EZEKIEL

A study of his book
by Pastor David Legge

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Ezekiel - Chapter 1
"The Man And The Message"

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Ezekiel and chapter 1, Ezekiel chapter 1, and what I want to do for you this evening is lay a foundation that I believe will be essential for the weeks that lie ahead. So do bear with me. We'll be looking at verse 1 specifically this evening, but we won't be looking at too much of chapter 1 tonight. I want to lay the foundation and the context of this great book that we hope to study in the weeks that lie ahead.

Verse 1 of chapter 1: "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him".

I think you would agree with me that false assurances are awful things. To be under a delusion or to be under a false assurance, on occasions, humanly speaking, can be fatal. But if we broaden that concept of a false illusion and assurance into the spiritual sphere, we find that false assurances can lose men and women their eternal immortal souls. As we go through the Old Testament scriptures, and specifically the minor and major prophets, we find that the Old Testament people of God - more often than not - were under false assurances. They had deluded themselves. In many occasions, and we've seen it in recent days in the book of Habakkuk and Haggai, when the prophets of God - the men of God - came unto the people of God with the message of God, all they did was protest. It seemed to go against their lifestyle, everything they held dear. The prophets of God that came to them were a threat.

So we hear protests, and we hear them within the book of Ezekiel also, where the people of God say: 'Can God judge His chosen people?'. Prophets of judgement come. Prophets of righteousness come and declare God's judgement: God's wrath will be poured out upon the people of God - and the people of God object and say: 'But we are God's chosen people, we are God's elect. God cannot judge us. Some say God's holy city cannot be destroyed. We dwell in Jerusalem, and you as a prophet come and tell us that enemies of God - Babylon - will come and sack the city and burn it? That can never happen! The temple of God dwells within Jerusalem, and the temple of God is the symbol of God's presence with His own people. Are you telling me that God would let our enemies come into the chosen city of God and destroy it?'.

The objection is: are God's promises toward us sure, no matter what? I mean, if God has said that we are secure, if God has said we can be assured of His protection and His safety, is that not enough? To have the
word of God, to be the chosen people of God, to have the covenants of God, to have the law of God and the
testimonies of God, to have the Ark of God, the Ten Commandments, to have Aaron's rod, to have the Holy
of Holies where God's Shekinah glory dwells - is that enough?

The message of the prophet Ezekiel is the message of all the prophets. That is what Israel failed to recognise
toward their God. Oh, they could recognise that they were God's chosen. They could recognise that they, out
of all the races of the earth, were most blessed, and all the other races of the earth would be blessed through
them. They recognised they had all the promises of God, but what they could not bring themselves to
recognise was their own sin. In failure to recognise their sin, they failed to recognise the holy God that they
were called to serve. They continued sinning, and as they continued to sin they assumed that God's smile
would always be upon them no matter what they did because they were God's people, because they were in
the covenant of promise, because God had shone on them in days gone by. They felt that they were secure,
that they couldn't be moved from the firm foundation of Zion. That false assurance was further cemented in
their mind by the false prophets who came along too. They simply agreed with that mindset. They preached:
'Peace, peace', when there was no peace.

In the first deportation of the children of Israel to Babylon you find that, in the little concentration camps all
around the nation of Babylon, that these false prophets were going around and prophesying falsely, telling
the people: 'Don't worry, you're out of the land of promise now but God's promises are still toward you. You
are still God's people. God loves you. God is still smiling upon you. And just in a few days, a few weeks,
perhaps even at the most a few months, God will send an army from Jerusalem and He will defeat your
enemies and He will bring you all back home to the land of Zion'. Then the second deportation took place.
Then the third deportation, and with the third deportation of Jews from the city of Jerusalem, the Babylonian
empire burnt it to the ground. Jeremiah, a contemporary of Ezekiel, is heard to say in response to the
messages of the false prophets who speak: 'Peace peace', when there is no peace, the cry of God's people
goes up: 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved'.

What was Israel's mistake? Their mistake was they failed to grasp the abominable nature of sin, and the
terrible holiness of God almighty. We are saved, and I believe very strongly in the eternal security of the
believer, but do you know something? If any doctrine that we have and believe and hold onto dearly
becomes a cloak of false security, of a false assurance that will make us numb to sin and numb to the
holiness of God, we must beware! If anything in our lives makes us numb to the awfulness of sin, and to the
goodness and the righteousness of God, there may be something wrong with the balance in our doctrine. For
the consequence, as we look at the prophet Ezekiel, is this: that if we do not realise the awfulness of our sin
and the holiness of our God, we will cause the glory of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit, His fullness - if
you want to say, the candlestick of the Lord Jesus Christ within His church - there is the danger that we
cause the glory to depart. Along with the departing of that glory there is a forfeit of reward.

Ezekiel was a prophet of judgement but, you know, Ezekiel was more than a prophet of judgement because
he brought hope to God's people. First of all, he brought judgement to them, but at the end of all the
judgements that he pronounces upon the people of God, and then upon the Gentile nations round about them,
there is a message of great hope. There is a message of reconciliation, a message of reconstruction of the
nation of Israel, of the temple of Israel, of the city of Jerusalem. But the reason why Ezekiel's message was
so unpopular was that he brought a message of hope that rested upon the completion of Israel's repentance.

All the prophets were preachers of repentance. That probably accounts for why most of them were martyred,
including the last great prophet, John the Baptist, who lost his head because he was a preacher who stood in
the wilderness - no one else was doing it - and said: 'Repent!'. What often happens is, when the people of
God do not repent, in order that God drives them to that holy act of repentance He must discipline them. That
is what is happening here within Ezekiel: He is disciplining His own people, and in order that Israel would
be cured from the sin of idolatry they had to actually enter into the city of idolatry, and be sickened with it all under the judgement of God.

So we find Judah in Babylon. We find them singing the Psalm, Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?". Away from Jerusalem, away from God's physical, visible presence upon the earth, Israel are separated from all that they know to be a closeness and a nearness to God - here they are in Babylon! But isn't it amazing that, while this remnant of Judah sits by the rivers singing depressing songs, that in verse 1 of Ezekiel chapter 1 you find a man, and while all around is despairing - what a contrast! While these people have already put up their harps on a willow tree and sat down to weep and to mourn and to cry for the loss of Jerusalem, this man Ezekiel is seeing visions of God. Ezekiel sits by the river Chebar and he sees the Shekinah glory of God leave the temple of Jerusalem. He sees that glory follow the people of Judah throughout their pilgrimage, right down to the land of captivity in Babylon. There they are - God's people and God's prophet in the midst of captivity and bondage - he is seeing that very Shekinah glory of God.

As we go through this book we will see that Ezekiel sees the glory of God in so many visions, so many pictures and allegories throughout this book, and then God takes him to the middle of the book and shows him how that glory, that Shekinah, has departed from the people of Judah. But then - what a message of hope - as we find him coming to the end of this book, in the final chapters, and how he points to a day that is yet to come when that Shekinah glory will return to the people of God.

'And Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth its successive journey's run'.

We must, as we look at this book, realise that everything within it is for Israel. We do not confuse the church of Jesus Christ with Israel, but as we look at Israel in this book, surely we must, as Thomas Watson says: 'Think in every line you read that God is speaking to you'. Specifically this message is only to the nation of Israel, but there are spiritual principles within this book that we need to apply to our everyday lives.

As we seek to do that we look first of all, this evening, at the man Ezekiel. It's very interesting to note that there is nothing at all known about Ezekiel in the whole of the word of God, but that which we find in the book of Ezekiel. We find out that he was born just a year or so before the law book was discovered in the temple, as part of Josiah's reforms. In order to turn the tide, good King Josiah decided that he was going to bring the law of God back to the centre of Jewish faith and politics. He sent servants into the temple to dig deep and to look for the Torah of God. When they found that law it was read out to the whole nation, and a measure of reform and godliness was brought back to Judah.

Ezekiel was born into that atmosphere, but we find as we read the historical records of the Old Testament, that when he was barely a teenager, he would have heard the news of Josiah's death at Megiddo. There good King Josiah went to stop Pharaoh Neco coming in and invading God's nation. Here is a king of Judah willing to stand for God, willing to stand for what is right, but he is killed. That message of his death must have been devastating to the nation. Then as that teenager grew, it's most likely that he heard the preaching of Jeremiah. He may even have known the ministries of Habakkuk and Zephaniah. But one thing is absolutely sure: that he witnessed within his society a period of political instability following good King Josiah's death. He witnessed Judah's fortunes shifting from godliness, shifting from righteousness to the evil, wicked alliance and allegiance of Egypt. Then as we come to these matters within the book of Ezekiel, we find it moving from the wicked nation of Egypt to great captivity in the land of Babylon.
Now, we know from this book, as we scour through it, that Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel. By this time Jeremiah was an old man. If you can picture this in your mind as we read this book, Jeremiah was ministering to a remnant of Jews in Egypt. Daniel was taken to the court of the king of Babylon and had become the Prime Minister of the whole of that empire. And here is Ezekiel with the captives in the second deportation from Jerusalem, and he is brought down to the river Chebar - the rivers of Babylon. In fact, if you go to Iraq today there is a tomb there which is identified as the tomb of Ezekiel. It probably is because it's round about the same area that Ezekiel ministered.

What do we know about this man Ezekiel? There are three things that I want you to note from these verses that we have down before us. The first: Ezekiel is a priest. The second: he is a prisoner. The third: he was a prophet. Now, as you read verse 1 you find that Ezekiel was a priest. It says it very clearly - and for him to be a priest in Old Testament times it would mean that he came from the upper crust, the upper class of society. His father would have been a priest. Like Jeremiah, his contemporary, who was a priest and a prophet, so Ezekiel would be a priest and a prophet. Every eligible man from this upper class would begin his service in the temple. It would be a great honour to come for your first sacrifice, for your first offering at the age of 30 years of age. However, Ezekiel, when he was 30, was in captivity in Babylon. He was unable to fulfil his calling as a priest while living in exile far from Jerusalem. He's away from the temple. He's away from everything that they know of, as Jews, that means 'God' and 'the environment of God'. But we read that at the age of 30, instead of beginning a priestly ministry, he begins the ministry of a prophet. So he is a priest who ministers as a prophet.

But the second thing that we see is that he is a prisoner, and if you know your Old Testament history you'll know that in the year 606BC the Babylonians came into Jerusalem and they took the first deportation of Jews off to Babylon. We know that in that first deportation Daniel went with that group. Then a few years later there was the second deportation in 597BC, and this time young Ezekiel was taken at about 24 or 25 years of age. If you turn to chapter 3 and verse 15 you will see that Ezekiel's home in Babylonia was a place called Tel-Abib. It was to the north of Babylon on the river Chebar, near the river Euphrates. There he settled in a kind of concentration camp of deportee Jews. This young man Ezekiel settles down in the mud huts of exile's Judaism. In chapter 8 and verse 1 you find that Ezekiel had his own house. This concentration camp was nothing like Nazi concentration camps, or concentration camps that we've seen in recent days on our television from Kosovo and places like that. This was a place where they were looked after rather well, but yet they were away from Jerusalem. It seems that they had their own homes, that they could do their own thing, they could worship their own God.

We find as we read the book that not only had Ezekiel his own home, but he was married. We find that, as we read through the rest of the book, that his wife eventually died in the very year of the final siege that began in Jerusalem. The exiles among whom Ezekiel lived, like him, had come from the upper crust of Judean society. We believe that they were privileged folk, that they had everything they needed. As Dickens says, in some measure: 'For them it was the best of times but it was the worst of times'. They had all the affluence they needed. They had all the bread they needed. They had all the wealth they needed. They had all the health they needed, but they were out of Jerusalem, they were separated from God - and there was this dichotomy, this contradiction in terms: being well off, but being separated from their God. This group of privileged people was the people that were renowned for not listening to God's prophets in the past, for not heeding the warnings of exiles that would come. These people were the people who were sitting crying: 'The harvest is ended, the summer is over and we are not saved'. These were the people who were listening to the false prophets, who were waiting every single day for deliverance from Babylon, and be brought back to their riches, the wealth and their prestige in Jerusalem.

As far as they were concerned, Ezekiel's message was a load of rubbish. He was very entertaining in the dramatisations of God's message that he did. In fact, as far as they were concerned all he did was divulge
entertaining prattle that was meaningless. But no matter how much they laughed, the message of Ezekiel is this: God would vindicate His prophet, and God would vindicate His truth. If you turn with me to chapter 33 and verse 33 you see that - chapter 33 and verse 33 - and out of all the crying of the ridicule of pagan Judaism there comes this voice from God: 'And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them'.

Opposed to the message of the false prophets, the exile would not be short. They would not be delivered very soon. They would not be spared. In fact, many of them would be slaughtered in exile, or would die in exile. But the miracle of this man Ezekiel, as a priest and as a prisoner is this: that in distant Babylon, away from the temple, away from Jerusalem, away from the visible Shekinah glory of God, he is inspired by the Spirit of God to proclaim the message of God to God's people. Not only that, but this prophet of God is inspired to live the message before them.

That brings us to how he was a prophet. At 30 years old he begins his prophetic ministry. He continues it for just over 20 years. He preaches this message - a message that no one will listen to, a message that no one seems to take heed to. His prophetic ministry began in the 5th year after the arrival in the land of exile - verse 2 shows us that. He becomes a preacher in the midst of this concentration camp. He becomes a missionary to his own people, telling them to repent, telling them to turn back to God, that the Shekinah glory might return to His people.

Like his New Testament equivalent, John the Revelator in the book of Revelation who also was a prisoner on the isle of Patmos, this man like John, in prison, saw the heavens opened. They were given visions of God. What often happens when that happens is that such visions put men on their faces. Ezekiel was called in his ministry to much personal and painful suffering. He was called to live out his message. He was called to demonstrate it in his very life and, I don't know about you, whether you've read this book or not, but as I read it, it brings home to me the words of the apostle in Hebrews 11: 'Others had trial of cruel mockings and scouragements, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth'.

You know, as you read this book you find out that for some time this man Ezekiel was made dumb. He couldn't speak - and God did that! God ordered him on one occasion to lie on his side as a demonstration to the people of what they were like and who they were facing, and who they were turning to for help. He lived on loathsome food and God, again and again and again, commanded him to do these symbolic acts in order to get the attention of his own people. He was told to shave his head (that's a picture of him, by the way, on your study sheet), to shave his head and shave his beard - humiliation. He was told to act like someone fleeing from war. He was told on one occasion to sit and just sigh to himself. Then when his dear wife died that he loved so well, and as it coincided with the final demolishing of the city of Jerusalem that it was meant to illustrate, that man of God was told: 'Today you're wife has died, and today you shall not shed a tear'.

It wasn't easy being a prophet of God. I hope you can see the parallel of the age that Ezekiel lived in and preached in, and the age that we live and we seek to preach in. The message has not changed - the message is that they that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. The message is that it is a hard thing to be a holy man, to be a holy woman, to be a holy teenager. It's hard. It's difficult. Everything is against you. This world system opposes you in every way that it can, and if you seek to follow God with all your heart and preach the message that God has delivered, you will suffer for it. In fact the only thing, perhaps, that we are promised is persecution. But isn't it wonderful to hear from the lovely lips of our Lord: 'Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake'.
What a man! What was his message? In 1 Samuel and chapter 4 and verse 21 you find a word that is very descriptive of the nation of Israel at this particular time. The word is 'Ichabod'. Of course, it refers in the original context to an entirely different situation but we could aptly apply it to the situation in Judah politically, religiously, morally and culturally, in the time of Ezekiel. Ichabod: the glory has departed. It summarises the whole of this book, Ezekiel - the Shekinah glory has disappeared from God's people. That's what chapters 1 to 3 tell us: 'The glory that you're seeing now Ezekiel', these great visions of God - chapters 1, 2 and 3 - 'they have gone from my people!'. In chapters 4 to 24 we read that specifically: the departing glory from God's nation. Then in chapters 25 to 48 you find Ezekiel turns the tide and gives a message of hope: that God's glory will return to Israel one day, and there will be a temple rebuilt. In chapter 48, if you wish to turn to it for a moment, you see that great climax - the message of the prophet begins with Ichabod: the glory has departed, the Shekinah glory has disappeared, the only one that seems to be seeing it is the prophet Ezekiel, but God pronounces a message of hope. If they repent, God says in chapter 48 and verse 35: 'The Lord is there' - future - 'Prophet: the Lord will be there'.

This is a book of the glory of the Lord. The statement 'The Lord God' appears over 200 times. It is a book of 'Thus saith the Lord' - you read that 120 or so times. You also read that it's a book of 'The word of the Lord that came unto Ezekiel', you find that 49 times. The word 'Spirit' occurs 25 times, which is remarkable for the Old Testament scriptures. So you have here a prophet inspired by the Spirit of God, bringing the word of the Lord that came unto him, pronouncing: 'Thus saith the Lord, the Lord God over all the world, that His glory has departed from His people, but one day that glory will return'.

Now, I want you to get into the mind of the Jews at this time. It's important that you do it. It's important that you understand the context. Jerusalem has fallen, the Davidic house was cut off, the temple was about to be razed from the ground, the nation had been exiled from the land, and that brought with it a spiritual and emotional fallout. Nebuchadnezzar's victory over Jerusalem had dealt an awful blow to that false assurance that the people were under. It was as if their faith had failed them. In fact, more than that, they were emotionally and spiritually devastated and they were asking fundamental questions about their God: 'Is God impotent? Is the covenant God that we have given our lives to and sworn allegiance to - is He not all-powerful to save us? Has Jehovah betrayed us? Has He abandoned us in our greatest need?'. You know, to all intents and purposes for these children of Judah in Babylon, I'm sure that Merodach, the God of Babylon seemed to them to have prevailed over Jehovah. It seemed that he had gained the victory, and perhaps many of them were thinking: 'Well, should we not follow this god, this god who is stronger than Jehovah?'. You can imagine what it was like for God's prophet, Ezekiel, to face an audience like this - that was disillusioned, that were cynical and bitter and angry with God, and prophets of God, and all to do with God. This great house of rebellion had now collapsed, and there they were standing in Babylon, away from Jerusalem, away from God, crying: 'Is there no one to save us?'

Then for a period of about 10 years these false prophets are saying to the people: 'Don't worry, you'll return to the city. The city won't be destroyed. That's God's city'. But nevertheless, Jeremiah the prophet sends a message to Babylon, telling those people, contradicting the message of the false prophet: 'The city will be destroyed. The glory of God will depart from Judea'. Can we put Ezekiel's message and Jeremiah's message in a nutshell? Yes we can: 'The glory has departed but if - and only if - you repent, the glory will return'. This message of Ezekiel is a message of sin, a message of punishment, but a message of repentance and a message of hope of blessing in the future if the people of God repent. Ezekiel was coming, and what he was wanting to do was to destroy these false assurances, these false hopes and to awaken true hopes, true assurances from the word of God to the people of God.

Oh the parallels, at least for me, are staggering to our generation today. I think in many ways Ezekiel spoke to the darkest days of the nation of Judah. Indeed, as one writer said: 'He stood at the bottom of a valley in the darkest corner'. Do you not feel like that at times? I mean, you only have to listen to what's going on
around us. You only have to hear the moral standards of this world and our leaders and our church leaders. You only have to take a glimpse into your own heart and see how the lust within you seems to, like with a magnetic power, attract everything that is without there. It just comes in, and at times without you helping it, it saturates your mind and your heart. This man Ezekiel had to meet the false hopes of this people, and the preaching of the false prophets, their indifference, their despondency that was begotten in days of sin and days of disaster.

Do you know what Ezekiel means? 'God strengthens'. God strengthens! I mean, what else would you need if that was your task - if that is what God called you to - to face these rebellious people, to face them in the midst of their captivity and preach a message of repentance that grated and went against everything that they believed in, everything that they held dear? He needed to be strengthened by God. Look at chapter 3 and verses 8 and 9, where God strengthens him for his task. Chapter 3 and verses 8 and 9 - God says: 'Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house'. He needed his forehead strong, for this man would have to face everything that God's people threw at him.

Now, there are several themes within the book of Ezekiel that comprise and summarise the message that God was giving through the prophet. You find the four of them down on your sheet, and it really encapsulates everything that Ezekiel says. The first, and to me the most significant item, of the message of God through Ezekiel is 'The Transcendent Glory of the Sovereign God'. It's right throughout the whole of the book. Verse 1: '...by the river of Chebar...the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God'. The first three chapters are just saturated with Ezekiel's visions of God by the river of Chebar. As you read them - go home and read them - they are saturated with majesty, transcendence, dignity, royalty, divinity.

We see very clearly from it all that Ezekiel's sense of God was not that of a friendly neighbour who he might address on a first name basis. But in this book God is beyond creation, God is seen to be beyond the prophet, beyond the prophet's explanation. That's why you find that, when the prophet receives a vision of God, it is 'the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord' - verse 28 of chapter 1. It's always 'the appearance of the likeness'. He can't describe God because we can't describe God! He doesn't even describe the appearance of God. He can only describe the likeness of the appearance of God. He uses a way of speaking of Him that carefully avoids even the hint of actually seeing God or describing God, or 'if we could get a little bit of clay and make what God looked like to Ezekiel', or paint a picture of it, or get a computer screen that shows us the likeness of God, or get the BBC to show us the likeness of Jesus. That is why the Holy Spirit in His wisdom never tells us what He was like, because 'we know no man after the flesh; neither do we know God after the flesh, but they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth'.

