, will be taken from the earth and will escape the events of the tribulation. More than likely when this happens, it will cause a number

of people who have not trusted Jesus to become convinced that he is who he said he is. Many Jews today are familiar with the text of the New Testament; they just do not believe that it is true. When an event like the rapture occurs, they will be convinced.

However it comes about, there will be many Jews who come to Christ in the last days. We know this to be true from Romans 11:25-36. The saints/holy people of Daniel are the Jews. In the end, they will be judged. Their criteria for salvation is the same as that of every other person. Those who come to Christ in the end will be saved. The rest will face "shame and everlasting contempt."

Daniel found this whole experience to be a bit overwhelming. He asked for further explanation. He was told in verses 9-13:

Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

The words are closed up and sealed until the end of time. This is fascinating. The Jews have the book of Daniel in their Bible, but it is in the "Writings" section and is not considered to be prophecy. Their very fate is wrapped up in this book and yet it is basically sealed from them until the end of time. When that end comes, many of them will come to realize the implication of the words of Daniel. Many will come to Christ and will be purified. And the wicked will continue to be wicked.

Again the three and a half year timing is given (1,290 days) from the time that the abomination occurs until God intervenes and destroys the evil ruler. Curiously a second figure of 1,335 days is given, forty-five days later than the original event. Perhaps this is when the events of Zechariah 12:10-13:1 will take place:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives.

On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

Perhaps forty-five days after the evil one is defeated, Christ will return to the Jews who will then be awaiting his arrival. If that is the event suggested, then what an understatement it is to say "Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days."

Daniel is one of the truly great books to be found in the Bible or any other piece of literature. The stories of Daniel in the lion's den and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace

encourage us to make righteous choices. The apocalyptic parts encourage those who long to be with the Lord, intrigue those who are curious to know the events of the future, and challenge those with logical or mathematical minds and have a compulsive need to make the pieces fit together (I plead guilty on all three counts.) But what do we do with this information?

We stand encouraged to make righteous choices. We live our lives knowing that God has a plan and that history as we know it will come to a conclusion. We stand equipped with the knowledge that life may (will) be difficult at times, wars will rage, people will die, evil will rise and fall, but that God is in control of it all.

Trust God. He may choose to protect you through the fiery furnace or the lion's den but he may not. He may allow your flesh to be completely destroyed. That is not the issue. Do not be flesh-minded. Be spirit-minded. Trust him, obey him, and love him even in the face of death. It is the only way that you will ever have life.

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