Do you see the transcendence? Transcendence simply means 'He is above'. He cannot be explained. Now, how do we apply this to our lives? Well, this is how we apply it: the children of Judah knew what God was. They knew what He was like. Their fathers were the ones - Moses, who saw God face to face and talked with Him as a man talks with his friend. They received the law written by the finger of God, yet at this moment the glory of God had departed. They had forgotten the transcendent glory of the sovereign God that their forefathers once knew. Now, the question that we must ask of ourselves today is: 'Have we lost the awe for God that we once had?'. Have we lost the reverence for God that our forefathers once had? How do we know? The way to know is our relationship to sin. Just like these people, if we are making a lifestyle of sin and compromise and backsliding for ourselves, if we're rebelling against God like these people, then we will know.
Look at chapter 2 and verses 3 to 8. Verse 4, he looked, he beheld in the whirlwind. He saw a vision of God, verse 5, 'out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures'. Sorry, chapter 2 - I'm in the wrong chapter! Chapter 2 and verse 8: 'But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee'. Do you see the contrast? There was rebellious sinfulness, and the way that we can know whether we are acknowledging and whether we are in the awe of the transcendent, majestic, divine, awesome, sovereign God is: do we ignore our sin? Do we rebel against God and expect Him to smile at us? You have the sovereignty of God throughout this whole book - that He will make men and women know that He is the Lord. He will vindicate Himself, He will show that He has led His people into Babylon. God didn't let them go; God led them in! God did it. God was sovereign, bringing them through because He wanted those idolatrous children of God to go into that nation, and be sick with all their captivity and idolatry, and all the paganism, and to come out a pure people.

But secondly, the book tells us 'The Utter Sinfulness of Mankind'. Those two are always related by the way. When a man sees visions of God he always sees his own sinfulness, because his sinfulness is uncovered. You see that in Isaiah 6 and verse 5, that Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and His greatness and glory filled the temple, and he said: 'Woe is me! For I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips, I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: but mine eyes have seen the Lord'. Do you know something? Their sin stretched throughout their history and, in fact, within this book Ezekiel says that they acted like a prostitute - the people. From the day of their birth they were like a whore and they actually, in chapter 16 (we don't have time to read it) - chapter 16 verses 46 to 48 - he says that they were worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. What does that tell us? We're going to find out in the weeks that lie ahead, that God the Holy Spirit tells us in this book, and right throughout His word, that sin cannot be swept under the carpet. It cannot be made beautiful, it cannot be ignored, it cannot be excused, it is ugly, it is dirty, it is offensive. It cannot co-exist with the presence of a holy and a righteous God.

Thirdly, we find 'The Certainty of Divine Judgement upon Sinners'. In other words, it was the end of the road for Judah and Jerusalem. They were being cast out. If you want to liken it to the words of our Lord Jesus that we heard yesterday: 'The salt hath lost its savour and was thrown out to the road and trodden under the foot of Babylonian men'. Judah's destruction would be almost total and its people would be scattered to the four winds. Ezekiel says that they would be made 'meat for the cooking pot' and they would be cooked until they turn into a charred heap of ashes - chapter 24. No one would be able to save them. In fact, he says later in the prophecy, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were miraculously brought back from the dead, and stand between them and God, even all their righteousness accumulated in aggregate could not save God's judgement from His people. In fact, he said there wasn't a prophet able to stand within the gap. That doesn't mean no one was willing. I'll tell you what it meant: Ezekiel was probably willing but God made him dumb so that he couldn't stand in the gap. God was determined in His righteous wrath to judge sin, and He would judge it! The frightening thing that we find in chapter 9 and verse 6 is that he says: 'Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark' - that's the believing remnant - 'and begin at my sanctuary'. Begin the slaughter! Begin the judgement at the very place where the Shekinah glory has left - at the culprit! Is that not what Peter said in relation to the New Testament church: 'Judgement must begin at the house of the Lord'?

Fourthly and finally, it ends on a beautiful note because there is the message of 'The Hope of Future Restoration Through the King'. You know, there are three prophets in the word of God who wrote when they were out of the land - only three. There was Ezekiel, there was Daniel and there was John in the New Testament. All three of them wrote what we call, in theological terms, apocalypse - books that are highly symbolic in their language concerning God and judgement. But the books always end in a hopeful note for the future. You can see that very clearly because in the New Testament the book of Ezekiel is quoted at least 65 direct and indirect times, but 48 of those 65 are found in the book of the Revelation. The heart of the message of Ezekiel is this: 'The glory is gone. The glory will remain gone until you repent. But all of your
idolatry and all of your wickedness and all of your sinfulness will not pervert or prevent My sovereign eternal will, and I will bring My glory back to Israel'. Isn't that wonderful? That one day there would be a Davidic Prince. One day there would be one in Judah who would rule righteously. One day God would give His people, Israel, a new heart and a new spirit. He would raise up for them a new temple. He would put His glory, His Shekinah, back. The temple in chapter 10 that is abandoned would return to glory again in chapter 43. All that we see throughout this whole book is sin, punishment, repentance, hope and glory!

As we will see next week in the vision that Ezekiel has of God in chapter 1 - that round the Throne of God there is a rainbow, and right at the beginning of this prophecy God is pronouncing judgement, but He tempers it with His mercy. Oh, there's a great hope of Israel's restoration and it's embodied in the words of their national anthem that they sing even today. Listen:

'Our hope is not yet lost,
The hope of 2000 years,
To be a free people in our land:
In the land of Zion and Jerusalem'

One day in that land a remnant once again will show forth the glory of God in Jerusalem, but let me finish on this note: as we look at these studies week after week after week, would we please - in God's name - learn from Israel? 'Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come', Christ says to the church, 'unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent'.

Our Father, we thank Thee that the Lord Jesus is the light of the world. We thank Thee He is the express glory of that Shekinah that once dwelt above the mercy seat. But our Father, we also know that Israel ignored their sin and they still await the day when the glory will return. We thank Thee that it will return, but Lord help us not to be foolish enough to think that our glory will never depart, and to be under the false assumption that we are God's people, therefore all will be well. But help us daily to repent, to take up our cross and follow Him. In His precious name we pray. Amen.
Ezekiel - Chapter 2
"Visualising The Invisible"

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Ezekiel 1:1-28

1. The VISION
   a) The Whirlwind
   b) The Cherubim
   c) The Wheels
   d) The Firmament
   e) The Rainbow

2. The LESSON
   a) The Glory of God Cannot be Limited
   b) The Judgement of God Cannot be Avoided
   c) The Blessing of God Cannot be Taken for Granted

Now it's a delight to welcome you all to our Bible Reading this evening here in the Iron Hall. It's our second study in the book of Ezekiel, and it's great to see you all with us. We trust that as we meet around the word of God this evening, that the blessing will be ours from the Spirit of God. Ezekiel chapter 1 - now, we've a lot of material to get through this evening, and a lot of detailed verses of Scripture. So, please do read - I hope you've read this passage before you've come to the meeting tonight - but please do read it carefully with me, because we hope - God willing - to get through the whole of this chapter this evening.

Verse 1: "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him. And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that
they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings. And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake".

Martin Lloyd-Jones in 1939, at the outset of World War II, wrote these words: 'I feel that there is a tremendous opportunity for preaching. At the moment what is wanted is the comforting to help the people over the shock, but following that the need will be for the prophetic note to awaken the people'. In the light of a national catastrophe Martin Lloyd-Jones called for the comforting of the people, but after the comforting of the people the need for the prophetic note to sound and awaken the people. I believe that the vision that we have just read did exactly that for the prophet Ezekiel. It was both a comfort by the river of Chebar, that God was still with His people, that God was still speaking to the prophet - yet at the same time there was a great warning, a great note, for the people to awaken and to follow their God again and to repent for the glory had departed. It was a warning that God was coming to His nation in judgement.

He had already deported some Jews from Judah, from the city of Jerusalem, in the first deportation - Daniel went with that. Now Ezekiel is a captive in this concentration camp at the river Chebar, that is the second deportation. Then there would be the third, and with the third the temple would be sacked - destroyed - and the whole city of Jerusalem would be burnt down. So the call of God, through this vision to the prophet Ezekiel, is: 'Waken up! I am with you, I will not leave you. My glory has departed, but you must awaken, you must repent of your sin - or else there will be trouble'.

We learnt last week that the context of this great prophecy was a time of great change. Individual lives were being shattered, there was sudden catastrophe had come into homes, they were broken up. Rich people, the aristocracy, the politicians were all lifted out of their homes, from all their riches, from all their affluence and wealth, and were taken to the land of Babylon and placed in this concentration camp. It was a time of despair. We read last week from Psalm 137: 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and there we wept as we remembered Zion' - they despaired! They were away from God's city of Zion, they were away from the temple - the visible place where God's glory dwelt.

The false prophets were coming and speaking peace when there was no peace. The false prophets were telling the people that God would destroy Babylon, that God would deliver them and bring them back to their city of Zion - He would set the captives free. But the great prophet Jeremiah had sent the message to the people in captivity: 'Settle down', he said, 'you're going to be here for 70 years, you're not going to get out until it's God's time, and until you all repent of your sin'. A time of great change, a time of great despair, and we learnt that the primary theme of this great prophecy is the departure of the glory of God from Judah.
We ask the question, and I believe accurately: is there not a great parallel with our age in which we live today? Do we not live in a society that is wrecked with great change, and hearts that are broken and failing them for fear because of despair? Ecclesiastically, within the church of Jesus Christ, is there not a time of the departing of God's glory from within it? What is the answer? We can wreck our brains, and scan the Christian bookshelves, we can go to America, we can find out church growth plans, we can devise new praise bands, we can think of more casual services to attract the lost into the church, we can appeal to the sign gifts that have departed since the New Testament, we can do all sorts of things - but it seems that the departure is still there. The glory does not return, therefore what is the need of the hour?

I believe the need of the hour is exactly what that need was in Ezekiel's day, and that is: a fresh vision of the glory of God. That is the theme of this great vision that you see the picture of on the back of your sheet - William Macdonald's conception of Ezekiel's vision. You can see the notes at the bottom of that drawing, that it's not completely accurate, because if you notice the cherubim all should have four faces: each of a lion, each of an ox, each of an eagle, and each of a man - but, for the sake of necessity in drawing it, he has only one face there. But that gives you an idea of what we've just read, this complicated passage of Scripture - but the point is that we are faced tonight with a vision of the glory of God. That is what is displayed within this vision.

So, what is the vision that we have before us? Well, you know that Ezekiel is full of visions - and indeed I believe that chapter 1 of Ezekiel, this particular vision, is the key to all visions within the Scriptures. I believe
it's the key to all the visions within this book, within the book of the Revelation, within the book of Daniel, and I believe that it's the foundation of the apocalypse - the last book of our Bible. But we cannot fail to see, as we read this passage, how difficult it is to understand this vision. Indeed John Calvin, the great reformer, said: 'If anyone asks whether the vision is lucid, I confess its obscurity and that I can scarcely understand it'. Vernon McGee (sp?) says, in relation to Calvin's commentary: 'I am certainly a Calvinist in the sense that I must concur with his statement - neither do I understand Ezekiel's vision clearly'.

As we read these words, and they are so complicated, we can see right away that they defy the capacity of human speech for description. Whatever Ezekiel saw, as he tried to put pen to paper and put it into words that men and women could understand, it falls far short of the actual thing that Ezekiel saw. We must remember that as we read these words: this was not actually what he saw. What he saw could never be described! Yet nevertheless it must be written down, it must be conveyed, as it has been by the Holy Spirit. But we must remember as we begin this evening that this vision, above all things, was an experience. It wasn't a passage of scripture for Ezekiel, it wasn't a letter, but it was something that this prophet was caught up within himself - and we can never experience it. We can never fully understand what this man saw, and the only way we can share in it is in the words that he has left for us.

Now picture it, look at the diagram in front of you. He begins by sitting by the river of Chebar, and he is in a physical reality - OK? He's sitting beside that river, and he sees a physical storm coming towards him from the north. With that storm there are clouds and there are flashes of lightning, but as he watches that storm approaching him it's as if that storm is opened up - like curtains on a stage - suddenly drawn back to reveal a heavenly scene. Beyond those immediate curtains of earthly reality, the prophet Ezekiel is taken into a supernatural realm where he sees a vision of the chariot of God's glory. It seems that he sees this chariot as God rides triumphantly and irresistibly through all the eras of time.

You can see that he saw four living creatures, they're described as cherubim. You can see that they're connected with the chariot, yet they're individually distinct from it - they're not part of the chariot, but they're connected to it. Above all of that, you can see there's a throne. You can't see who's sitting on the throne, because there's a cloud in that diagram - but the word of God tells us that there is a man who sits on the throne. Now let me just say this before we go on any further: this is the highest vision of God that we have within the Scriptures, and within it there is a vision of a man who sits upon the throne. Now before we go any further, I want you to notice that this is a vision not of God - no man has seen God at any time, and I believe no man will ever see God - it's not a vision of God, it is a vision of the glory of God, it is a vision of the presence of God.

Now first of all, in the context of chapter 1, you can see that this vision first of all was an authentication of the call of Ezekiel to the prophet's office. All the prophets had some kind of supernatural visionary experience to bring them into the prophetic realm, and that is what it is here personally for Ezekiel. But more than that, it introduces us to all of the themes that we find within the prophecy - all of them are outlined within this one vision. God waited five years before speaking to Ezekiel, and sometimes silence speaks louder than words to show that God is not pleased, that God is angry with His people.

Now let's look at this vision as quickly as we possibly can, because we want to deal with everything within the passage. First of all there is a whirlwind - verse 4, look at it: 'a whirlwind came out of the north'. Now that is speaking of judgement upon Jerusalem, because Babylon - those who have captivated them, and taken them to their empire - they came from the north, the empire of Babylon, right down into Jerusalem and destroyed it. So the north there speaks of the Babylonian empire coming into Jerusalem and taking them captive. But within the word of God the direction of north is also a type, or a sign if you like, of the throne and the presence of God. You can see that from Isaiah 14 and verse 13, when he describes the fall of Satan and the motivation - that Satan wanted to exalt himself to the sides of the north. What did Lucifer want to
become? He wanted to become like God, to exalt himself to the throne of God, to the sides of the north - and that is the general direction that the Old Testament people of God understood as the place where God was - northward. It's the idea of heavenward, that we look up toward God - look up for your redemption draweth nigh. That is the direction that the people of God ought to have their sights directed and focused to. In other words: God is there, God is up yonder, God is in that direction.

So, you've two things: you have the judgement of the Babylonians coming from the north, and you have the direction of the throne of God in the north. Two things that, to the Jewish mind, seemed to contradict one another - but it's not the case, it's the exact opposite. For what God's Spirit is saying through this vision is: 'You believe that My throne is to the north, the Babylonians are coming from the north, and the interpretation is this: I am the one who is sending the Babylonians'. Do you see it? There is a whirlwind, indicating a tremendous movement from the throne of God. What is that movement? It is the judgement of God. If you look at verse 4 you see that there is a fire as well, a light that is brighter than the sun - perhaps like an atomic blast - incandescent heat and light. There, in the midst of that whirlwind, there is great fire - why? Because our God is a consuming fire, our God is light! Remember at Paul's conversion there was a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun. You have a whirlwind, you have great judgement, you have great heat and great light, and all of those things are speaking to us of the unapproachable presence of God.

From the north - to the Jew a place of mystery, a place of darkness, a direction of distress, a place of judgement - there comes Judah's enemies toward them, by the hand of God influenced and directed, coming towards them. We are right away [shown] God's glory as the glory of a judge. Ezekiel's awe is not just from what he saw, but from what he heard - because he heard the whirlwind. Several times he tries to describe the sound that accompanied the vision. He says, look at the passage, that it was the voice of the Almighty. That's all he could describe it as: the voice of El-Shaddai.

If you go into Psalm 104 and verses 3 and 7 you read these words - you don't need to turn to them, I'll read you them: '[God is the one] who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who rideth upon the wings of the wind: At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away'. God is described as the one 'who rideth upon the wings of the wind' - that word 'riding' is the same word that you find in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 8, where God is described as 'walking in the cool of the day' after Adam and Eve's transgression. Now you might hear people say or depict that God was walking in the garden, having a stroll of some kind, leisurely - that is not the sense of the passage. The word is that God was 'riding', God was walking in the cool of the day, and it's a sense of judgement, it's the sense that - because of Adam and Eve's transgression - God was seeking them out in the garden, riding judgementally in the cool, on the wings of the wind.

That was the noise that accompanied the visions of Isaiah in chapter 6, the vision of John in Revelation chapter 1, and indeed we know that that is the noise that will accompany our Lord Jesus as He returns from the clouds - 2 Peter 3:10: 'But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up'. A fiery whirlwind from the north - speaking of judgement, speaking of their enemies, speaking of a God who would come in His unapproachable presence and holiness and righteousness as a consuming fire to His own people.

Then secondly we see the cherubim. In case you think I'm jumping the gun, verses 5 to 14 you find the cherubim, we know they're cherubim from chapter 10 of Ezekiel verses 1 through to 22 - where there's an even more detailed description of some of the things that they are doing in this vision. The cherubim, we read, could see and they could move in all directions without turning at all. That's important: they could move and see without turning. They could move quickly to accomplish God's will. They had four faces, they could see in all the directions of the compass. If you look at your sheet you will see that they each had the face of a lion, the face of an ox, the face of an eagle, and the face of a man. Many scholars believe that the
Lord Jesus Christ, the one who sits upon the throne, is revealed in His four aspects within the Gospels. In the gospel of Matthew you find His kingship, symbolised by the lion. In the gospel of Mark you find His servanthood, symbolised by the ox. In Luke you find His humanity, symbolised by the face of a man. Then in John you find His deity, symbolised by the flying eagle.

Now that may well be the case, but I believe the primary interpretation of these four faces was twofold. First of all they display the glory of God - we must remember that this is a vision of the glory of God, and these four faces depict the characteristics of God. But not only do they do that, I believe they also convey to us God's sovereign glorious rule over all of His creation. Think of a man, the face of a man, speaking of God's intelligence - man is the highest of all God's creatures, and indeed God put him in charge of the whole of creation. So there you have it: God's intelligence, but at the same time God rules over all men. Then you have the strength and the boldness of a lion: God is strong, God is bold - but yet the lion is the king, as we often say, of the jungle, he's the king of beasts. So the word of God is saying that God rules over His creation: intelligent man; He also rules over all the beasts - even the king of beasthood, the lion. You go on to the ox, and you find there faithfulness and service - and yes, in the Lord Jesus you have His faithfulness, you have His servanthood in the gospel of Mark. But more than that, it shows over all creation God is also over the king of domestic animals - the ox in the field. Then you have the eagle, speaking of divinity in the heavenlies, speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ who was not just a man, but who was the God-man. But you also have there the eagle, the king of the air - and the depiction is, in these four faces of the cherubim, that God is sovereign, that God in all His great characteristics is over all of His creation. God's character and God's rule.

Now, if you add them up, the four faces and the four wings make sixteen faces and sixteen wings in all. Look at verse 6, you see that each of them had four faces, each of them had four wings - that means this: that no matter where Ezekiel was standing, he could see all four faces. Have you got that? With each of them with the four separate faces, wherever he was standing as they turned and as they moved, he could see all the characteristics of God's rule. If you look at your diagram you will see that two of their wings, being extended so far they touched one another to make a square - and the other two wings they used to cover themselves, we read that in verse 11. Under their wings - you can't see it in the diagram - are the hands of a man, in other words speaking that these hands were ready to succour, to comfort God's people, to help them when they needed it, or also they were there to strike in judgement if necessary. But the point is this: all of these depictions are under the control of Him whose heart is concerned with His creation. God is over His creation - that's the message!

We read in those verses of those cherubim, that they went every one straight forward. Every one went straight forward - do you know what that means? That all of them, nothing could turn them away, nothing could turn them aside, there were undeviating principles of divine government. Have you got it? They went wherever they desired, and wherever the Spirit within them told them to go - and no-one could stop them: undeviating principles of divine government. We read that the fire that went up and down among the living creatures, and the lightning, and the bright amber flames - what does that speak of? It speaks of the Shekinah glory, the manifest presence of the glory of the God of Israel - that uncreated light that once abode over the mercy seat and between the cherubim in the holiest place of all, in the tabernacle of the wilderness, in the temple built by Solomon. That very glory that God said has departed from Judah, has now followed the children of Israel in their captivity, gone from the temple, gone from Zion, gone from Jerusalem - and now there's only one man in the whole of Judah that's seeing it in a vision of God. In other words: the glory had departed and gone back to heaven.

Then thirdly you have the wheels - verses 15 to 21. Now one thing is for sure: the wheels don't visualise today's technological society, as some prophetic teachers would say. Even one, when men started to fly in aeroplanes, he said that this was prophesied in the first chapter of Ezekiel in these wheels! That type of
preaching brings prophetic ministry into ill-repute, doesn't it? But what are these wheels? Well, they're very confusing - and the passage tells us that they're not parallel to one another, in other words it's not like the rim of a bicycle wheel and the hub in the middle. They're both parallel to one another, but the wheels - as you look at your diagram - are at right angles to one another, they're crossing one another like a gyroscope top. The wheels are constantly turning - and it necessitates that if they're turning and all the animals can go in one direction or another, the living creatures, because they're faced in the four directions, they could move anywhere without changing. Do you see that?

Verse 18 tells us that those wheels were full of eyes. So there you have the rule of God over His creation, these wheels are full of eyes - in other words speaking to us of God's omniscience, that God rules in His creation, that God never changes in any way, but yet He can go where He wishes just like the cherubim. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and good. All that we read tonight speaks of the great glory of God! Now please don't miss this among all this picture and details and intricacies, don't miss that what it is saying is that God is constantly moving and working in His world. He is a powerful God, He is a glorious God, He is a God who is present in all places, He can see all things. He has a purpose for man, He has a purpose for all of creation, He has a purpose in His providence - and the world in Ezekiel's day that was full of terror and change, the message to that world was: God is in control! What a message for us today.

Fourthly we see in the vision: the firmament - verses 22 to 27. It's described as, literally, a beautiful platform - if you look at your diagram - above the wheels and the cherubim. It's a platform that contains the throne of God. In other words: God is still on the throne. 'Ezekiel, you're in Babylon, you're by the river Chebar, you know that the glory has departed, but listen: God is still on the throne! His will is still being accomplished in His world, even if you don't see it Ezekiel'. The complex movements of the cherubim and the wheels reveal how intricate God's providence is in His universe. In other words: only He can understand it, only He can control it - but the message is: there is perfect harmony, there is perfect order in everything that God does, even in the midst of apparent chaos!

In verses 26 and 27 you see an amber throne in azure blue, you see a sapphire studded throne flashing like a diamond in colour like a rainbow, you see a light that blinds and obscures. In verse 28 it is described as the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. He saw a vision of the glory of the Lord. That firmament there, a dome covering the whole of the living creatures - in other words God's divine government was over all of His creatures. In verse 26, if you look at it, it tells us that upon that throne sat the likeness of a man. Who is the man? Well I believe Paul gives us the answer to that question in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16, he says: 'Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh'.

I believe this man, the likeness of a man, is the man of God's counsels - the Lord Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate state, but yet depicted in a body, showing the intent of God: that He would be the Lamb crucified before the foundation of the world. Here the Lord Jesus sits on this throne in a place of power, a place of majesty - and now, at this very moment, now that redemption has been accomplished, the man Christ Jesus literally sits in His glorified human body on the throne of the Eternal! Amen! Isn't it wonderful to think, at this very moment, that the Lord Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament? Isn't it wonderful, as we delve into this great prophecy, to realise that the book of Ezekiel is a Christ-centred book?

Then there is the rainbow, fifthly - in verse 28 you read of it. In the storm there was a rainbow and, if you remember the book of Genesis, you read that Noah saw the rainbow after the storm - after it. In the book of Revelation you see John the apostle, and he sees a rainbow round the throne, and he saw it before the storm. But here the prophet Ezekiel sees it within the storm - and God is showing that His glory is at work in the world, He is judging the sins of His people, He is keeping His covenant - the rainbow, a depiction that God will keep His covenant with His people, yet He will keep it with a remnant in the midst of judgement! The message of the book of Revelation is that the storm may rage, the very sun may seem to be blotted out of the
heavens, but the word of our God shall stand forever! He will not break His covenant, and what comes out of His lips He will keep. Oh, isn't that wonderful? Isn't it wonderful to have your eyes lifted heavenward to see God's plan, to see that no matter what is happening to you in your life and in your circumstances God is in absolute control!

Now what is the lesson of this vision? It's important that we understand this: what is the purpose of this vision? Now, you know, you can get so taken up with all these descriptions and these little details that you can miss the whole point entirely! Because the point of the vision is that Ezekiel was overwhelmed by this sight of the glory of God! It stunned him, it prostrated him! For all the religious upbringing that he had, the theological training as a priest that he had, there was absolutely nothing that could prepare him for seeing the vision of the glory of the Living God. If we enquire too closely into the possible symbolism of the creatures and the four faces and the wheels, you know, you could miss the point! You could miss the point that the details are part of the total vision, and the totality of the vision conveys to the prophet one thing - what does it convey to him? This: an awareness of a dimension of reality and power that were totally and utterly beyond his comprehension! That is it! Something beyond him - beyond him as a theologian, beyond him - if I can say it - as a believer! If we miss that, and if we can stand up tonight and say: 'I understand this whole passage, this whole vision', we've missed the whole point of it! If you can say: 'I know how to put God into a box, and I have my doctrinal scheme, and I can comprehend the incomprehensible' - you can't!

So, that is the lesson. In exile Ezekiel sees the vision and it becomes clear to him that, yes, they have been cut off from Jerusalem; they have been cut off from the temple; they have been cut off from the visible sense of the Shekinah glory of God - but they cannot be cut off from God forever! Wasn't God's glory seen in that Shekinah, wasn't it? It was the visible manifestation of His presence among His people. That's how they knew that God was still with them - and that's why, at the dedication of Solomon's temple, you see it come down. You see it in Isaiah chapter 6, in Isaiah's vision - but there's something I want you to see between Isaiah and Ezekiel that is so different. Isaiah's vision was the Lord high and lifted up on a throne in the temple - do you see it? A state, a static, stately vision of God in the temple - it is a vision befitting the symbol of God's permanent resting place, He appears to His people in their visible sight of God's presence - the temple.

Indeed that was their belief, wasn't it? That as long as they had the temple, they had God. Indeed, in Lamentations, we see that even their enemies knew that the kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem. They thought that it was impenetrable, it could never be beaten - the armies of Jerusalem could never be beaten, because God - Jehovah, their God, the God of Israel was there dwelling with His people - and they saw the temple like a lucky charm! That: 'As long as we have the temple, we have God, and we can do what we like!'. Hence you have that false assurance, that false security. Hence you have a complacency of men and women running around shouting, as in Jeremiah 7: 'The temple of the Lord! The temple of the Lord!' - it was their charm. They put more faith in the temple of the Lord than the Lord of the temple!

So when Jeremiah comes along, and when Ezekiel comes along, and says: 'The temple will be destroyed. Jerusalem will be destroyed' - it was seen as high treason. They were seen as national traitors to do such a thing. But Jeremiah pointed back into Israel's history to Samuel's youth - and you remember there the people of Israel did a similar thing, they put faith in the Ark of the Covenant - not in the God of the Ark, but in the Ark of God! You know what happened: that symbol of the presence of God, instead of being the reality of His presence, was taken - Shiloh was destroyed, and the Ark was taken into exile. We read in 1 Samuel 4:22, literally: 'Glory has gone into exile from Israel: for the ark of God has been captured'.

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Now, what is the point of this vision? This is the point: there are two things that really are all you need to see in this vision - first of all: motion. There is a movement. In other words: God is moving in His world. The wheels are moving, the cherubim are moving - everything is moving - the light is moving, the sounds are moving. God is moving and working in His world - but here's the thing: the Shekinah glory of God is moving from Jerusalem, and moving back to heaven! That brings the second thing - it's judgement. That's what it speaks of: judgement.

There's so much akin to the book of Genesis in this vision, because you have a strong wind - and you remember, after the flood, that there was a strong wind came to dry up the waters. You have the Spirit - the ruach - the wind of God breathing over the waters, you have that in this passage of Scripture. If you think of the backdrop of this vision as being the book of Genesis, you find something here - I believe the Spirit of God is reminding the people of God of the creation story! You see man, you see the ox, you see the lion, you see the bird - God is saying He's ruling over all of His creation, He's reminding them of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. Do you know what He's saying? 'My people, I want you to compare your own experience of exile with Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden. You were put out, and there were cherubim that stood over the way of the garden to protect the way of God'.

That is the message of this vision - and there are three things that we see in it, finally, let's look at them. First of all there is a statement that the glory of God cannot be limited. You have in it the nature of God. Now, you think about this: Ezekiel was a theologian, he had been trained as a priest, he had been prepared for divine service - yet all of his theology was inadequate! Please note that! God overwhelmed him, even though this vision was less than the reality of what God was actually like - it was only the likeness of the appearance of the glory of God - yet here's the paradox of the whole thing: if we cannot understand a great deal of this vision, we have understood it! Have you got that? If we cannot understand this vision, we have understood it! Because the message of it is this: you cannot understand God.

If, as we read this passage tonight, like me you stand in awe, and think: 'How can we make head nor tail of this message?' - you do well, that's a good position to be in. This great theologian, with all his theological propositions - and sometimes our theological propositions can be as much a transgression of the second commandment of making idols as anything else! When we put God into a box, when we say: 'God cannot do this', or, 'God must do this' - apart from His divine revealed will, of course, He's always faithful to that - but when we subtract God, and suppress Him from His being to our little theological A-B-C, we commit an awesome sin!

Then you have the glory of God that could not be limited geographically. You know, they tended to confine God, didn't they? They said: 'He's in Jerusalem. He's been in Jerusalem for years, He's going to stay there. And if you say - Ezekiel and Jeremiah - that He'll not be in Jerusalem, and the temple will be broken down, that's treason! But him to death!'. We do that sometimes, don't we? We confine the experience of God to particular places, to locations, and you can't do that! You can't confine Him to a place, whether it be a church or a city or a country - and Ezekiel realised that he was actually, think of this, experiencing the presence of God in a foreign, godless land that was at enmity with God! Not only was it experiencing God's presence in an unexpected place, but if we could put it further: it seemed to expect God's presence in the unexpected!

Paul, many centuries later - and I think this is wonderful: you who are going through trials, you who are broken hearted, you're in the midst of chronic illness, you're having trouble in your family and trouble in the workplace - isn't it wonderful to know that no matter where you are, as Paul said centuries later: 'I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! Nothing can separate God's people from God when they have a heart toward Him!
Secondly, he said that the judgement of God cannot be avoided. You will know that a rainbow speaks of the mercy of God, as we saw last week – but you know, people think that because they see a rainbow there that that denies judgement. Of course it doesn't! You can't have a rainbow without rain. Isn't that right? In fact it denies the possibility of rain if there is no rainbow - and, indeed, without rain there couldn't be the sight of this mercy sign. What this rainbow is asserting - yes - is the faithfulness of God in the midst of overwhelming judgement, that it is Israel's only hope - and without the mercies of God they would be consumed, as Lamentations says. But the point is this: there is no escape from the judgement of God!

It's not popular to preach a message of judgement today, sure it's not? Indeed I read today of one Pastor who's one goal, he says, in his church's 'seeker services' is: 'In order that', I quote, 'in a non-threatening atmosphere the seekers share a delightful, thought-provoking hour in which they are introduced to the person of Jesus Christ'. It's very doubtful that Ezekiel would have expressed his experience with the Living God as a 'delightful, thought-provoking hour', isn't it? It was a threatening atmosphere, because it is never comfortable for sinners to fall into the hands of an angry God.

Thirdly and finally, the message was: the blessing of God cannot be taken for granted - the blessing of God cannot be taken for granted. A lady reputedly asked Abraham Lincoln, during the dark days of the Civil War in America, if he was confident that God was on their side. 'Madam', he said, 'I am less concerned whether God is on our side, than whether we are on His side'. Can I speak personally to you? No matter what our history has been, we cannot assume and take for granted the blessing of God. Our nation is filled with churches that have become memorial symbols to orthodoxy in a bygone day, and spiritual fire - but the message of this vision is, to Israel and to Judah, that God is no respecter of tradition - and still He is not! When tradition becomes merely the dead heritage of the past, do you know what He says in the book of Revelation that is so akin to this book? 'I will remove the lampstand from the midst of those who have forsaken their first love'.

How does it happen? How does it happen that a church building becomes a carpet warehouse, or a restaurant, or a Moslem mosque? How does it happen? It happens through the error of Judah! What is it? A contentment with the externalities of religion, a society that thinks it is enough to have the form of godliness while denying the power!

The encouragement and the challenge to us tonight, as we close, is this: God will achieve His purposes with or without us.

Let us pray, and wouldn't it be refreshing if, as we just bowed our heads, we considered that we come into the presence of the One who we've just read of: Father, we worship Thee and we pray that we will know more of who Thou art - and that our reaction would be that of Ezekiel's, in our lives and from our hearts, that we will fall at Thy feet, prostrate. Help us never to take Thee or Thy blessing for granted, but to realise, Lord, that if You cannot work with us that You will raise up another people, and You will work through them. Forgive us Lord, and give us grace in the days that lie ahead to do Thy will and to honour our first love. Amen.
ow let me welcome you to our Bible reading tonight in the Iron Hall, it's great to see you all with us. Perhaps it's your first time here, we're glad to see you and we trust that the Lord blesses you as you've gathered with us round the word of God. Ezekiel, the book of Ezekiel again, and chapter 2 - please do make yourself comfortable as the temperature is still quite high, although it was a bit cooler today, make sure that you don't fall asleep tonight as we look at these portions of the word of God. We're going to take time to read chapter 2 and 3 of the book of Ezekiel, for it's important that we get the whole gist of what the Holy Spirit is revealing to us. So we begin at chapter 2 and verse 1, and remember that our subject this evening is: "The Preparation of the Preacher".

"And he", God, "said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house), yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house; open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a scroll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat this scroll: and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that scroll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this scroll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. And he said unto me, Son of man, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.

"Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. Then
the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days. And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul. And the hand of the Lord was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face. Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house. But thou, O son of man, behold, they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them: And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear: for they are a rebellious house."

I think it could be said that romance has infiltrated the church. I'm not talking about the Romeo and Juliet kind, but I'm talking about the romance of a rose-tinted perception of what it is to serve Almighty God. To serve God, for some, contains a false conception: they perhaps believe that to be a missionary is to go and serve the Lord in the sun, to be a pastor or a preacher is to serve God in the limelight - it is to have a title, other fools even believe that it's to be a respected person. But Ezekiel's call in the two chapters that we have just read shatters all possible false conceptions concerning what it is to serve the living and the true God. Fundamentally, I believe that it shakes our motivations and the reason why we serve God in the first place.

Now I have no doubt about it, as one who seeks to serve God day by day - and I'm sure that you can say this as you seek to live for Christ in your everyday life - that there is no better life, it is the best life. Indeed, as the Lord Jesus said, it is the abundant life, it is the life that truly brings the dividends that God granted in creation at the first in paradise. But I hope you will concur with me that it's far from an easy life, and it is certainly not a comfortable life. We must ask the question: what drives us to serve God? What is it that motivates us to serve the true and the living God, to preach the Gospel, to come to a fellowship like this and hopefully to contribute with the body of Christ in throwing the Gospel light into a darkened world? What is the motivation? What is the reason that we serve God? Is it to be a winner of hundreds and thousands of souls? Is it purely to have our name put down in the Christian history books as a great Bible teacher, as a pioneer missionary? Is it to set up our names in a literary standpoint, and be seen as a great Christian author and be given a great reputation as a theologian? Is the purpose of serving God even to bless God's people? Is it to be appreciated by the sheep of God's flock, to be loved by them because you feed them, because you tend them and look after them?

Whatever our service or our motives may be, if they are those things that we have just mentioned they are questionable. You heard me correctly, yes: it is questionable to be only in the service of God to see souls
saved. It is questionable to be in the Lord's work purely to bless God's people and to feed the flock of God. It's not questionable in a bad sense, or an evil sense, but rather in a misguided and naive sense. Do we often sense these false expectations in our life? Do we have false expectations as we seek to serve God? Do we have a false conception of what it is to go through with God, and to follow God in everything that He has laid out in the Scriptures? What are our expectations? Do we expect to see thousands and thousands of souls brought to Christ? Do we expect always to be appreciated and to be loved?

Often, I believe, it is a false expectation that leads to frustration. That frustration can develop into depression, and for many it develops into the final conclusion, which is disillusionment with Christian service altogether. I'm sure that many of you have been in this position, where perhaps the cry of your heart is: 'No-one appreciates me any more! I'm taken for granted! People never say 'Thank you', people don't realise in this church what I do in the background. They don't see it, they don't appreciate it!' I believe, if we analyse our hearts concerning this matter of what motivates us to serve God, we can find that even in our service for Him there is an awful depravity and at times an awful sinfulness.

I wonder if we had been called like Ezekiel was what our answer would be to it? If you look at chapter 2 and chapter 3 of this book, and imagine God calling you in this way, and then imagine you going into the interview room of a missionary society - would you admit to them that God had called you, but God had also told you that no-one would be converted through your ministry? That you were going to be a useless evangelist in terms of numbers and success? I heard a preacher say recently that he never ever had 'burnout' because he never ever expected too much of himself - I think that's being too simplistic. The question we need to ask, as we come to a passage that portrays for us the call of God in a man's, or for that matter in a woman's, life - we must ask: what is the realistic expectation of what it is to serve God? What are we in the service of God for? How do we balance not expecting too much from ourselves with attempting great things for God, and expecting great things from God? Is there a place in between where we can be satisfied that God is using us, and we have a holy discontent and thirst after God and holiness, yet at the same time we're not a contractor of what some preachers call 'Messiah complex'? In other words: we feel that we are God's chosen one, that we believe that 'God is going to use me to overthrow the world for Him'.

It surely must come down to what God, first of all, has called us to do, and secondly what then our goal should be. Our goals will be determined by what God has actually asked us to do! If we don't realise what He has asked us to do, our goals will be beyond what we can possibly reach! We need to realise what the truth is about service, and what are the misconceptions that make men and women become shattered in the service of God. I believe, in this call of Ezekiel, we can learn a great deal about what it is for God to call you and I, as believers, into His work within the church of Jesus Christ. I believe these two chapters teach that there is a balance, a balance concerning the results that we can expect. Just in case we sit on our laurels, and say: 'As long as we sow the seed, that's alright', He also brings in at the end of these passages a great responsibility upon the prophet to proclaim God's message.

So let us look at these things, the first thing that we find is Ezekiel's calling. Look at verse 1 of chapter 2: "He said unto me, Son of man". Ninety times or so in the book of Ezekiel you find this title 'Son of man'. The other prophetic book in the Old Testament you find it in is the book of Daniel, and the only other place in the Bible you find it is in the New Testament - and that is the Lord Jesus Christ calling Himself the 'Son of man', and then later in the epistles the apostles calling Him the 'Son of man' too. It was the favourite title of the Lord Jesus Christ for Himself. Around 86 times He speaks of Himself as the 'Son of man'. Not to go into this in too much depth, because we have a great deal more to look at tonight, the 'Son of man' does not simply indicate humanity. There is a conception that because Christ was called the Son of God, that that spoke of His deity - it did do so - that the 'Son of man' speaks of His humanity, that is incorrect. That is one facet of the title 'Son of man', but you find as you go to Ezekiel, Daniel, and then into the Gospels, that the 'Son of man' is always allocated in a prophetic sense.
It's allocated to Daniel and to Ezekiel and to our Lord Jesus Christ, and there's a few things that are common to each of those three individuals. The first is rejection, they were rejected by their own people for preaching this message. The second thing is humiliation. Daniel was cast into the den of lions, you will find as we go through the rest of Ezekiel that Ezekiel was subject to great humiliation for obeying the word of God - and do we even need to touch upon the humiliation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! Love so amazing! The Immortal dies! Who can explain its great design?

'Son of man' speaks of humiliation, but it also speaks of rejection, humiliation and then exaltation. Ezekiel was humiliated, and that is always the plan of God: that you cannot have glorification before humiliation. So, by even calling Ezekiel by this name in verse 1 and right throughout this book, He is speaking to this man of the cost that he will have to pay as the prophet of God. What is he being called to? He is being called to humiliation, and if you want to serve God you need to realise that you are called to humiliation!

In verses 3 and 4 the Holy Spirit outlines for him what that humiliation will be: 'You are to be a prophet to a rebellious house'. That word 'rebellious' occurs frequently right throughout this book - Israel is called a rebellious nation. Now it's strange, because the word 'nation' - if you look at verse 3 and 4 - the word 'nation' is not the word that God usually uses for His chosen people. In fact it is the word that He often uses for the Gentiles, and the Israelites used for the Gentiles. In other words, the traditional language of election had been changed. The chosen people of God, the Israelites, are now becoming the 'un-chosen' people of God. God is no longer calling them 'My people', and if you go into chapter 3 and verse 11 - look at it, He describes them as 'the children of thy people, Ezekiel. They are thy people'. No more does He call them: 'My people, Israel'.

If you look at verse 3 of chapter 2, you will see that He calls them there 'the sons of Israel', the sons of Israel. What He is pointing out to them is the hereditary nature of their rebellion: 'Your sons, and your son's sons, and your grandsons and your great grandsons - and as far as you can go back, Israel, the sons of Israel are a people of rebellion!'. Of course, you will know that Israel was Jacob - his name was changed to 'Israel'. Jacob was that one who had the nature to wrestle with God, and God is saying: 'You're all like your great father Jacob, you are wrestling with Me, you are rebelling against Me!'.

What had happened is that Israel had sunk to a level of the heathen. When Israel sunk to the level of pagan heathenism, and the Gentile world, God called them by the name that they were portraying in their life. They had sunk to an all-time low, and they were beginning to live just like the people that were all around them. If you want to put it in our terms: the world was seen in the church, and the church was in the world. They were impudent children - it reminds me of the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 11, where He said in verse 16 and 17: 'What shall I liken this generation to? They are like children playing in the marketplace, and calling unto their fellows' - they're like spoilt children! How will we able these people? Well, God labels them as a rebellious, impudent, hardened people. Obstinate, stubborn, He says in verse 4.

He tells Ezekiel: 'You see when you're going as a missionary to these people? Language won't be your problem, they speak the same language as you do'. As one author put it: 'Being a Wycliffe Bible translator would have been a straightforward assignment in comparison to what Ezekiel had been called to do'. Language would not be the problem, the problem that they would have, the barrier that the man of God would have is utter rebellion against God - they would not listen! God says in chapter 3 and verse 7: 'They're not going to listen to you, Ezekiel, it's not you they're not listening to - it's Me! They don't want Me! My people don't want to listen to My word'. He is telling Ezekiel, listen: 'This is why you're going to be humiliated, because My people are a rebellious people - they don't want Me as their God!'.

Ultimately it was a refusal to acknowledge the sovereignty of God - and if you want to put it into our terms today, in the church of Jesus Christ, we can apply it to ourselves as a refusal and a rebellion to admit and to
recognise the lordship of the Saviour in our lives! It's an awful sin in the eyes of God, it is a serious sin because it is a sin that causes God Almighty to call His people by a name that He calls the wicked world!

Now if success was measured on the responsiveness of this congregation, we would have to say that Ezekiel would go down as one of the greatest failures in all of history. But, you see, his success was measured by another standard - verse 5 of chapter 2 - this is the standard where he would know that he had succeeded: 'They will know that a prophet has been among them'. In other words, when everything befalls this nation that Ezekiel prophesies, when it all comes upon them they will remember one solitary, simple man called Ezekiel who warned them and called them to repent.

As I was studying this it came to me that it is amazing that the hardest people to get to repent are not the wicked sinners, but God's own people. In fact God tells him in chapter 3 and verse 6: 'If I had sent you to the Gentiles, they would have repented right away. But I'm not sending you to the Gentiles'. In Matthew 11, in that same passage as I have referred to, again He says to His people who are like spoilt children: 'If I had done these mighty works in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes - even Sodom would have repented, but My people are a rebellious people, My people are stiff-necked, they are hardened'!

Now in the light of this we must ask a question of ourselves: as we seek to preach the Gospel to a world around that is dying, how can we measure success? Is it numbers? Is it conversions, how many people have been converted in the last month or year? Is it the buildings that we erect? Is it the money that we cash in every week? Is it the talent that we have in the pews? Do we adhere to the philosophy behind the church growth movement and strategies in America - that bigger is better? Is the way we measure success how many people we have, or how many people are being converted?

Now don't misunderstand me: we ought to strive to be as fruitful as possible, and we ought not to be content at any time when folk are not being saved, or when our lives show a lack of progress at all. We ought to have a continual disposition of holy discontent! What comes to me from these passages of Scripture is the sobering reality that this poor man Ezekiel's success and faithfulness could not be measured by numbers. His primary goal was not souls! Does that not stagger us? His ministry was not souls, he was told: 'You're going to go out, and they're not going to listen to anything that you say - but listen, My Ezekiel, you have a great high calling because I want your ministry to be for one goal, and that is My eternal glory! Ezekiel, your preaching, your modelling, everything that you do will bring glory to Me. It may not bring any souls into the fold, but it will bring eternal glory to My name'.

As John Calvin, the reformer, said: 'When God wishes to move us to obey Him, He does not always promise us a happy outcome to our labour - but sometimes He wants to test our obedience to the point that He will have us be content with His command, even if people ridicule our efforts'. Now what I don't want you to do is apply reverse psychology to this, and maintain that if you're bearing no fruit that must mean that you're very faithful - that's not what the book of Ezekiel is saying. If we are not bearing fruit we need to ask questions of ourselves. But the point of this teaching within the book of Ezekiel is that we must do all that we can to save some, but at the end of the day God is the one who opens men's and women's hearts! We must give God His sovereignty! We must realise - and you've all heard about it, of people who have been led to Christ by unbelievers! In the book of Galatians Paul rejoiced that Christ was being preached in contention, because Christ was being preached. I believe the inference of that is that people were actually believing in the Gospel because of people who wanted to preach Christ to get Paul a beating in prison!

The amazing thing about our God is that He can work all things together for good. He makes even the wrath of man to praise Him! You ask yourself the question of those old pioneer missionaries that went on the frontier of the Gospel in foreign lands, and they arrived on the foreign mission field, and only days after they arrived from a gruelling journey some of them dropped dead and were buried without even speaking a word
for Christ. They didn't even know the language! And the question is: was their life a waste? I'll tell you one thing: I wish I had half of their reward at the Judgement Seat. Do you know why? Because their primary desire was not just to see souls saved, but it was the glory of God - even if souls were not saved.

It may take a greater call to go and see nothing, than to see mighty things - and I believe that's why Ezekiel had to have a vision of God so uplifted, because he was going to go into a ministry that was not going to be fruitful tangibly and visibly. William Greenhill, the puritan, comments upon this saying: 'Sometimes God gives large encouragement, large promises, hope, success, providing for our infirmities - at other times a bare commission, a command, must suffice to do that which would make one's heart ache. It is His prerogative to send whom He will, and upon what service He will'.

The Navy slogan used to be: 'Join the Navy and see the world' - and in verse 6 of this chapter you see this: 'Join the prophets, be cast among prickles and thorn bushes, sit on the scorpion'. He was called to absolute humiliation, rejection and broken-heartedness. He was called to very little tangible fruit, yet the amazing thing is: this prophet Ezekiel was the exact opposite of all the rebellion that was in his people. He is the antithesis of their behaviour!

Look at chapter 2 and verse 8 - he listens to the Lord, when his people are not listening. In fact, as we go down we see that there is obedience to the word of God. When he sees the vision of God, he meets God face-to-face, he falls down - a picture of his humble submission. Chapter 1 and verse 28, he's not obstinate and rebellious in the sight of God. Then, when he's commanded to rise to his feet, chapter 2 and verse 1, he rises to his feet. You might give Ezekiel a pat on the back and say: 'You're some fellow Ezekiel! You're great doing all these things' - well, don't get that into your head, because if you look at the passage, chapter 2 and verse 2, you will see that the only reason this man is able to receive the word of God, stand up on his feet before God, humble himself before God, is because he received a infusion of the divine Spirit of God! Verse 2 of chapter 2: 'The spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me'.

As we read this passage we find that the Spirit not only raises him to his feet, but the Spirit enables him to hear the word of God. God not only hands into his hand the scroll of His word to him, but in chapter 3 and verse 2 if you look at it, God is the one who causes Ezekiel actually to eat and to swallow the scroll. The whole picture is just an out-living, a personification of the name 'Ezekiel'. What did I tell you 'Ezekiel' meant? Here we go now, can you remember? 'God strengthens' - in fact, in this chapter we could say and translate it like this: 'God hardens'. Ezekiel had to be made a hard man, and when his vision is over, and when Ezekiel's call is over, the Spirit lifts him and He sets him among the exiles back beside the river Chebar in the concentration camp. He sits there, it says, for a week absolutely motionless and stunned - and what is the point of all this? What are we to take out of this? This is the message, don't miss this: without God's power Ezekiel, literally, can do nothing. Do you see that? What a lesson! Is that not what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples? 'Without Me, ye can do nothing'!

Now, it's right that we say that we live in a different era today - there is a different dispensation of the Spirit of God, and the role of the Holy Spirit has changed from the Old Testament times. In the Old Testament the Spirit came to specific people to accomplish specific tasks, and He could rest upon a person and then go away from him for a period of time and come back upon them again. You remember David prayed: 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me'. Yet throughout the Old Testament, and especially Joel chapter 2, there was a hope, there was an expectation and anticipation that one day the Holy Spirit would be poured out universally over all peoples and individuals. Isn't it wonderful to be living in that day? The Spirit at the day of Pentecost was poured upon His church, and has been poured upon all of God's people and equips all of them - what for? Why do we have the Spirit of God? For the prophetic task of God, to go out and to preach the word of God - as one author says: 'This is now the age not only of the priesthood of all believers, but of the
prophethood of all believers'. Not prophesying in the sense of a charismatic way, but in the sense of heralding the word of God!

Is that not the theme of the Acts of the Apostles? The coming of the Spirit being given to the believers, what for? To witness to Judaea, to Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world. Was that not why the Lord told them before He left: 'Don't you lift a finger because you can do nothing without the Spirit of God, but tarry ye here in Jerusalem until the promise of My Father comes, and then ye shall be given power from on high!'. Even on that day linguistics was not a problem, because the gift of tongues was there at Pentecost. But the problem today is still not linguistics, but the problem today is the same problem of Ezekiel, and that is: a rebellious, stiff-necked people that will not hear the word of God - people who are dead in their trespasses and in their sins. What people need today is not language that they can understand, but what we need in our world is new life from the hand of God! We need men and women who are touched and born-again of the Spirit!

This is so relevant to the church today, because there's a great debate going on about what is the secret to evangelism, what can we do to bring more people to Christ. Is it articulating our language? Is it becoming a better communicator? Is it to think of new methods and gimmicks to make sinners more comfortable in the church? What is the message of Ezekiel to that cry today? It is: 'No!'. If Ezekiel was with us he would say: 'What you need is to fall on your face before God, and be equipped of the Holy Ghost to do what is a supernatural task'.

So God equips him. That's our second point, in verse 1 of chapter 3 God says: 'Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this scroll, and go speak unto the house of Israel'. Here the 'Son of man' title is distinguishing, I believe it's distinguishing him from all the divine visions that he has seen, and indeed the cherubim that he sees. It's showing him, in this instance, his frail humanity and showing, as a mere mortal, that he is to take what God gives him - he needs everything. But more significantly than all that, I believe it marks him out above his contemporaries. In verse 3 of chapter 2 remember we saw that they were called 'the sons of Israel', 'rebellious', those who 'strive with God' - but Ezekiel is called the 'Son of man'. Now, in the Hebrew language, the word 'man' is 'adam' - it is, literally, the name 'Adam', the first man, Adam. Nearly all of the references that you find in the Old Testament - maybe not nearly all, but some of them - are the word 'adam'. So literally what God is saying to him is: 'Son of Adam'.

You remember that a couple weeks ago I showed you the parallels between the book of Ezekiel and the book of Genesis. Just as the first man, Adam, received the breath of God and became a living soul - through his nostrils by the 'ruach', the spirit of the living God - Ezekiel has the breath of God, the Spirit, the same word 'ruach', infused into his being. It is that that lifts him up unto his feet. It gives him new life. It enables him to obey God. Again you see this creation theme - and later, when you go to chapter 37, you see the dead bones of Israel brought back to life by what? A breath of the Spirit of God! I believe the picture here is that what will happen to the nation of Israel, chapter 37, and prophetically still to happen - is now happening personally to God's prophet. He's being made a personal illustration to his people.

Ezekiel, like Adam, becomes the founding member of a new community, what will be a new obedient and empowered people by the Spirit of God. I want you to see not only a son of Adam, not only the parallels with the first Adam - but if we miss this we miss everything: there is here a picture of the last Adam! Our Lord Jesus, who by His obedience undoes the effects of the first Adam - is that not what the New Testament teaches? Romans chapter 5: 'For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous'. Do you see the parallel? Christ is the one on whom the Spirit rested there at His baptism. He was the chosen one of God upon whom the Spirit rested in all fullness - indeed, the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He is the one, now, who can pour out His Spirit upon the church. He is creating, day by day, an new community. He is building up His church, and the gates of hell cannot prevail
against it. Christ doesn't swallow the word of God like Ezekiel, He is the word of God. He doesn't just see the glory of God, the Shekinah, He is that glory. John 1 and verse 14 they said: 'We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'. He came to an earth that was rebellious, hardened their heart. He came to His own and they would not receive Him to preach the good news of the Gospel - and He will return one day in judgement to tread the winepress of God in His wrath.

What a glorious picture. Ezekiel here, just like Adam, he is given a test. It's a test that revolves around the idea of eating. Adam was told: 'Don't eat of that tree', but Ezekiel is told: 'You eat of that scroll'. It's the opposite, and what is happening here in the story is that there's a whole reversal of the original sin! Do you see what God is doing? He's reversing all the mess that man has made, in this son of Adam He's reversing all the consequences of sin. Ezekiel then is given that food, and it's not like the fruit of the tree that was good for food, pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom - but rather it's an old scroll that doesn't look very appetising, written on both sides with lament, mourning and woe upon it. But although it's unattractive, as Ezekiel puts it into his mouth he finds that it tastes as sweet as honey. Now, it's amazing to me as we read this that the only thing that Ezekiel does in the whole vision is eat the scroll! And even it is given to him! But this is what will equip him, this will equip him to take the unpalatable message to his fellow exiles. Like John on the Isle of Patmos in Revelation 10, who also swallowed the word of God - it was sweet to his taste, but it says of John that when it reached his stomach it was sour. Sweet to the mouth, sour to the stomach, because when we take the word of God to a dying, rebellious, hard-headed nation it is a bittersweet experience!

John the Baptist found that. The two witnesses in Revelation chapter 11 found that as well - and Paul speaks of, that to some it is an aroma of life, but to others it is an aroma of death unto death, and they will oppose it and they will destroy it and they will do all in their power to exterminate the message of the Gospel. In verse 8 and 9 He says to him: 'Give My word anyway. They're not going to receive it, but give it anyway and I will make your head hard'. Isn't it interesting that when you compare Ezekiel with Jeremiah, Jeremiah had a soft heart, but God's giving Ezekiel hard head. When we read the book of Jeremiah we find that there are times that Jeremiah couldn't stand up against what God called him to. In fact on one occasion we find him running to the Lord with his resignation in hand: 'I've had it, I don't want to do it any more, it's too hard!' - but God says: 'You're not going to make that mistake, I'm going to give you a hard head'. That presupposes that he must have been a bit of a soft heart, because he needed God to harden him!

He is saying to Ezekiel: 'The children of Israel are hard-headed, but I'm going to make your head even harder than theirs' - and do you know something? We need hard-headed men and women today. We need hard heads to serve God. We need people infused by the Spirit of God, like Ezekiel. Like Ezekiel we need people ingesting the word of God. What are we relying on? What is our service for? Is it purely for the glory of God? What are we serving God in? Are we relying on ourselves or are we people of the Spirit of God? How do we know? Here's how we know: the test will be our emphasis on prayer! Prayer is the sole test of whether or not you are relying on God - and whatever our emphasis on prayer in this assembly is, and in your life, that reflects how much you are relying on God.

We can be busy people, in a busy place, in a busy church - but the question is: are we filled and motivated by the Spirit of God? That's why the apostles had to get deacons to serve tables, to free them to serve the word of God in prayer. This is the way that God was equipping Ezekiel, He was putting His Spirit in him, He was giving His word to him, and He was hardening his head to face this rebellion.

Thirdly we find his commission. The temptation may be to think: 'Well, I just go out and do my duty then, do I? I just take the word of God and I just preach it. I preach the word and I don't get too emotionally involved'. Well, if you think that you're not listening to the divine call. We find that God lifted Ezekiel, set him down - he was absolutely dumbfounded, because he felt in verse 14 of chapter 3, he actually felt the anger and wrath
of God. There he is, he's getting the worst of both worlds if you like: he feels God's anger and frustration at a sinful world, yet it says that now in exile he sits with the people.

That is the dilemma of the prophet. A man who is called to bear witness to God's heart, but yet a man whose passion is for the people. God's sovereignty is not a 'get-out clause' for your or my responsibility, for this is not a duty. There is a difference between duty and responsibility, because responsibility has character, and responsibility in this realm has love. God tells Ezekiel: 'You're my watchman. It's not just a matter of giving this word and going home, and saying: 'I've done my job', but you're going to be involved in this'. In fact we find Ezekiel - and, listen, he swallows the scroll and it's filled with woes and lamentings and judgements, and I believe that he was actually physically ingesting the very judgement of God himself! A man of sorrows, but a man who would be the watchman for the people and would warn them - and if he didn't warn them he would be responsible.

God finally shows Ezekiel the Shekinah again. He tells him to go into his house, to close the door, and he's not allowed to go and speak to the people - it's an amazing thing, isn't it? He's been given the message and he's not allowed to go. God tells him, listen: 'You will go when I tell you to go, and you will say what I tell you to say - and whenever you're not saying that you'll not be saying anything, because I'll make you dumb'. Isn't that a wonderful lesson? We ought to say what God says, and say no more.

Are we Spirit-filled? Are we filled with the word of God? Are we hard-headed, but are we broken-hearted? Will we go and say what God says, and say nothing more and say nothing less? The message is this, this is our responsibility, this will break out the burn-out factor: if they believe it, they believe it; and if they don't, they don't - but all the glory goes to God.

Let's bow our heads, and as you do so: whatever you do for the Lord - and I'm assuming you are doing something for the Lord, and that's maybe a big assumption - but isn't it wonderful to know that you can never lose if the glory goes to Him?

Father, we thank Thee that we are on the winning side and we are in Christ. We pray that in our service, no matter what the results may be, that it may be for Thy glory - then we will know that we will have our reward in heaven. Amen.
Now let me welcome you this evening to our Bible Reading here in the Iron Hall, it's good to see you with us especially if this is your first time with us on a Monday night. We're glad to see you and we trust that the Lord blesses us together around His word.

Ezekiel chapter 4 is our reading tonight, 4 and 5 indeed - and it would be a good exercise in the weeks that lie ahead if you could possibly read the passage that we're going to study on a Monday night, because as you've found out, I'm sure, there's a great deal of intricate detail within these chapters. It's hard to take in in one evening, so if you read whatever chapters we're dealing with - they will be announced - so that you get a head start.

Chapter 4: "Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city, even Jerusalem: And lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about. Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel. Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon the e the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it. And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege. Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and fitches, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof, according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof. And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it. Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink. And thou shall eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight. And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them. Then said I, Ah Lord God! Behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth. Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment: That they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity.
"And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard; then take thee balances to weigh, and divide the hair. Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them. Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts. Then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; for thereof shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord God; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her. And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries that are round about her: for they have refused my judgments and my statutes, they have not walked in them. Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye multiplied more than the nations that are round about you, and have not walked in my statutes, neither have kept my judgments, neither have done according to the judgments of the nations that are round about you; Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations. And I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all thine abominations. Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments in thee, and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter into all the winds. Wherefore, as I live, saith the Lord God; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore will I also diminish thee; neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity.

"A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them. Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted: and they shall know that I the Lord have spoken it in my zeal, when I have accomplished my fury in them. Moreover I will make thee waste, and a reproach among the nations that are round about thee, in the sight of all that pass by. So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment unto the nations that are round about thee, when I shall execute judgments in thee in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I the Lord have spoken it. When I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine, which shall be for their destruction, and which I will send to destroy you: and I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread: So will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee; and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee; and I will bring the sword upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it".

In chapters 4 and 5 we have 'Signs of Judgement'. G.K. Chesterton, in the early twentieth century, said this: 'This is the age of pacifism, but it is not the age of peace' - it is the age of pacifism, but it is not the age of peace. History testifies to that, because there have been approximately 15,000 wars, men have signed some 8,000 peace treaties - yet over a span of history, spanning five or six thousand years, we have only enjoyed as human beings, perhaps at the most, two to three hundred years of true peace. By that we see that man is not a peaceful creature, and with that backdrop we realise how futile it was for even the prophets of God to be running around this concentration camp in Babylon shouting: 'Peace! Peace!' - that these children of Judah one day would get back to Jerusalem, indeed very soon would be delivered and an army would come from Jerusalem and take them away from Babylon and set them up in all their affluence and riches again in their home.

Indeed we are reminded of the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 when he says: 'For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape'. In the backdrop of all these false prophets prophesying: 'Peace, peace!', when there was no peace, here comes Ezekiel into the horizon. Now in chapters 4 and 5 he begins to use signs and acts and parables before the people to depict the judgement of God that was inevitable for them. Now, you will
remember that at this time Jerusalem was not yet destroyed - yet the false prophets were still saying that it would never be destroyed - but the judgement was still up ahead, the destruction of the temple, the destruction of the whole of Jerusalem.

This ought not to have been any surprise, and indeed it was no surprise to Ezekiel, because if you cast your mind back to chapter 1, if you care to look at it, you remember the great vision of God - the vision of God's glory, the Shekinah that Ezekiel saw. You will remember that in that vision God was portrayed as the divine warrior. God is seen as ready to deliver judgement unto His people, and we can see that because He was coming out of the North - the whirlwind was coming out of the North, which was the traditional direction of Jerusalem's historical enemies. So here is God seen as coming from a place where Jerusalem's enemies usually came from, in other words He was coming against His own people, coming as the God of judgement.

In the face of this impending danger Ezekiel is appointed, you remember last week in chapter 3, as a watchman over the people of Judah. He is a watchman to warn them of the judgement that is to come, to cry out to them of the wrath that is their due, and to flee from it, repent of their sin. It is never a popular thing to be a preacher of judgement, and if you care to take a brief scanning of the history of the Old Testament as well as the New, you will see the plight of the prophets - and that will confirm it for you, how they were mistreated. We saw a little bit last week of the humiliation, specifically, of the prophet Ezekiel. To preach judgement to God's people was never a comfortable thing, and when you were called as a prophet you didn't expect everyone to love you, everyone to bow down to you, and scrape to you and respect you.

Things haven't changed much today, and perhaps that is why judgement is seldom heard within the church in the West at this very moment of history. Indeed, as one writer I was reading last evening - a book on apologetics with regard to why we believe in hell - he said this of the doctrine of hell: 'Of all the doctrines in Christianity, hell is probably the most difficult to defend, the most burdensome to believe, and the first to be abandoned'. 'Perhaps', listen again, 'the most difficult to defend, the most burdensome to believe, and the first to be abandoned'. Hence we have increasing numbers of so-called evangelicals disposing of the doctrines of judgement and of hell - why? Because it is not palatable in a postmodern tolerant society that we live in today.

That is what is happening now, but the question in the light of chapters 4 and 5 of Ezekiel is: how much more would the preaching of judgement be abandoned if we were, in reality, to act out that message as Ezekiel did? For Ezekiel was not just asked to preach a message of judgement, but he was literally asked to incarnate, to live out in the flesh, the message of God's judgement upon His people. He was asked by God, called by God, to embody this message of God's wrath.

Now that can be seen in the signs that we have before us, and on your sheet tonight. The first we have - and we'll see how this will be made clear as we go down them - the first sign of judgement is: a model of destruction, in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 4. What Ezekiel is asked by God to do is to take a tile, or what was in those days a brick, it was the writing material of Babylon - indeed archaeologists have found many of these with much writing upon them. This is the writing plate. He was asked to take one of these and, instead of writing on it, he took this 14 by 12 inch square piece of tile and was to draw the city of Jerusalem on the brick.

So you can see Ezekiel taking this brick, drawing the city of Jerusalem, and then God says to him: 'Now what else I want you to do is: I want you to put battlements, the walls around Jerusalem. I want you to put ramps' - in other words, the protection of the city around it. 'Then I want you to depict the enemy, I want you to put soldiers and I want you to make sure that they have battering rams'. So there you have the city of Jerusalem depicted on this pottery tile. There are the soldiers of Babylon round about with their battering rams. Ezekiel is told by God to take that tile and to break it, to destroy it into pieces to depict the destruction
that was inevitable upon the city of Jerusalem. In other words, it doesn't matter what the false prophets teach, or what the contemporary mood of the day is, God must and God will judge sin! That's God's message through this first sign: it is inevitable! It doesn't matter what men say, it doesn't matter what theologians are pontificating, or the emotional mood of the day - if it's not popular it matters not: God is going to do it!

So, the first sign of judgement you had is the model of destruction. The second sign is: the pan of separation. If you look at verse 3 of chapter 4, you will see there that after Ezekiel depicts the city on this pottery tile he is asked to take unto him: 'an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel'. So there he is with the pottery tile that is Jerusalem, and he's asked now by God to take this iron pan, and to put it between himself and the model of the city of Jerusalem. All that God is saying here is this: 'You have been separated from Me. There is the destruction of the city, but there's much more than that, My people Israel have been separated from Me' - and with their separation it is inevitable that they will be judged. It cannot be stopped - if they are separated from the covenant God that looks after them, that seeks to care for them, destruction is inevitable.

As the tile portrays the siege of Jerusalem, this iron pan shows the hardships of divine judgement. In other words, when this destruction comes upon the city God will not be there to bail them out! They are separated from their God! The hardships of divine judgement, and the terrible suffering which the people were to go through, is absolutely inevitable.

Now what is the point of all this? It seems rather theatrical and maybe quite humorous in a way. Do you know what the point is? Ezekiel, in verse 3, is actually asked to be God himself in this dramatisation. He is asked to face against Jerusalem, and he is to be the one between whom that iron pan goes from the city. So Ezekiel, as the prophet, actually becomes the invisible aggressor of God's people. Ezekiel is standing as the Babylonians coming to break down this tile depiction, the model of Jerusalem. But it's more than that: Ezekiel is asked to be the invisible aggressor behind the visible. The visible aggressors are the Babylonians coming from the North to judge God's people, but Ezekiel is asked not only to depict the visible but to be seen as the invisible. In other words, he is to show that it is God, it is God who is judging His own people.

Ezekiel is acting out the part of the Lord. In other words, there is this separation between the Lord and His people, and there are now no channels of communication, there is no call that's able to go up for salvation and deliverance from their enemies. Even if anyone wanted to do it, even the prophet of God - the one who could, and would if he could, stand in the gap - you remember was made dumb! He wasn't allowed to plead, he wasn't allowed to intercede for God's people - all the appeals process had been exhausted! God has spoken and spoken again to His people, and they refused Him. They are rebellious, they are stiff-necked, hardhearted!

It seems, as far as you can read, that God's patience had run out. What an awful thought! The patience of the long-suffering, gracious God running out! Ezekiel is asked to visually depict this, and the prophet is told - look at verse 3 - to turn his face toward them. He's adopting the position of God, that implacable attitude toward the city: 'I've had enough! I'm facing you, I'm going to deal with you!'. The iron wall and Ezekiel's expression communicate God's absolute abandonment of the city of Jerusalem, and later in chapters 8 to 11 we're going to see how that peters out. It shows the dual agency of both human judgement and God's divine judgement upon them. What I mean is this: the human agency are the Babylonians - men who are seeming to come in and destroy the city. But what Ezekiel wants the people to see is that behind all that is happening on a human level, there is an Almighty God besieging His children! In other words, He is saying to them: 'This event will not be simply a political event in human history, this city will be under siege but it is the result of divine action. Ezekiel, I want you to make the invisible aggressor - Me - visible. I want My people to see that it is I that is judging them, that it is I that is behind the Babylonians'. All that is going on, the judgement in the city, it is God!
Now there's a great lesson for us as we look at this second sign, because we need to ask ourselves in the light of this sign: do we, as believers, see God behind the movements in our world? Indeed that was the picture that was given in the vision - you know that the vision in chapter 1 was a vision of movement, and those wheels within wheels, that picture movement, were touching the earth. In other words, God's continual movement and involvement is always in the human level. Do we recognise it? Well, one test that we could put on it is the Foot and Mouth scare that has come upon our nation recently. If we were to say that it's a judgement from God, I believe that there are even some believers that would say - whether audibly or inaudibly - 'Come on! How do you really know it's a judgement from God? I mean, is it really a judgement from God? Who are you to say that?'.

Now I know that we have to be very careful of becoming God's interpreter, and as the hymn says: 'God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain'. But at the same time we must not miss what the Israelites were missing, they were failing to see that there was a sovereign God who was behind all of the actions of humanity, there was a God who is controlling the world - and that God would reign and would rule! Indeed Amos tells us: 'Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?'. The Lord is involved in our humanity, the Lord is here within society, the Lord is moving according to His own will - and just as Ezekiel's contemporary, Daniel, said - His will is: 'to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men'. Do we recognise that? Do we see the invisible aggressor behind the visible?

There it is: the sign of a model of destruction, the sign of a pan of separation. Thirdly there is the bed of iniquity in verses 4 to 8, and at this point the sign changes because Ezekiel ceases to be the God who is judging the people, and he becomes now the victim. He takes on the role of the children of Judah. He becomes the siege victim, and because of that it's more complex to interpret it - but if you look at it for a moment you will see that Ezekiel is asked to lie on his side. He's asked to lie there for 390 days, it literally says: 'bearing the sin of the house of Israel'. Then he is asked to lie on his other side, the right side, for a further 40 days - and that 40 days were to be bearing the sin of the house of Judah, verses 4 to 6.

Now what is the difference between the house of Israel and the house of Judah? Well, there are other differences within the Scriptures, but I believe what Ezekiel is pointing to here is: the house of Israel is speaking of the covenant people of God - all of Israel, the North Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom, all of the people who were called by God and chosen, the elect nation, to follow after God and who had entered into the covenant there at Sinai. He is to lie, bearing the sins of Israel, for 390 days! God tells him: 'Those 390 days are equal to the 390 years - the history of your sin before God'. If you look back in the Old Testament history you will find, right from the building of the first temple right until now, there are 390 years of Israel's combined sin against God.

So if that is the history of the house of Israel and their sin that he had to bear on his left side for 390 days, what is the sin he had to bear of Judah on his right side for 40 days? Well, I believe that it's not speaking specifically of the kingdom of Judah, but it's speaking of the Judeans that were in this concentration camp at this particular moment. They were from Jerusalem the capital, and there they are - and God is first of all saying: 'Now I want you to lie on your left side for 390 days to symbolise the 390 years of absolute sin and abomination of the whole covenant people of Israel, North and South Kingdoms. Then I want you to turn on your right-hand side, and I want you to lie there for 40 days to depict the 40 years of the sin of the remnant that have gone into Babylon'.

Now when you combine the dual significance of this phrase: 'bear their sin', we see all the iniquity in the community, and where is it being placed? Verse 4, it is being placed upon Ezekiel. All of the sin of Israel
and of Judah is all combined and is all laid upon the great prophet! All their long history of accumulated sin, which consummates later in the siege of Jerusalem that Ezekiel is prophesying to come, all of this is just piled upon God's prophet! Just as Israel's ancestors were in the desert 40 years for their sin, so those exiles of Judah would be 40 years there in Babylon because of their long history of sin.

Now as you look at this, I'm sure that it's beginning to conjure up in your mind the doctrine of substitution. Is it? Do you see it? Do you see the prophet of God who is bearing the sins of Israel, bearing the sins of Judah? You could possibly look at that and say: 'Well, isn't that a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ? Isn't that showing the substitutionary nature of His death?' - No! It's not! Do you know why? Because the judgement was not averted. The judgement was going to come, and the judgement - as we read later - did come. Jerusalem was still destroyed, and the purpose of this action may appear to be substitutionary, but what it was for was to illustrate to the people the accumulation of their own sin. It wasn't effective in removing sin, it wasn't to be so - it was just to show them the awfulness of their sin! That is what the Old Testament sacrifices were about. They did not take away sin. Indeed if you go to Hebrews chapter 10 verses 3 and 4, we read there: 'But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year' - do you see that? A remembrance of sins every year. He goes on: 'For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins'. All of those sacrifices, the law of God, all of the temple ceremony, all it did - like this bearing of the sin of Israel by Ezekiel - was to remind God's people of their sin!

What a striking picture and reminder it was: the prophet of God used as an instrument to bear the sin of the people, yet the judgement was still impending. I'll tell you what it is, it's not a picture of substitution, but it's an awful striking picture of the need of a redeemer - of the need of one who could actually come, and by bearing the sins of the children of Israel actually take it away and divert it! It's wonderful, isn't it, to be children of the new covenant? It's wonderful to be at this side of Christmas, and to look back and to see one perfect spotless Lamb who was able to say to His Father: 'I have finished the work that Thou gavest Me to do'. We see Him expiring there at the cross, and saying: 'Tetelestai! It is finished!'. Ezekiel couldn't say that, but praise God we can say it. Praise Him that that judgement is averted.

But don't think it's all doom and gloom for the children of Israel, because there is a glimmer of hope within it. If you combine the 390 with the 40, that whole time that Ezekiel was to lie on his side for those sins, you get 430 - and 430 parallels with the years that the children of Israel spent in sojourn in Egypt. Now that might seem awful, but the parallel that God is saying here is: 'I'm going to judge you, and the combined judgement for Israel and Judah together are going to make 430 - that's the same that you spent in Egypt', but there is a light of hope! Because when a man who really knew the word of God heard that, he would've realised that God was saying: 'You're going to go through an awful judgement, but at the end of it there's going to be a new Exodus!'. Oh, it's going to be a long tunnel, but at the end of it you're going to get out - there's going to be a new entry into the land. If you read Ezra chapter 1 you will find that the Jews again are back into Jerusalem. The message - although it is primarily doom and gloom for the people, and it wouldn't be deliverance for this particular generation - but there would be a day when God's abandonment would lift from the people, it would not be forever, and that rainbow that we saw in the first vision in chapter 1 would become a reality through all of the clouds of judgement.

There's a model of destruction, a pan of separation, a bed of iniquity - and then we find, perhaps, one of the most gruesome of these signs of judgement: a diet of famine, chapter 4 and verses 9 to 17. Additional punishments were to come to Jerusalem, that is what God was saying - and it is a sign of defiled bread. It's perhaps difficult for us to even read of this, let alone a priest who never was to eat anything that was defiled or unclean, to even go through with this sign. But here we find, in verse 14, that the sign was to depict what the people were to experience after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. It was a diet of famine. Despite the promises of the false prophets, the city and the people were going to be lost, and these various signs described the horrors that they were to experience after that event.
So Ezekiel is asked to depict it, and continuing to lie down on his side he is to live on siege rations. He was asked to eat food which was a near-starvation diet, a mere 8 ounces per day, of unpalatable mixture of grains and legumes - and legumes are just like the pods for peas. You can imagine eating that mixed up with grain into a kind of porridge and then baked. Starvation diet! He was only allowed two-thirds of a quart of water to drink day by day. What God was showing was the scarcity that there would be after the judgement had fallen on Jerusalem - there wouldn't be even one particular kind of grain to make a loaf of bread from. Indeed in the third century AD it was said that somebody actually made up a cake like this, and tried out an experiment - and even the dog wouldn't eat Ezekiel's bread. That's how horrible it was, and not only were the rations small and unappetising, but this priest of God who was never to touch or eat anything unclean was actually asked by God to cook this bread over the dung of a man! After cooking it over human excrement, this man Ezekiel would be deemed ceremonially unclean.

He cried to God and he protested, and from his protest God said: 'Well, do it with animal dung' - which is done today in some parts of the world, India and Africa. But what God was wanting to depict to the people is: 'This famine is coming to you because of another famine. This famine is coming because of a famine of the word of God, because My people are defiled, because My people are ceremonially unclean'. We are meant to be turned off by this whole escapade. As we read this, and God tells him to cook his bread - and look at the bread! - he's asked to cook it over human dung, we're meant to feel nauseated! Why? God is trying to communicate to His people the awful sinfulness of sin! It is disgusting! It does turn us to nausea, because I believe that is the disposition of the Almighty with His people's sin. It makes Him sick! In fact, when you go into the book of Leviticus, Israel is told there that if they defile the land with their sin that the land would spew them out. We are not children of the land, our citizenship is in heaven, yet that promise is still there for us - to the church of Laodicea. If we become lukewarm, if we become defiled in our sin, the Lord will spew us out! Do you see it? A diet of famine.

Then you have, fifthly, a sword of wrath. The fifth and final that you find in all of chapter 5 verses 1 to 17. In verses 1 to 3 you find what's very unusual - to find a priest shaving off all of his hair. Ezekiel seems to be doing everything that a priest ought not to do! In fact we find in 2 Samuel 10 and verse 4 that it was a shame for a priest to shave his head, because we read there that: 'Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off one half of their beards', and it was an awful shame to the house of David. I believe that the people, as they watched Ezekiel shave all the hair off his head and his beard, they would have all gathered round to see this spectacle as he acts out the imagery of what God was going to do to His people. He's acting out the imagery that you find in Isaiah 7 and verse 20 where God says: 'I am going to hire a razor. I'm not going to use my own'. In other words: 'I'm going to borrow someone else to do this job' - and here God is, borrowing the Babylonians to take judgement upon His own people. He is hiring the razor.

Here is the prophet, he shaves all this hair off his face - and then what he does is: he takes a set of scales and he carefully divides the hair, it says, into three parts. Do you know what that is saying? That this is not done haphazardly, that God never judges the world or never judges His people haphazardly, but it is done meticulously - it is all measured and meted out. In verse 12 you find that one-third of that hair he took and he burned it inside the city, and he was depicting how there'll be one-third of the children of Judah that would be destroyed, burnt in the city in the siege. Then we read that he takes a second third of hair and he moves outside the city, and he throws up in the air and he smites it with a sword - he cuts it into pieces - and he is telling that the second third of the group of people would be those outside the city who would be killed later in exile. Then the last third of the hair, he lifts it up and he throws it into the wind and he let it go to the four corners of the earth. He is saying that there is a group of people, and they will go down to Egypt - and that's the group of people that took Jeremiah to Egypt eventually - but there will be another group that will be scattered all over the world.
Then you read that not only was there a bit of hair that he burnt inside the city, and there was hair that he went out of the city and cut up into bits, and there was a third part that he threw up in the air and went to the four corners of the world - but we also read that there was a little smittering of hair in his skirt. God is saying: 'There will be a remnant. There will be a people that I will take back with Me. It is a small remnant, but there will be those who eventually will come back in My skirts'. Now we don't have time to look at this, but if you go home and read chapter 5 of Ezekiel and go then to Leviticus, and read chapter 26 of Leviticus, you will find there that these are not Ezekiel's words, but it is exactly the same words that you find in Leviticus - because Leviticus is a chapter of the law where God is laying down for Israel the blessings and the cursings of the covenant. You will find within Leviticus 26 the sins that are mentioned within this chapter, and indeed the sins that Israel are guilty of here. You find that God, in Ezekiel chapter 5, is interpreting the sins of Israel as a breach of the covenant that you find in Leviticus chapter 26. Do you see it? God is saying here, through this great visual experiment and illustration: 'My people have broken My covenant'!

It shows, as He metes out this judgement, that His judgement is absolutely fair. They have broken their agreement, the people have not kept their side of the covenant, of the bargain. But you know, it's worse than that, because Israel had not only failed to live up to God's standard, but if you look at verse 7 it says there that they failed even to live up to the standards of the nations around them. Imagine that, that the nations that Israel was meant to be a light unto were looking into Israel and saying: 'Look at the way they're living! They can't do anything right!' Because of that God's people, who would be a light to the nations, their light was being put out by God!

What a testimony to the utter failure of all those men and women born into Adam from the very beginning. But what a testimony - I think this is wonderful - that even though there has never been a people, even God's people, throughout all time who has been able to keep His covenant in Leviticus 26, there was one man, the last Adam, who came and perfectly and absolutely fulfilled the covenant of Jehovah - and we, because He takes the curse, we get into the blessing! Oh, isn't it wonderful? He takes our curse, He gives us the blessing. The sword of God's wrath descends upon Him. His holy soul is burnt with judgement for us. As Paul says to the Thessalonians: 'For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him'. Hallelujah for a wonderful Saviour!

Now there are questions that come out of this passage that I think we have to deal with tonight, because of the age in which we live. It answers a little to what we introduced this subject with, the preaching of the Gospel and how we preach a message of judgement to a day and age in which we live. These actions are very odd to us today, and you can imagine how odd they were for Ezekiel's own people - they were equally as odd. But you have to remember that this was a man who swallowed the word of God! Remember, last week? He swallowed it, and that means that because he swallowed it the word of God was taking flesh before their eyes.

So how do we communicate the message of God today? Do we use visual aids like Ezekiel? How do we portray to a lost and a judged world that God is going to come and judge them if He does not save them? In the past preachers seemed to be happy with words and word pictures, and they seemed to be able to show the great wrath of God and depict it in an awful way. But that's not the age in which we live. We live in an age that is increasing in technology, it's a visual age. It has the impact of television, of videos, and we have been transformed from a generation that used to be word-centred to a generation that is now image-centred. So now you have churches that are now bringing in drama and all sorts of things to, as they see it, effectively describe and depict the message of God.

I remember, a few years back, taking a weekend youth mission - and I didn't know about this before I took it, and the first night I was asked to preach for 15 minutes. I thought that was a little bit strange, they obviously
didn't know me! But 15 minutes - and when I got there, there was a drama group - and one hour later, after
the meeting started, I then was allowed to preach for 15 minutes - after they had acted out for one hour! I
went up to one of the actors afterwards and asked what his authority was for such a display, and guess what
book he pointed to? Ezekiel. Now we must deal with this, because the church is being riddled with all this
dramatisation. We must see here, and this I think is the fundamental thing, it may seem legitimate at a first
glance to say that this is a way to communicate the Gospel because Ezekiel did it in his day - but that misses
the whole point! The point of what Ezekiel did was that it was authorised by the divine being. God had told
him to do it, God had given authority for him to carry out this dramatisation. As he was carrying it out, he
was functioning as the divine word made visible and made sure. In other words, the message of Ezekiel took
over the messenger - it was dominating his life.

That is the first principle when we communicate the Gospel, and it is this: we must seek in our methods, and
in our communication, that we use that which is ordained of God. We read in the New Testament, in 1
Corinthians 1:21: 'For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by
the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe'. Now the real fulfilment of what Ezekiel was doing in
all of his dramatisation acts is not that we do the same, but the whole point of it is what it actually pointed to
- and we then ask the question: how does God now communicate His love and His judgement to a lost and
dying world? What is His ultimate dramatic act now? What is it? Just as the word became flesh in Ezekiel,
the word has become flesh in Christ. That is our message, that is our dramatisation: 'The Word was made
clesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of
grace and truth'. What Christ did is real, hallelujah! What Ezekiel did was a depiction, was pointing forward,
but our Lord Jesus lived, He died, and the greatest sign act of all was that He died taking our sins - but,
praise God, taking them away!

Just as Jerusalem was once abandoned by God because of their sin, our Lord Jesus Christ, the sinless one,
was abandoned on Golgotha's hill by God that we might go free. The difference between what Ezekiel does
and what we do is: our sins are gone! We aren't to depict anything, we aren't to act anything, we are to tell
what has happened! What is done! We are called to act out our message like Ezekiel's - and this is the
greatest challenge of all: if you want to dramatise the message of God, do you know what you are asked to
do? You are asked to dramatise what Christ did for you, what did He say? 'Take up your cross daily, and
follow Me'.

Do you know what we need today? We don't need new methods, we don't need new gimmicks - and let's ask
the question: with all the gimmicks that they've brought into the church of Jesus Christ, has it brought a great
awakening? No, if anything there's more reproach in the eyes of the world - and I believe the devil's laughing
at us! What we need is men filled with the Holy Ghost, willing to be fools for Christ and willing to dramatise
in their own life the message I bear in my body: the dying of the Lord Jesus! Oh, my friends, God's chosen
method is still incarnation - the life of God in us. My question to you as we close is this: are we, like Ezekiel,
acting out the message of God, living out the message of God - not dead orthodoxy, that's dramatisation and
acting - the real thing, the Living God living in me? For if we were doing that, I think we would find a great
awakening.

Our Father, we thank Thee that Thy plan of salvation is the divine life within the human. Lord, the apostle
John told us that no man has seen God at any time, but he also goes on to tell us that the way God will be
seen today is in the lives of His children when they love one another, when they lay down their life for the
brethren, and when they have a heart broken for the lost to win them to Christ. Lord, help us - like Ezekiel,
but we do it in a more superior sense - to live out the message of Christ in us, the hope of glory. Amen.
We'll be looking tonight at Ezekiel 6 and 7, God willing, if time permits us. I hope you read these verses before you came, because if you haven't you might be in a bit of trouble. Ezekiel chapters 6 and 7.

Verse 1: "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying", and that phrase has been repeated continually, in fact Ezekiel is unique in the sense that the word of the Lord has come to him more than any prophet - as far as I can understand - within the Scriptures. He receives so many revelations, and so many messages from God. "Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, And say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God; Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys; Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcases of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars. In all your dwellingplaces the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I am the Lord". Please underline that every time you see it within the book of Ezekiel. "Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be carried captives through the countries. And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captive, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations. And they shall know that I am the Lord, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them. Thus saith the Lord God; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot", speaking to Ezekiel, "Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries. And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations. And they shall know that I am the Lord, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them. Thus saith the Lord God; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot". So will I stretch out my hand upon them, and make the land desolate, yea, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblath, in all their habitations: and they shall know that I am the Lord.

Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Also, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel; An end, the end is come" - now please, if you mark your Bible, underline that as well, you'll see it repeated through this chapter - "An end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land". Again: "Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according
to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity: but I will recompense thy ways upon thee, and thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee: and ye shall know that I am the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God; An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come. The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the Lord that smiteth. Behold the day, behold, it is come: the morning is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded. Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness: none of them shall remain, nor of their multitude, nor of any of theirs: neither shall there be wailing for them. The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof. For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, although they were yet alive: for the vision is touching the whole multitude thereof, which shall not return; neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life. They have blown the trumpet, even to make all ready; but none goeth to the battle: for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof. The sword is without, and the pestilence and the famine within: he that is in the field shall die with the sword; and he that is in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him. But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity. All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak as water. They shall also gird themselves with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be upon all faces, and baldness upon all their heads. They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity. As for the beauty of his ornament, he set it in majesty: but they made the images of their abominations and of their detestable things therein: therefore have I set it far from them. And I will give it into the hands of the strangers for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil; and they shall pollute it. My face will I turn also from them, and they shall pollute my secret place: for the robbers shall enter into it, and defile it. Now He speaks to Ezekiel and ask him to do one of his many sign acts. He tells him, Ezekiel: "Make a chain: for the land is full of bloody crimes, and the city is full of violence. Wherefore I will bring the worst of the heathen, and they shall possess their houses: I will also make the pomp of the strong to cease; and their holy places shall be defiled. Destruction cometh; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none. Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour; then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients. The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be troubled: I will do unto them after their way, and according to their deserts will I judge them; and they shall know that I am the Lord".

I don't know whether you heard this week, but insurance premiums have gone up in price. I'm sure you have heard that, much to your pain. I was listening to a programme on Radio 4 during the week, where they were discussing this. They were debating the fact that the insurance premiums have risen purely because so many people are claiming compensation. They went into a philosophical debate about why this is so in our century: so many people are claiming compensation, and they indeed christened us a 'Compensation Society'. In other words, if you have an accident - whether you have whiplash or not - you claim for whiplash, because you know that you probably will get the money for it. They, in their secular discussion, were able to come to the conclusion that the reason why we're a 'Compensation Society' is due to our fondness of attributing blame to others. When we have accidents it's never to do with our stupidity, or our clumsiness. Someone else is to blame. If we crack our toe go on the footpath, it's the Council.

That mentality is filtering into society, and no-one any more seems to want to take true blame. Indeed, as we look around us and even look at the television this evening at the news, we see that justice once again has
been castrated. It seems that there is no justice any longer in the courts of our land. Right and wrong are hard to tell apart nowadays, and I would say that they've almost become legally indistinguishable. We look at our own land and the politics, and what has gone on in the last few years since the Good Friday Agreement, and we see now today that terrorists are compensated more than the victims of terror.

We could almost cry with the Psalmist in 73 and verse 12, where he in his day was looking around and seeing all these injustices. A society that was not willing to take blame, but blamed those who were right and acquitted those who were wrong. He cried out: 'Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches'. The ungodly prosper, the evil are the ones who are rich. Well, the message of these two chapters we have read together this evening - and it was necessary to read both chapters, they go together. There are so many details in it, but listen, the one theme that must surely have come across to your mind is this: men and women may get away with their wickedness here and now in this dispensation, but this message of God is, 'You can run, but you cannot hide!'. Judgement is coming! The judgement of God is inevitable, and because of the hotchpotch of a lack of blame within our society, a lack of accountability, a lack of absolutism whereby we know what is right and wrong - whether morally or legally - the judgement of God will be an even greater shock because men think they have evaded it.

I don't know whether you have ever pondered the link between the dilution of the judicial system in our age today, and the denial of the doctrines of judgement. Have you ever set them beside one another? How a father convicted of sexually abusing his daughter can get three years jail? Then you measure that beside the theological concept of judgement for sin, and what you find - I believe - if you look at it, is that the lack of justice within our society is infiltrating into the minds of men and women so that they believe that there will never be consequences for their sin. If you can get away with crime - in other words, in your realm of reality, life, day by day living, if that is a place where men and women can get away with murder, heinous crimes, rape, that breeds within your mind and within your soul ultimately a confidence that it will always be so.

What happens is: the minimalisation of guilt becomes the cause of horror when men and women realise that there is a day coming when they will be judged severely. Do you see the parallel? Do you see the link that there is? Do you see why men and women don't want to believe in hell? Do you see why, in our society, theologians are diluting the concept of the judgement of God? And when you read chapters like Ezekiel 6 and 7 you wonder how they can do it! The graphic language that God is an angry God, and that God is declaring - as our title tells us - that 'the end is here!', that He will come in judgement. That does not only apply to the law of our land, but it applies - as we have said - to the laws of God. When you conclude, think about this for a moment, when you conclude that God is a God of love, just a God of love who will never ever punish you, who certainly won't send you to the lake of fire for all eternity, what happens is there is a process within you that you allow yourself the liberty of changing truth.

You see, if you don't believe there'll be any consequences for changing truth, why wouldn't you change it? If you don't believe in a hell, why would you ever contemplate an angry God? What happens is: when you don't believe there are consequences for your actions, you can then change truth - and when you change truth you begin to misrepresent God, and when you start to misrepresent God you get a new god, and when you get a new god you commit the sin of idolatry.

Don't always think that we're cocooned in the church, and are not affected by the world around us - because we are. Theologians, Bible teachers, are affected by society's values that prevail - and when you have a liberal society you will have a liberal church. The most serious sin that I can see within the Scriptures is the rebellion of idolatry in the eyes of an Almighty and a Sovereign Living God, for it is a serious thing to misrepresent the character of God. That is what idolatry is! To misrepresent the Almighty, and that is the sin that Israel was guilty of here - and God's message is: 'That sin just can't disappear! That sin must be judged and, Israel, that judgement is inevitable!'.
So we have the reason, first of all, for the judgement. We see it in verse 2 where He says to Ezekiel: 'Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel', and then in verse 3 you have, 'Ye mountains of Israel'. It's as if Ezekiel is turning and speaking to the mountains, that's exactly what he's doing. Now why is he speaking to mountains? Well, you remember in chapters 4 and 5 where Ezekiel was given the signs of judgement, those signs of judgement were specifically for the city of Jerusalem. But now the judgement, the borders, the horizon of this judgement, are being broadened. God is saying: 'I'm not just going to judge Jerusalem, but I'm going to judge the whole nation of Israel, north and south'.

But it means more than that, because for the Jew the concept of the mountains of Israel, if you like, was the home territory of God. Now I don't want to pull it down to our levels, but if I can illustrate it as His home territory, His home playing ground. The mountains were especially God's place, in fact the Lord refers to the mountains of Israel Himself as: 'My mountains'. God dwelt there in a special way, and even when the people of Israel were away in exile they were still God's mountains. As we read the word of God, even when Israel was taken captive by a foreign force - whether it be the Babylonians or another empire - the mountains of God still remained His home territory.

Now when you get that in your mind you begin to realise the seriousness of this sin, because God is directing His judgement towards His own home territory. In other words He is saying: 'Do you see this sin of idolatry? Do you see this sin of misrepresenting God? Well, if you like, you are bringing that sin right to My door step!'. The sin of idolatry had entered in, right into the very home territory of God Himself.

There's a third reason why Ezekiel addresses the mountains, and that is because in the hill countries of Palestine that is where there were located, in little spots, the high places of worship. If you look at verse 3 you see it mentioned there: 'and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys...I will destroy your high places'.

Those high places were little coves, little groves, and there would have been a stone platform on which there would be an altar to the foreign god - Baal or Asherah - and there would be other cultic practices, and objects, and gods, and various other statues that people would worship and bow down to. They were constructed, and sometimes there were little buildings or, if you like, little chapels. There were idols housed within them, they lived there and men and women worshipped them there.

As you read the Old Testament you will find that, prior to the building of the temple in Jerusalem, the Lord allowed that God should be worshipped in those vacated high places of another god. Before there was any place, as long as the men and women of Israel were worshiping the true and the living God, God allowed them - 1 Kings 3 and 2 - to worship Himself in those high places on the hills. But as we read Old Testament history we find that, once the temple in Jerusalem was built, God told them in Deuteronomy chapter 12 that that was to be the centre place of worship - worship was not to take place anywhere else, but at the temple in Jerusalem!

As you and I know in many ways in life, and especially in religion, old paths die hard - the old habits that we have, especially when those old habits are more convenient for ourselves, and the locations are more flexible, and the rules are broader. That is exactly what happened to the children of Israel: they were allowed to use these places when there was no temple, but when the temple came and God said: 'Now you've to worship Me here, and don't worship Me there', the people said: 'Well, it's more expedient for me to worship You in these high places. It's more convenient, it's nearer my house. The rules of this God are more flexible!'!

Often the figures of Baal and Asherah were erected once again in those high hills, and again the ritualistic sexual practises took place above every high hill, and under every green tree as they worshipped the fertility gods. One by one, year by year, this pagan religion began once again to infiltrate into God's Judaism. If you turn to 2 Kings - you don't need to do it now - 2 Kings 23, you'll find there that even those ministering at the high places in King Josiah's day were not just pagan priests of Baal and Asherah, but the very priests of
Jehovah, God's priests, were standing there worshipping and offering sacrifices to another god!

All of that religious behaviour can be summed up in a word that is extremely relevant and contemporary for us today, the word 'syncretism'. What syncretism is is when you combine the truth of God with false religion, you get a syncretistic faith. The distinctions of the true and living God were being blurred. Israel's distinctiveness as the people of God, and as a shining light among the nations, and as having the only way to God, was being diluted. You can see this if you read through the books of Kings and Chronicles, you can see that it was the primary concern of the writers of those books - that the kings, one after another, failed in wiping this old religion of Baal worship out. God continually told them: 'Knock down those altars, knock down those high hills and worshipping places of the god of Baal'. But time after time there was this repeated failure of reigning monarchs to suppress the high places, in both the Northern and the Southern kingdoms. As we read Old Testament history we find out that the only two kings, Hezekiah and Josiah were the only two monarchs that attempted to destroy them!

We read, even, that at times this syncretism - this false mongrel of a religion - was officially encouraged! It was sanctioned, it was stamped by the kings - and some of them even worshipped those gods themselves! Some of them weren't as bad as that, they only turned a blind eye to it. Now listen, I hear people say sometimes, you know: 'See in the day and age in which we live, we've got to make the word of God relevant'. That's a lot of rubbish! You don't need to make the word of God relevant, it is relevant! If people would just take it and preach it they would find that it becomes relevant!

Can you see a more clear picture in all the world of our day than this? A day when there is religious syncretism, and pluralism, and ecumenism - there are no more absolutes any more, but as long as you're sincere and have a heart after some kind of deity out there, and as long as you're nice to one another, smile all the time, God will accept you! It doesn't matter any more what truth really is! You have the priests of Christendom standing up and worshipping other gods - some of them even standing and saying they don't even know if there is a God! You have the 'Defender of the Faith' saying he will be the 'Defender of the Faiths'. This is the kind of society that we are living in, and with the ones that are actually worshipping other gods you have the other ones who just turn a blind eye to it and let it go on, and don't even shout about it.

We see for Israel that in Leviticus 26, as we saw the parallels last week, there the covenant was laid out for God's people and they were giving the blessings and the cursings. They were blessed if they were obedient and stayed with God, and if they were disobedient they were cursed. You see the parallel here again, it can be heard, the curse of God because they had fallen away from the covenant, they had become a rebellious people for worshipping and following another god! There you have it, the reason for the judgement: absolute and utter idolatry.

Now listen, let's bring it into our day even more for the situation is just contemporary to us - but certainly I would say Ezekiel is not contemporary, because there's very few of them around today. Now what do I mean by that? Well, I mean that if you stood up in Parliament, or even in public, and shouted at the top of your voice what Ezekiel said, people would be absolutely astounded and turn nauseated at such ignorance and arrogance! In a contemporary pluralistic society Ezekiel's words are terrible!

Now look at this, idols are mentioned through chapter 6 consecutively. Do you see the word in the Hebrew that Ezekiel uses? It's a favourite word of his - because he uses it right through the passage - for idols, do you know what it actually means? It's a bit like what Paul does, he makes up words when he can't think of a word to describe what he's meaning. What Ezekiel does is he takes two words and makes an artificial one. The first word is the word 'to roll', the second word is for 'a detestable object'. So he takes the Hebrew word 'to roll', and the Hebrew word for 'a detestable object' - he sticks them together, and he makes a word that means 'idol'. Do you know what the imagery is? Just think about it for a minute: a rolling object that defiles. You don't need to think too long, he is speaking of excrement. Ezekiel, in the strongest language that you can
imagine, is calling these idols of Baal and Asherah pieces of dung!

But let me tell you, he does it in even cruder terms that I couldn't tell you from the pulpit tonight. For if we were to take it into our society, and try and explain what Ezekiel was saying, we couldn't say it - it's so crude! As one author said on this verse: 'Such is not the typical language of inter-faith dialogue in our culture'. Sure it's not? If you can imagine Archbishop Eams telling Cardinal Sean Daly that his idols are just pieces of dung. You can imagine what would happen [it would be] all over the papers, on Talkback, on Question Time, and everybody would be in a hue and cry - but here's Ezekiel, doesn't care, it's the truth of God!

Now the question that we have to answer here is: do we do what Ezekiel did? Now I don't mean in our scathing remarks, but I mean Ezekiel didn't just say this - some of the prophets, even Gideon, went and pulled these things down and smashed them up! Is that what we're to do? We have to be very careful, because many people have read the Old Testament and misrepresented it and misinterpreted it. Because modern nations, in other words - and this might hurt a few of you - but the nation that we live in is not God's nation. We are not in a covenant with God as a people! Therefore, because there isn't that covenant relationship between God and the United Kingdom, we must beware that we don't bring in the rules and regulations of a covenant relationship.

Now I know that in British history a lot of men did believe that we were in covenant relationship with God, but you'll not find that within the Scripture. We are not in a relationship, covenantally, with God - so to a large extent it doesn't matter what men and women do around us. But this is the inference, and this is how we must apply it to our day and age: Israel were God's covenant people, and if you want to take the parallel into our century today, in our dispensation the people of God and the people that are covenanted by the Spirit of God is the church of God. Right, we apply it. That means that if we are to do today what Ezekiel was doing then, we are to come into Christendom and into the realm of religion and we are to declare what the truth is, and we are to declare that the covenant of God has been diluted, that idols have been brought up into the church of Jesus Christ, into His covenant people.

Let me give you an example of this, because this is exactly what Paul did. Let me give you two examples in fact. In the book of Acts you have Paul in Athens, and he looks at the altar unto the unknown God, and what does he do? Does he say: 'You pagan sinners!'? The AV says: 'I perceive that you are superstitious', and indeed the Greek seems to indicate that Paul is actually saying: 'I perceive that you are religious'. It seems that Paul is almost commending them for their seeking after the God, or a god, even if he's the unknown God. So there is a people, the Greeks living in Athens, and they are not covenanted to God - they are a Gentile nation. Paul comes to them and tells them the way, the living way.

But it's different for Paul when he finds people who say they're Christians, preaching a false gospel. When he finds the people who claim to be covenanted by God, and are taking the name of Christ as their own - and he uses the harshest words possible, and he reserves them for those who are preaching: 'Anathema'! That tells me that there can be no polite dialogue with those who Paul considers under eternal condemnation. Do you see how we apply this in our day? You can look at it - we don't have time - to Galatians 1 and verse 8, and he says: 'It doesn't whether an angel from heaven come down and preach another gospel, he is accursed of God if it is not the truth!'. Go to Galatians 5 and verse 12 he says the same thing, and in Philippians 3 and verse 2 he describes anyone who came into the church, into the religious realm, and among the covenanted people of God by the Spirit, and preached another gospel - do you know what he said? 'They're dogs! Beware of dogs!'..

Now again that doesn't impact us today in our realm, because a dog was the dirtiest animal you can imagine in Palestine. It had other connotations, it was such a strong word - and in fact you could even think of words now that are related to dogs in our language that are absolutely abusive, but that is the connotation, that is the
strength of it. He even talks about those who came into Galatia telling them that they needed to be circumcised and Paul said: 'I wish they were even cut off!' - and he's not talking about cut off from the people of God! He says: 'If they want to be circumcised, well why don't they go the whole way and be emasculated!'.

You can see that Paul uses the strongest language possible when it comes to those who will pervert the truth and the gospel of Almighty God. It doesn't matter whether it's a dead body that they're flying around the world for men and women to touch - that is idolatry in the sight of God and should be condemned from every Bible believing pulpit in the land! It is absolute blasphemy! Because of that God says: 'Do you know what I'm going to do?'. In verses 11 to 14, and also at the start of chapter 6, He says: 'I'm going to do a death dance. I want you to do it out for Me, Ezekiel'. You see, in these high places where they worshipped the other gods, as they would sacrifice to their gods and bring homage, they would do a ritualistic dance. As they were committing and consecrating the place to their god, they would dance around it, and sing and all the rest. But God takes this, and almost - if I could say it - in a sarcastic way, He says: 'Well, I'm going to do a dance of death! Just as you consecrate this place for your holy worship, I'm going to slay the people round, and I'm going to lay them round just the way they would dance - but they'll be corpses, and they'll lie in death, and they'll lie in blood - do you know why? I'm going to do what every monarch in Israel and Judah failed to do - I'm going to do it!'. Why? 'Because then they will know that I am the Lord'.

Do you see what a big thing it is to misrepresent and violate the character of Almighty God? That's the motive of the covenant in Leviticus, to not misrepresent the character of God - and you see, my friend, even in our own Christendom, and now sadly in evangelicalism, how our God is misrepresented as an impotent, powerless, weak grandfather who's just a God of love. It stinks to God. That is the reason for the judgement.

Then, secondly, we have the remnant of the judgement in verses 8 to 10. You see there that there is a glimmer of hope in chapter 6, because God tells Ezekiel: 'There will be some, and it will not be now Ezekiel, but in the years to come they will look back with hindsight, they will remember and have bad memories of what they did. They will remember me, they will remember their idolatrous sins, and they will have self-loathing. The sin of idolatry that they once delighted in, it will come to them and it will be the object of horror in their eyes, and terror, and conviction of their sin. Ezekiel, this is future, it's not going to happen now. It's going to take time for this to fester and germinate within their heart, but the judgement that I bring upon them, it will bring them to the realisation of what they have done!

Now from a theological point of view, an eschatological point of view, it tells us this: that God never ever cut off Israel finally in history, and He never ever will finally cut them off. There will always be a remnant, always be some who are faithful - but I think this is, perhaps, one of the darkest hours in the whole of Israel's history, except today. For it takes them a while until they realise, only some of them, what they have done. That quickly transpires from verses 8 to 10 talking about a hopeful remnant, right back into judgement - it's only a glimpse of hope. You find again in verses 11 to 14 a threefold judgement that you find repeated throughout the Old Testament: there is the judgement of the sword, war; there is the judgement of the famine, hunger; there is the judgement of the plague, disease - and once again it's unleashed on all of the land. In verse 11 you can read that, from house-to-house for the abominations - and that word 'Alas', literally means 'Hooray! Hooray! God is judging His people's sin!'.

Isn't that awful? This fearsome trio of sword, famine, and plague can be found in Leviticus 26 as a judgement of a violation of the covenant of God. If we had time we could go to Revelation chapter 6 and see that the four horsemen of the apocalypse - three of them are sword, famine, and plague. It is God's way of judging, and it even points in this through to a future great tribulation upon the whole of this world.

What a picture of our world today, what a picture - because Baal worship and Asherah worship is still with
us. Do you know why? Because Baal was the thunder god, in other words the god of power, and the male
god of fertility. Asherah was the female goddess of fertility, and we know her better from the Greek goddess
Aphrodite, the goddess of love - so-called - 'Eros'. There you have it, and the Israelites were wandering after
these gods - and do you know what they believed? That when these two gods copulated in heaven, there
would be rain on the earth and the seeds would grow and there'd be fertility. They believed that the way to
worship these two gods, and to help them copulate in heaven, was for men and women to commit fornication
all over the world - and under every green tree, and upon every high hill, this is what God's people were
doing!

My friends, if you don't see the parallels today with our world - as one writer put it: 'To put it into the
contemporary vernacular, Baal and Asherah were in effect the patron saints of sex and guns and rock roll -
promising to deliver a potent mixture of satisfaction to the desires for power, success, and pleasure'. Sex,
power, and money - only look to Hollywood and you'll find out that those are the gods of today. Now, the
church of Jesus Christ wouldn't remotely - I hope, at least the true Church - bow down to pieces of wood and
stone and metal. That is beyond us, and therefore we think that we are not committing idolatry. But you
know, and I know, that we can have little high places in our heart. We can have little altars to unknown, or
even known, gods. Even in our lives, in our families, we can have them as a god, our career as a god, our
business, our self achievement, our academia, our recognition, our doctrine - even our church, our
denomination!

One writer put it: 'Our high place may be the office, where we sacrifice our relationships to win the blessing
of the god of career. It may be the family room, where we consecrate our prime time to the god of
entertainment. We measure our value and success by the extent to which these gods smile on us, and
consider ourselves of little value when they frown on us'. At times, because of these things, we often despair
within ourselves that our desires for God are not enough. You know, C. S. Lewis says that's not the case, he
says: 'Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward in the Bible, and the staggering nature of the
rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that the Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak!
We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink, and sex, and ambition - when infinite joy is offered
us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum, because he cannot understand
what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea, we are far too easily pleased'.

For the believer the choice is between reward and loss, for the unbeliever the choice is between life and
death. We hear today, around our world and in the church: 'It doesn't matter what you believer as long as
you're sincere' - but what that is in cold language is: 'It doesn't matter what you believe about God'. If it
doesn't matter what you believe about God that is idolatry, and that is a matter of life and death - and it
means that it matters all the more, for God is a jealous God! God is one who will not suffer caricatures like
that.

The reason for the judgement, the remnant of the judgement, and finally: the arrival of the judgement. Many
think the message of the prophets continually through the word of God was this: 'Repent, for the end is near'.
You know the wee man walking about: 'The end is nigh'. That's not what Ezekiel's message was, his message
was: 'It's too late to repent, the end is here!'. What an awful, awful message to have to preach. The message
that you find in Genesis, remember we saw the parallels between the beginning in Genesis and this book? In
Genesis 6 verses 5 and 6 you have: 'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that
every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had
made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart'.

Do you know what God says in chapter 6 and verse 9? He says: 'I am broken with their whorish heart, which
hath departed from me - my heart is broken'. In other words, if we could put it in our language today, He is
saying: 'This is going to hurt Me as much as it's hurting you' - it has come. For the first time in this chapter 7
in every chapter so far there has been a glimmer of hope: the rainbow in chapter 1, the remnant in chapter 6, but if you go through this chapter you'll not find one iota of hope. Totally dark, totally gloomy, and it's in poetic form. God Himself - do you know how He refers to Himself? As 'the Lord Attacker'! Verse 9, look at it, He says: 'I am the Lord that strikes the blow, I am the Lord that striketh!'. He says over over again: 'The end is here', verse 2 of chapter 7, verse 3, verse 6, verse 7, verse 10, verse 12. He over and over again says: 'The end is come, the end is come, the end is come, the end is come!'.

God's anger is burning against His people. His wrath is kindled. Imagine the impact of this - this is God's covenant people! God who had been revealed to Abraham as Jehovah Jireh, God the Provider; been revealed to God's people as Jehovah Nissi, God my Banner - and that simply means 'God my Protector'. So here you have a people that have seen God as their provider, and God as their protector, and now God says: 'I'm Jehovah Makeh (sp?), the Lord that smites you!'. God's patience had run out with His people, and God's anger was personal. If you count how many times, even in verses 8 and 9 of chapter 7, that you read the word 'I' it's amazing. He saying: 'I'm doing it, I shortly will pour out my fury upon thee, I will judge thee. Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity'. God is saying: 'This is a personal anger, I have a personal controversy with my people. I am not an impersonal cosmic force or law, I am a personal God who is holy, and a God who is angry!', in verse 3, 'A God who has reason, just cause, to be angry - for I am recompensing you for your works!'.

The land, if you like, was ripe for judgement. Verse 10 says the rod had blossomed, and the rod speaks of Nebuchadnezzar - meaning that the time for God's rod, he was actually God's threshing instrument for the children of Israel. God took Nebuchadnezzar in His hand, verse 11 explains that violence had become a rod of wickedness - and God was using Nebuchadnezzar to discipline and to chastise His people. What is being predicted in chapters 6 and 7 is the final destruction of Jerusalem and the temple that will come in 586 BC - the final destruction of that city and the third deportation to Babylon. They cast God's law aside, they put it behind their back - so God would set His face against them, God would force them to despair at their idols, God would make them dissatisfied with their hoarding up of silver and gold. They would cast their silver and gold into the streets, and they would break down their idols. Their material possessions would mean nothing to them - look at verses 19 to 22 - they would be meaningless, they wouldn't fill their belly or their bowels, they wouldn't satisfy their hearts.

In verse 22 we see God says: 'Not only that, but I'll let them go into the very Holy of Holies, My secret place - I will let the Gentiles, the worst of pagans, walk in and defile my place'. We heard yesterday morning that they set up their ensigns, their signs of pagan religion and military prestige. He says, in verses 26 and 27, that in this judgement He will be no respecter of persons. 'The king shall mourn, and the prince', verse 26, 'the priest' - all the religious realm, all the hierarchy and the monarchy, they will all come to naught for they have left God! He told Ezekiel: 'I want you to do another sign: take chains and put them on your arms, and show these people that I'm going to chain them because they have chained themselves to their sin'.

We see God's people, Israel, still in absolute misery and distress today because of this very same thing. D.A. Carson preached on a tape about these chapters, all of judgement, do you know what he called it? 'When God Shoots to Kill' - an awful thought! But the reality is this: any nation that rejects the knowledge of God, it will lose its moral fibre, it has no means of support or protection when it falls into trouble. This is exactly what is happening - God isn't even protecting them, He is the Lord the Aggressor, the one that's smiting them. We might declare: 'O God, our help in ages past', because of the first world war and the second world war - but let me tell you this: because of what our government and church and society are doing today, if we - God help us - ever fall into another world war, God will not be with us!

There is a day of reckoning coming, and we as God people should know it. There's a day of judgement, there's a great tribulation, and there's an awful hell - and there's a judgement going on at this very moment
even in people's lives for their sin, where they are receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which is meet. You see AIDS all over the world because of sexual immorality, but there is a day coming after man shall die that there will be a judgement. Jude says: 'The Lord will come with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him'. The point is this - praise the Lord this isn't for us! - but the point to us is this: knowing the terror of the Lord we ought to persuade men! For it's not God's job to just forgive them, it's not God's job to let them in because they're sincere - because the religious world in their religion and moralism, as they live this life of unrepentance they are doing nothing less than treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of righteousness of God.

What is the message? Ezekiel 3 and 18 is the message: we are the watchmen, the watchwomen, who are to cry to a dying world: 'Flee from this wrath to come!'. That's why the apostle John, in his closing words in his epistle 1 John 5 verse 21 - do you know what he said? A very strange thing, when I was younger I couldn't work out why he threw this one in at the end: 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols'. I once heard a preacher say that in his study he had a picture, and there was one little word just written in the middle of that picture - do you know what it said? 'Eternity' - eternity.

Whether it's heaven or hell, whether it's reward or loss, God - as He gave these people the choice - gives us the choice: 'Choose you this day whom you will serve'. Sinner, will you go to hell for your sin? Child of God, will you go on empty-handed?
Ezekiel chapter 8, and we're reading chapter 8 and chapter 9 this evening. I hope you have read them before you came to the meeting. Not as long tonight, these chapters, so let's begin at verse 1 of chapter 8:

"And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell there upon me. Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber. And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy. And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain. Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry. He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? Even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? But turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations. And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about. And there stood before the seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? For they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth. He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar,
were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east. Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.

"He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and slay: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city. And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, A Lord God! Wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head. And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me".

Chapters 8 to 11 of Ezekiel comprise the second vision of this man of God, but in order that we deal with it we're going to look at it in two halves. We're going to look this evening at chapters 8 and 9, and then next week - God willing - at chapters 10 and 11. The date that Ezekiel received this vision is found in verse 1 of chapter 8. It says the fifth day of the sixth month of the sixth year of Jehoiachin's exile, and if we translate that into our present day calendar it was the 18th of September 592 BC. Mathematically, if you work it out with all the other dates that we have in this book, and indeed comprising the 430 day lying on his side that Ezekiel went through and the fasting of a famine food, you find that 14 months had passed since Ezekiel's first vision. The 430 days that Ezekiel was lying on his side is almost now finished.

Now, we know that Ezekiel didn't lie exactly every hour of every day for those 430 days, because he had to get up and he had to make that food that was talked about within the word of God - the food of husks and dry bread that he had to bake over the dung, and eat, as a sign of the famine that would come upon the people of Judah in later years in exile. On one of those occasions, just at the end of the 430 days of Ezekiel's signing, perhaps he was up and he was making this food - but there was a group of elders, we know, in his house and they had gathered into his home to talk to Ezekiel.

Now the word of God doesn't tell us why they were there, but I think that possibly they were there looking for a favourable word from the Lord from God's prophet. If you remember, there are false prophets running around this concentration camp in Babylon, they are telling the people: 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace - they are telling them that 'the armies of God are going to come very soon and deliver you, they're going to bring you back to Jerusalem, and they're going to take with you all your riches, all your family, all your wealth, and everything is going to be OK'.
So perhaps these men, the elders, the leaders of Judah, have come to hear a favourable word of the Lord from God's prophet. If you were to turn to Jeremiah 28 tonight, you would find that in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign the prophet Hananiah declared that within two years the Babylonian yoke would be broken. Hananiah was one of these false prophets, and I just wonder did the people in exile hear Hananiah's prophecy in Jerusalem - and now the two years were almost up, and these people listening to Hananiah's false prophecy were expecting that very soon the armies would come from Jerusalem and would deliver them, and the Babylonian yoke would be broken. They had calculated it well, as far as they were concerned the clock that had once said two years was running down to zero, and they now expected to be saved.

But what a shock they got when they got to Ezekiel's house! For the prophet had no word of comfort, but the opposite - an absolute condemning message from God! A message of judgement because of the people's sins, and the sins of the nation that they represented. As they are standing in Ezekiel's home, and speaking to Ezekiel and asking a request of Ezekiel, we find that the Spirit of God falls upon this man of God and he receives another vision from the Lord. What an elders meeting that proved to be! For we read that an angelic figure, that we read of in chapter 1 and verse 27 that showed Ezekiel his first vision of the chariot of God, this angelic figure comes back again. It says that it lifts Ezekiel by the hair, and transports him - in his mind, of course, it is a vision - transports him to the city of Jerusalem, and specifically to the temple of God.

That angelic figure takes Ezekiel on a journey of judgement to the house of God. The first thing that we note is the abomination of the temple worship that Ezekiel witnesses. Chapter 8 unfolds the details of what the word of God calls 'the detestable idols of vile images of Israel'. You remember in chapters 6 and 7 that we looked at last week, the condemnation and the judgement of God was upon the whole people. You remember that God told Ezekiel to face the mountains of Israel and prophesy to the mountains, and the mountains were a figure of God's home country, the border, signifying the whole of the land of Israel - Northern and Southern Kingdoms. But now it's being narrowed down in chapters 8 through to 11, and God is now specifically addressing the elders of Judah - those who are the leaders of God's people.

As this vision opens we see this glowing angelic figure corresponding to Ezekiel to tell these men who lead the children of Judah what their judgement will be. We see later, in chapter 10 - we'll see it next week - that again this angelic figure causes Ezekiel to see the glory of the Lord and the chariot of God once more. But why is this happening? Why is God showing Ezekiel this same vision again? Well, the reason is the context in which He is showing it to him. The first context in chapter 1 was in relation to the whole of the nation, the whole of the people's sin. But now in chapter 10 it is specifically in relation to the sins of the elders, the leaders of Israel.

The prophet is given a tour of the temple of God. God shows him four scenes of increasing abomination and the offence that it is to God. He is shown one by one, and you see the four on your study sheet, each one becomes a greater abomination in the eyes of God - and each one brings Ezekiel and that angel nearer to the very Holy of Holies in the temple of God. So we look at the first that Ezekiel saw. The first abomination was the image of jealousy in verses 3 to 6, and here the tour begins. Ezekiel is given a vision of the idol of jealousy, and it says that it's at the North Gate of the city of Jerusalem. It seems that this idol was in the shape of a human figure, probably the Canaanite goddess Asherah that we thought about last week. Indeed in the book of Jeremiah we find that he denunciates the 'Queen of Heaven'. It's probable that the 'Queen of Heaven' that Jeremiah talks about is this specific image of the goddess Asherah that sits at the North Gate of Jerusalem. It may well be the image that Manasseh set up and erected in the temple - you remember that Manasseh did not follow the Lord, but followed Baal and the gods of the Canaanites, and he erected this idol to this goddess of fertility, Asherah, right in the very midst of the temple. When good King Josiah came he took it out of the temple, took it to the brook Kidron and burnt it. But we know from Jewish history that idol in another form reappeared, and every time men and women of Judah fell into sin this idol seemed to jump up again for their worship.
The location of the idol is, as the word of God says, at the North Gate - the outer North Gate. That was a place where guards used to stand, where men of the army used to stand and guard the city from the enemy. That seems to speak that these men, in their minds, were thinking that by setting this goddess of Asherah at the Northern gate of the city that, in some way, they would prevent attack from the enemies. Of course the message of this vision is that this woman, and this idol, will no more prevent the attack of the enemy of the Babylonians - simply because it is the Lord God that is sending them. It is the Lord God, the Jew's God, that is sending these people to come and to punish His own people - and this god, this idol of jealousy as the word of God calls it, is absolutely powerless to prevent any attack!

It's remarkable to think of the children of God even behaving in such a way, but you know that is not the strength of this statement and this vision that Ezekiel is having - but rather, the emphasis is not on the idol itself, but rather on the provocation that it causes God Almighty, the pain that it causes Him. Verse 3, look at it, it says that it provoked the Lord to jealousy! The Lord was moved with anger at this goddess that sits to guard the people of Israel from their enemies! The reason being, God says: 'I will not share my glory with another'. Now this is remarkable for us, and we must deal with this as believers - those of us who are saved in this gathering tonight, we must realise that God demands of us, God's people today, absolute and exclusive devotion. Absolute! With all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with everything that we are and have! That is what God demands, and nothing less!

You will know from the Old Testament Scriptures that time and time again the metaphor of marriage is given to symbolise the covenant relationship between Jehovah and God's people Israel. That is such a descriptive picture, isn't it? A husband who is jealous of his wife, he doesn't want his wife going around and wandering, having other loves, other affections toward other men - and God, like a jealous husband toward His people, is jealous for an exclusive affection and devotion, just like wedlock! This covenant relationship must rest upon mutual faithfulness, and you can be sure that the husband - God, Jehovah - will be faithful to His covenant, but the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures is the story of the unfaithfulness and the spiritual adultery of God's people! We must ask ourselves at the very outset - and this is such a vivid imagery, isn't it? We must ask ourselves, as God's people today, have we any idols that we are unlawfully wedded to? Is there anything in our life that we are relying on for security other than God? Are we having any illicit relationships and liaisons with things that will provoke our God to anger and to jealousy? Because He has to have our absolute, exclusive, love and affection and devotion! What an image, an image that provoked God to jealousy.

The second thing that Ezekiel sees is even worse - that's the point, everything he's going to see gets worse upon worse upon worse. Here he is led again from this image even closer to the temple itself. If you look at verses 7 to 12 you see that he's led from beside this idol of jealousy right to the very door of the inner court. In that inner court of the temple, it says that Ezekiel saw a little hole beside the door. He saw it as a way of getting in, and he started to scrape by the bricks and mortar and make the hole bigger. Eventually, as he made the hole bigger, he could see a door through the hole. He walked through the hole, and he opened the door, and when he walked through the door it says that he found a secret chamber that was full of paintings, full of murals, that were depicting all kinds of animals - probably unclean animals to the Jewish law.

Worse than that, if it wasn't enough for Ezekiel to see all this idolatrous pornographic worship all around the walls inside the temple of God, he then had his eye turned by the Spirit of God to see something even worse! Seventy elders of the house of Israel offering incense to the idols in that secret chamber! Imagine! The point is this: what was seen outside in that image of jealousy, what was done in public at a distance from the temple, has now infiltrated right into the private entrance of the temple courtyard - and they are now doing in private what they were doing outside in public. If you look at verse 11 of chapter 8: 'And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients', the elders, 'of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood
Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up'. A censer was just an offering instrument of incense to God - but these men are actually standing looking at these images on the carved wall, offering incense to these false animal gods!

As Asherah, the worship of the Canaanite goddess, was to protect the city from attack, this worship of these animal gods was expected to protect the people from demonic attack and demonic forces upon their lives. Animal worship seems to derive from the Egyptians - and the shocking contrast is this: that seventy elders of the children of Israel are standing there worshipping the gods of Egypt, and worshipping outside the temple the gods of Babylon, Asherah! It's a deep contrast, because if you go into the book of Exodus in chapter 24, you will find another seventy elders there - and do you know what God did for those seventy elders? He let them see the glory of God! Seventy elders seeing the glory of God! Later in Numbers 11 we find that those seventy elders were also endued with the same Spirit that Moses the patriarch was given. So they were able to see the glory of God, they were given the Spirit of God as Moses had been given the Spirit of God, and we see later in the Old Testament that there were seventy judges whose function was specifically to deal with all the idol worship across the land of Israel.

Seventy elders who see God, seventy elders who are endued by the Spirit of God, seventy elders who are given the responsibility to wipe out all idols from the land of God - and here Ezekiel sees seventy elders offering up incense to those gods! What was the justification for such idolatrous behaviour? We find it in verse 12, for they say, chapter 8 and verse 12: 'Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? For they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth'. 'He doesn't see us! God doesn't see what we are doing, that's why we can do this!'. These men who were once the pinnacle of what was spirituality in the whole of Judaism, are actually leading God's people into idolatry!

What is even more staggering is that Jaazaniah that you read of in verse 11, the son of Shaphan, is a descendant of the man who stood and read the book of the law for King Josiah. He is a descendant, a family member, of the one who read the book of the law - the people hearing the book of the law were moved in their spirit and started to follow God, they started to pull down all these idols and reform God's law as the law of the land again. That man, the Secretary of State in Josiah's kingdom, was in charge - in charge of godly reforms - but here is his descendant standing among these men worshipping false gods! You even find, if you go into the book of Jeremiah, that one of these men's forefathers was a defender of Jeremiah in Jerusalem. So while Ezekiel was prophesying here in captivity, and Jeremiah was prophesying back in Jerusalem, one of these men's descendants was actually guarding Jeremiah in Jerusalem! Yet this man is among these people that are secretly worshipping these idols!

Why? How can there be such a shift from godliness to absolute idolatry? 'The Lord doesn't see us! The Lord doesn't see what we're doing! The Lord God has abandoned us - we're in captivity, why should we worship the Lord? We will follow whatever gods we like, for God cannot see us!'. You might sit here tonight and say: 'That's a terrible thing, isn't it?'. You know, that's a thing we all do, for we believe that sometimes in secret - maybe we don't believe it in our head, but our heart causes us to sin in these ways. We believe that there are certain things that we do, and have committed in the dark, and we think no-one has seen us - and by thinking that we become psychological atheists! We believe that God cannot see us. We cease to believe in the attributes of God. We don't believe in His omnipresence, or His omniscience - that God is everywhere, wherever we are, that God can see whatever we are doing, whether it be sin or whether it be righteousness!

What a commentary on those words of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil'. What an astounding picture - but, you know, this whole vision proves the exact opposite: that God does see them, doesn't it? God is sending a vision to Ezekiel of exactly what they are doing! What a picture to us of the wheels of the chariot that we saw in chapter 1 verse 18, those wheels in
wheels that revolved and touched the earth were full of eyes - speaking of the all-seeing attribute of our God. Look at verse 6 of chapter 8, you will see God says: 'Son of man, seest thou'. Verse 12 again: 'Son of man, seest thou', again in verse 15 and verse 17 - and the Lord's response is: 'They say I don't see what they're doing, but I see absolutely everything they're doing!'. The response that God will give is in chapter 9 and verse 9, if you look at it: 'Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not' - but the Lord does see! The Lord will send a judgement upon them, and what a picture to us - if there are any here tonight and they are not converted, they are not covered by the blood of Christ, they are not saved by the grace of God and sure of their salvation in heaven - God sees you! God sees everything you've done, all the sins that you have committed in secret places that you think men have forgotten and no-one has seen - God sees! God is weighing up all those sins for a day of judgement, and God cannot forget.

The irony of the whole thing is that the incense that was burning in this secret chamber of the temple, and the old idol that was outside the gate of the city that was there to ward off the dangerous enemies, and ward off the dangerous spirits - do you know what it was actually doing? It was bringing upon the people the terror and anger of God. The thing it was there to do, it was doing the exact opposite!

There was the image of jealousy, and the art of idolatry, and then thirdly - verses 13 to 14 - there's the mourning of Tammuz. It gets worse still, for Ezekiel is brought to see the sight of these women weeping for Tammuz at the North Gate of the temple itself. With each new scene, do you see where we're going? The North Gate of the city, right to the gate of the temple, and now we're coming into the very inner court of the temple itself - and there's a group of women there weeping. By each movement of this vision you're coming closer and closer to the heart of Israel's worship. Weeping for Tammuz was a Babylonian ritual that marked the death and the resurrection, or better the return, of their god Tammuz. In other words, when autumn came and all the leaves and fruit started to die they believed that Tammuz was dying - the spirit of creation, the rhythm of nature, a fertility god. Therefore they believed that through this ritual of weeping for Tammuz that spring would come, then summer, and then there would be a harvest - so they believed that by crying for this god, that their tears would bring fruit.

The sad thing about it all is that not only were they worshipping the gods of Babylon in the image of jealousy - the goddess Asherah - and then they were worshipping the gods of Egypt, these animal gods, inside the temple itself, but here they are worshipping another god: the god of plant life. Isn't it amazing? The people of God are lamenting for a dead god, instead of worshipping the living God. They had substituted lamentation for the dead for worship for the living God. The Bible is so up-to-date! You could turn your television screen on and see these poor folk, Roman Catholic folk, running after St. Therese - touching these dead bones in the coffin, and they are lamenting the dead rather than worshipping the living God as they pray to saints! I heard today that they've even exhumed the body of Pope John! They've set him up in the Vatican, put a wax face on him, he's embalmed - and they're there touching him, they're practically worshipping him! They are lamenting the dead rather than worshipping the living God!

The mourning of Tammuz. Then, fourthly, you come to the worshipping of the sun in verses 15 to 16. This is the final supreme act of idolatry, for God has brought them from the gate, to the door of the temple, into the inner court of the temple, and now they've come into the very temple itself - and they can see there 25 men, it says that they are actually elders again, with their backs to the temple of God, facing eastward worshipping the sun. Verse 16, look at it, chapter 8: 'He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east'. Elders of Judah worshipping the sun, and turning their back on the God of heaven - this was the ultimate abomination: turning their back on God, and worshipping the created order!
Now think about this, that's been quite technical, but let's really think about it all together - because what you have here are Egyptian gods, animal gods on the walls of the temple. You have Babylonian gods, Phoenician gods, Tammuz that these women were weeping for. You have sun worship, which is Zabian worship, and Persian worship. In other words, you have all these foreign gods, and it's depicting for Ezekiel and the elders the comprehensive nature of Jerusalem's sin. Now that's the gods that they worshipped, what about location, what about the journey that Ezekiel is taken on? Well, they're going from the very outside of the city gate right into the very inner court yard of the temple. Their sin, their idolatry, covers the whole of the city and the whole of religious worship!

The elders were men; the women weeping, female. Seventy elders symbolic of the leadership, picturing the state of the whole people. You have men, women, boys and girls, leaders and servants - and what God is saying is: 'This incorporates the idolatry of the whole of the nation, they are assimilating for themselves the idolatry of Egypt, Babylon, Phoenicia, Zabia, all of these gods they are worshipping - they have turned their back on Me!'. They have worshipped male gods and female gods, human gods and gods of animals, they are even worshipping the planets, bowing down to the sun. Can you see this? This journey of judgement that abomination is being piled up on abomination, and eventually in verse 17 of chapter 8 God says to them: 'Is this trivial to you? Does this mean nothing to you? That this is the way the leaders of God's people are acting?'.

The inference is that it was trivial to some. It may seem foreign to us, we might say: 'We will never bow down to pieces of stone or pieces of wood'. But as one writer said: 'If you substitute their gods for football colours, a flag, a swastika, or even a pair of jeans, we find ourselves back in the seventh century BC'. Worse, they've even resorted to worshipping the stars once again in our nation. The Lord says: 'Because of all this idolatry I will now let loose my explosive anger. The axe is ready to fall'. Once they engage their final act of idolatry God says: 'I will be deaf to their cries, I will not spare. Unlike their cries to me, I'm not going to listen to them - but when I cry, I'm going to do it, I'm really going to do what works' - look at chapter 9 and verse 1. In verse 18 He is saying: 'I'm not going to listen to their cries', and in verse 1 of chapter 9 Ezekiel hears God's cry, and God's cry is the clarion cry that His judgement is coming!

We live in a pluralistic society, don't we? People say to us as evangelical fundamental Christians: 'Things are different now. We live in a multicultural society, you can't say that your God is an exclusive God, and your way is an exclusive way - the only way to God'. It's as if our exclusive faith is unique, that it's never been before. It's as if men and women have never ever lived in a multicultural society before, but we find that the people of God - especially in the Old Testament - were constantly finding themselves surrounded by other nations, surrounded by other gods, and they find themselves as pluralists! It was exactly what is going on today that evoked God's anger here: syncretism - where men said: 'I'll take a bit of this religion, a bit of that; a bit of this culture, a bit of that - and I'll make my own man-made way that suits me. I'll hedge my bets by having a bit of everything, I'll keep the gods happy no matter who they may be!'.

Do you know the problem with that? One of those gods they're trying to keep happy is a jealous God - a God who is only kept happy when He is worshipped exclusively with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. Don't you get into your head that this is the Old Testament God that we're speaking about, because the Old Testament God is the New Testament God! This God is our God, that is why Paul said to the Christians in 1 Corinthians 10: 'Flee from idolatry' - God cannot have idolatry. He told them: 'You're not to partake of pagan sacrifices and profess Christ. You can't have this paganism, you can't have this syncretistic, pluralistic, multicultural religion. You must be all out for Christ, or nothing!'. He said: 'Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?'.

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Our God has not changed, and our God is still angry, and it arouses His anger when He sees idolatry within the lives of His people. But if we miss this, we miss the fundamental point: God is addressing the leadership. God is holding the leadership of God's people responsible. Confucius was not a Christian believer, but he said some wise things, and one of them was this: 'If a ruler himself is upright, all will go well without orders'. Isn't that a fascinating statement? 'If a ruler himself is upright, all will go well without orders. But if he himself is not upright, even though he gives orders they will not be obeyed'. We find in our land today that when the integrity of a nation's leadership is gone there is no hope for the people. When our leaders are falling all around us in moral, financial, and political scandal - what hope is there for the ordinary people? What hope is there for us when we look to royalty and see adultery, and see worship of every false god you can imagine? Worse than that, is that this applies to the church as well.

It's awful to see the abomination of temple worship in this chapter. What it leads to is the administration of divine justice in chapter 9, and you see three things that I want to outline to you in the time that we have left. God says: 'That's it, I've had enough of all this idolatry, I am coming' - and the first thing He does in verses 1 to 7 of chapter 9 is: He sends some servants. Now we know these verses off by heart: 'God is patient and long-suffering, not willing that any should perish' - isn't that wonderful, that our God is a patient God? But you know, our God is not always patient, but there comes a time when His patience runs out - and when His patience runs out it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

What God does here in chapter 9 is He summons six guards with deadly weapons. Normally these guards would have been standing at the gate of the city, but there is now an idol standing at the gate of the city. Normally these guards would be fighting against Judah's enemies, but God has called these six guards to come and destroy the people of God! One of them is dressed in white linen, and he's not armed with a deadly slaughter weapon but he's armed with a writing kit - an inkhorn. We don't know whether these figures are angelic or human, and I think there's a reason for that: because what God is saying here is: 'I am sending these men, but these men will come in the form of the Babylonians. The human agent will fulfil my divine sovereign will. These enemies are coming, but it is I that is sending them, I am sending them to punish you!'.

It's amazing when you think of this, because this scene before us is a re-enactment of the first Passover. You cast your mind back to the book of Exodus, you will find that God came against the Egyptians - but the sad thing here is: God is doing exactly the same thing, but He's coming against Judah instead of Egypt. Just as the Lord passed through Egypt in Exodus chapter 12, and just as He didn't touch those who had the mark - the destroyer couldn't touch them - these six individuals with their weapons of slaughter were to pass through the city of Jerusalem slaughtering to destruction anyone who did not bear the mark as well! Whether they be young, whether they be old, male or female - even the defenceless they were told to go through - whether they be frail or innocent, they were condemned to destruction.

It's meant to evoke into the Jewish mind the Passover. It's meant to evoke into the Jewish mind that when Joshua and Caleb went into the promised land of Canaan, and they slaughtered everyone around them of the Canaanites, the Hittites, and the Jebusites - they were told to wipe them all out. This is speaking again, but the difference is that the roles are changed! It is God's people who are being slaughtered! The awful thing is that the slaughter begins in the temple with the chief idolaters, the 25 elders. In verse 6 of chapter 9 you see that they were told to go straight there to the top, straight to the ones who were bringing the idolatry in.

We read in Kings that when Queen Athaliah was dragged out of the temple and executed, that they dragged her out of the temple in order not to desecrate the temple - but God says: 'The temple has been so defiled with all your idolatry, that it's not going to defile it one more bit by killing these men right in the midst of the temple!' Do you see how contaminated God's worship had become? Now I don't know about you, but sometimes when we're reading these things, do you know what we think? 'Is that not so cruel for God to kill men, women, and children? Is it not ruthless? Is this not terrifying?' - and the answer is: yes, it is if you think
in your mind that these people were innocent bystanders! But the exact opposite is true: these people had filled up wrath before God for thousands and thousands of years, they had turned their back upon God and worshipped other gods - and now they find their judgement from God!

Our problem is that we believe we're sinners, but deep down we don't really believe we're that bad. What a picture of our sin this is. We like to think of the Lord as the 'God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin' - but we forget that Moses goes on by saying that 'He will by no means clear the guilty; He will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation'. As one man said concerning Sodom and Gomorrah, and the judgement and the wrath that came upon them in fire and brimstone: 'The Lord waits long to be gracious, as if He knew not how to smite' - that's wonderful! Our God waits long to be gracious, as if He didn't know how to be angry - but when He smites, He smites at last as if He knew not how to pity! When God is a God of grace it's as if He has forgotten to be angry, but when God is angry it's as if He has forgotten to be gracious.

The Canaanites have been replaced by the Israelites as the objects of God's wrath. Do you know what that tells me? As believers we've got to take this seriously, because this God is our God. It means that just as God was ruthless with sin, we've got to be ruthless with sin in our lives too. Do you remember David and Goliath? Once he slew the big uncircumcised Philistine, he chopped his head off - do you know what one of the Puritans says? If it had been us, we would have given him a hair cut and it would have grown back - and we would have had to deal with it again. But as one man said to me recently, when he chopped the head off Goliath he was saying: 'This is a problem I've had but I'll not have it again'. What did the Lord say? 'If your hand offends you cut it off! If your eye offends you pluck it out!'. Our God is a God of judgement.

The Lord's servants came, and then secondly the Lord's glory departed - and we'll not take time tonight to look at this, but we can see how gradually, from the Holy of Holies, right to the threshold of the temple, right on to the Mount of Olives, and eventually away totally, the glory of God departed - the Shekinah glory, that cloud of glory, and we'll see that more in chapter 10. But the point is this: it is better to remove the false presence of false gods, than to lose the true presence of the living God. Is that not the point? Is it not better to cut out of our lives all those things, to look into ourselves and - as Paul said to the Corinthians: 'Judge ourselves that we would not be judged'? Is it not meet that we should begin judgement at the house of God before God does?

Then thirdly we see the Lord's mark separating them in verses 8 to 11, and this is amazing - because in the midst of all this carnage all that Ezekiel (and remember it's still a vision, it hasn't come to pass yet), but in the midst of all this Ezekiel sees all these people being slain and he can't see anyone being saved. He falls at the feet of the Lord and says in fear: 'Lord, have You forsaken the earth? Lord, have You forgotten to save this remnant that You promised?'. This is when this high priestly figure in the white linen garment is told by the Lord to come and to put a mark on the forehead of the remnant of those who are to be saved.

Did you know the Hebrew word 'mark' is literally the Hebrew letter 'tau' (sp?)? Do you know how it was done on ancient manuscripts? It was done with a cross - 'tau'. I don't know whether Ezekiel saw any significance in this, but I certainly can - because this man in white linen garments was asked to go and to mark with a cross upon the head of every child that was to be saved as the remnant. It reminds us of Revelation, where the 144,000 out of all the tribes of Israel are sealed on their foreheads with the name of the Father, and with the name of the Son. It's a picture of completeness - just before that great tribulation breaks upon the whole earth, the 144,000 are commissioned and chosen as the remnant, marked with the sign of this cross. Did you know in the Greek language that 'Χ', 'tau', a cross, is the first letter of 'Christos' - Christ? Here Ezekiel is marking this remnant, maybe unknown to him, with the first letter of our Lord Jesus Christ's title as Messiah.
The thing is that there are so few marked with this cross that Ezekiel didn't think there were any. Who was to be marked with the cross? Do you know who? He says: 'Those who sighed and cried. Those who saw the situation around in the nation and within the temple, those who recognised themselves for what they were and the nation - sighers and criers' - and that's what we need today! Men who will sigh, men who will cry! Suddenly, at the end of this chapter, this priestly figure appears again and says: 'I have done as thou hast commanded me'.

Do you know something? There's a day coming when a great tribulation greater than all that we have just read is going to break upon this whole world. Men and women are going to go about their business, they're going to take the kids to school, they're going to make their piece and go out to work, they're going to come in and have their dinner - and then a terror that this world has never seen hitherto will break upon them. Do you know what Ezekiel did? He fell at the feet of this angelic creature, and he cried for mercy upon them - and that's what we ought to do. We ought to be crying, just like the watchman Ezekiel, that God will spare, that God will save - and if we do that we will actually be fulfilling, in our lives, the mark of God upon us, as men and women who sigh and cry for what is going on in this old world.

Are we being marked? Oh, to be marked! Oh, to be marked by the hand of God as one who - when all the world is going to defilement, and sin, and degradation - is living spotless, and blameless, and has a heart after God's glory! Oh, to be marked. Isn't it wonderful that through the cross we are delivered? Isn't it? Through Christ we are not appointed unto wrath, but we escape. Hallelujah!
Let me welcome you to our Bible Reading tonight; it's great to see you all with us here in the Iron Hall. We trust that we'll be blessed together as we meet around God's word, in the book of Ezekiel, again this Monday night. Ezekiel chapters 10 and 11 tonight for our studies, and let's read from verse 1 of chapter 10. The subject tonight is: 'Glory - Past, Absent and Future'.

"Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight. Now the cherubims stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory. And the sound of the cherubims' wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh. And it came to pass, that when he had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubims; then he went in, and stood beside the wheels. And one cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that was between the cherubims, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen: who took it, and went out. And there appeared in the cherubims the form of a man's hand under their wings. And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone. And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides; they turned not as they went, but to the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went. And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had. As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel. And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. And the cherubims were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar". Now note that; this is the same creature that Ezekiel saw in chapter 1 of this book. "And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also: for the spirit of the living creature was in them. Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubims. Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward.
"Moreover the spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of the Lord's house, which looketh eastward: and behold at the door of the gate five and twenty men; among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people. Then said he unto me, Son of man, these are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city: Which say, It is not near; let us build houses: this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh. Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man. And the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak; Thus saith the Lord; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them. Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, and ye have filled the streets thereof with the slain. Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Your slain whom ye have laid in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the caldron: but I will bring you forth out of the midst of it. Ye have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you, saith the Lord God. And I will bring you out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you. Ye shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. This city shall not be your caldron, neither shall ye be the flesh in the midst thereof; but I will judge you in the border of Israel: And ye shall know that I am the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for them whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord God. Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city. Afterwards the spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me. Then I spake unto them of the captivity all the things that the Lord had showed me".

Don't forget, as we look at these two portions of Scripture, that they are the second half of the vision that began in chapter 8. Last week we looked at chapters 8 and 9, and I think I told you that that was only half of the vision, and we finish the vision tonight. So if you can remember all that we saw last week, this is purely a continuance of the same vision.

In the book of Jeremiah you find a cry, the cry of the people is: 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!'. The motivation of such a cry is: false security. A people who were holding on to the externals of their religion, rather than the deep spiritual relationship that they could and ought to have had with their God. Therefore, when the prophet Jeremiah judged them with his prophetic utterance from the Lord and said: 'Thus saith the Lord, there will be destruction, there will be captivity, you will be taken away to a foreign land' - the religious men and the politicians of the day, their cry was: 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!'. In other words: 'We have the temple of God for our security! What are you talking about? Telling us about judgement! Talking to us about captivity and deportation! We are God's people, we have God's temple - within it dwells the Ark of God, God's presence dwells above the Ark of God - we can see the visible presence of God! Don't tell us that God is going to judge us!'.
If God were still in His temple, what happened to Jerusalem would never have happened. If the confidence of the people of Israel was a true confidence, they would have remained in the land and their security would have been justified - but as we read this book we see very clearly that it is not justified. In fact, what this vision shows us is that because of their sin the very presence of the Lord had departed from Jerusalem! In fact, in the first chapter of this book we saw that it was by the river Chebar, in this concentration camp in Tel Abib, that this man Ezekiel saw the vision of the glory of the Lord. It wasn't in Jerusalem he saw it, he saw vision of the glory of the Lord in captivity - which was to tell him that the very presence of the Lord was no longer in the place that they expected. It was no longer in Jerusalem, but it had actually followed the people of God into captivity.

So this vision that we're looking at tonight, it is totally about the location of the presence of God. It's about where God's presence dwells. If you look at these verses you will see that the seventh figure - remember there were seven figures, six of them were clothed in army gear, if you like, and had a weapon, a weapon of destruction and slaughtering; we saw that in chapter 9. But one of them was clothed in a white garment, a white linen garment, the garment of a high priest. In his hand was not a weapon of slaughter, but there was a quill and a bottle of ink - a little writing case. He was the minister of mercy, do you remember that? If you go back to chapter 9 you will see that that man, or that angelic figure, was told to go and mark all the remnant with the cross - the Hebrew letter 'tau'. He was a minister of mercy.

But if you look at this portion of Scripture you will see that this man is called once again. What the Lord commands him to do is now not an errand of mercy, but an errand of judgement. If you look at verse 2 you will see that he was told, he was commanded, to take the burning coals from beneath the throne off the altar. He then goes and stand beside one of the wheels of the chariot throne of the glory of God, and one of the cherubim take some of the burning coals and places them within his hands. Then he is told to go over to the city of Jerusalem and to rain this fire and brimstone upon them. In other words, Jerusalem would be burned to the ground with fire from heaven.

It is reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah, isn't it? Destroyed by fire and brimstone from heaven. If you turn with me to chapter 16 of Ezekiel and verse 46 we read these words, speaking to Israel: 'Thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters'. Ezekiel, indeed God through Ezekiel, is saying that Jerusalem's youngest sister is Sodom, and that is the state of the nation of God's people now. Sodom and Gomorrah was rained down with fire and brimstone from heaven because of their abominations unto God, God's own people had got to such a peak and climax of sin that God was calling Sodom their younger sister, and He was going to rain judgement upon them as He did to Sodom.

Now this is amazing, because where do these coals come from? The cherubim takes the coals from the angelic divine chariot of the glory of God, and then he puts them into the hand of this figure in white linen. In other words, these burning coals actually come from the glory, the picture of the glory, holiness, and purity of God. When you think about that: these coals that are used to judge God's people, to destroy Jerusalem, to destroy His own covenant people, are actually His coals of purity, His coals of holiness, and coals of glory.

Now if you think about this for a moment, and cast your mind back to Isaiah chapter 6 where Isaiah says: 'In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up', and then down through the passage you find that Isaiah sees such a vision of the glory and holiness of God that he falls at the feet of God and he says: 'Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the Lord'. Then an angelic figure takes, with tongs from off the altar, a coal - touches his lips, and he is purified. So the coals of God speak of purity, they
purify, they're in this vision of the holiness and the glory and the purity of God - but these are the very coals that God is going to judge His own people with!

The writer to the Hebrews says these immortal words: 'Our God is a consuming fire' - and when you think, isn't it remarkable that that flood of molten fuel of God's holiness that actually conforms us to Christ is the very same element that will cause the wicked to perish? All you need to do is think of the atonement, and think of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross - what was that cross? It was the altar of God! God's holy indignation was poured upon Him, all of His wrath from His holiness. If you turn to Psalm 22, prophetically: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' - there's the question asked on the cross by the Lord Jesus. What is the answer? Verse 3: 'Thou art holy'. It's remarkable, isn't it, that those coals of God's holiness and purity are the very things that give us life, the very things that give us purity? For as He suffered, the righteous one became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him - and there has been that transferral because of these righteous coals of God upon Him.

But the awful thing to think about in the context of Ezekiel is this: that the very judgement that was poured upon Christ at Calvary's cross, and gives us life, gives us purity and holiness, are the coals of hell that the wicked unregenerate sinner will endure for all eternity! The picture that we have in Ezekiel is that this is a foretaste of final wrath, and that is what this book has been pointing to all along. It's not just prophetic about Ezekiel's immediate history, but it pushes forward to the very end times. When we read the apostle Peter we find there that 'the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up'. It's awful, isn't it? The picture of God's holy wrath, there's nothing unjust about it, there's nothing wicked, there's nothing cruel - it is absolutely righteous because the very coals He uses to judge His own people are coals of purity and holiness.

Why does He do it? It's simple. As old Matthew Henry said: 'Those who will not come to Christ and be saved will depart from Him and be damned'. Isn't that in black-and-white, isn't that the Gospel? Those who will not come and be saved will depart and be damned! Ezekiel gives us a unique glimpse into the mechanisms of God's divine judgement, and His history within the world. We see here the workings, the mechanics, of God in all of His justice and also in His mercy.

When physical destruction eventually comes on Jerusalem you will read later on in this book and later on in the Old Testament that it finally came by fire, and God did rain fire upon it. Nebuchadnezzar came in 586 BC and took the final deportation and burned the city to the ground. What God is saying is: 'This is the heavenly realm, this is what is going on - these Babylonians are my human instruments! It is I, the sovereign Lord in heaven, that is directing them. I am sending them to destroy and destroy my nation and my city'. These men, these Babylonians, were only the human instruments in the hands of an angry God.

You know, when we thought about that vision that he saw last week, and that idol sitting at the gate, and all the horrible abominations that he saw on the temple walls, and then he went into the very holy place and he saw the elders bowing down to the sun with their back to God - all of these abominations were to protect the people from their enemies and from demonic attack. But in the ancient near East, the thing was this: whenever a city or a country was sacked and destroyed by the enemy it was a sign to them, no matter what nation it was, that their god had either died or their god had abandoned them! So God was letting them see He had not died, but He had abandoned them.

In order that they see that Ezekiel has a re-visitation of the glory of God that he had in chapter 1 - and that's our first point. The chariot of the Lord - and, incidentally, there are some diagrams up in the porch on your way out, if you weren't here at that study you can get a picture of this chariot of the Lord which will help you understand this passage a little better. But this is the vision that he saw in chapter 1, and that is the central
figure of this vision in chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 - because the vision of the glory of the Lord is being shown now as a vision of judgement. The first time he saw it in Babylon, but now he is actually in Jerusalem - he is now seeing it in Jerusalem, departing Jerusalem.

If you read this passage you will see that on the top of the cherubim the prophet sees a throne. In verse 1 of chapter 10 you will see it first is empty, and then the divine chariot is drawn up to the south side of the temple in verse 3 - and that tells me that it is as far away as possible from all the abominations on the Northern side of the city. Remember the vision last week? Everything was in the northern side of the city: the idol was at the Northern gate - but now God's vision of His glory, this chariot, is being taken as far away as possible from the northern side, from these abominations. Then Ezekiel sees the cloud filling the inner court, and he sees once again the glory of God on the move away from God's people, just as he did before.

If you were to turn tonight - we don't have time to do it - to Exodus chapter 40, you would see there the wilderness wanderings of the people of God as they exited Egypt and were going to the promised land. There's a similar picture there of the glory of God filling the tabernacle, of the glory of God being with the people and the cloud guiding them by day and a pillar of fire by night. But as we read this passage of scripture we find that this cloud of the Shekinah glory of God departs slowly. He sees it halting, as if reluctant to leave. It's as if God doesn't want to move, it's as if God doesn't want to draw away from His people. In actual fact He isn't, He is being evicted by the people's sins and by their abominations! Isn't that an awful thought? That God's people were actually making Him redundant as their God!

It's a wonderful picture of our merciful God when you ponder for a moment that the first act of judgement against His people seems to be forced upon Him. He doesn't want to do it, He's reluctant, He halts as He moves away - what a gracious God! Do you know something that has struck me as I have studied this passage today? The presence of God was moving away, God's people were being judged - but at least when they were being judged they had God's presence with them! But now God was leaving them! God was moving away, there was going to be a total absence - and that is what causes this horror in Ezekiel's soul, when he thinks of God totally abandoning and leaving His people.

In Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 6 and 8, I wonder had the writer to the Hebrews this in mind when he said: 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons'. Whom the Lord loves He chastens, but what an awful thing to be an unchastened child of God - in fact I don't even think that it's possible, for that is abandonment!

If you look at this portion of chapter 10 you find that first the glory passes off the earthly cherubim within the very Holy of Holies. It dwelt above the Ark of the Covenant, and it lifts upon it and hovers - and then that cloud of glory moves. If you look at verse 4 you will see that it hovers above the threshold of the temple. Then it moves from the threshold of the temple to the divine chariot that Ezekiel is seeing in his vision. In other words, it's moving from the false cherubim to the real cherubim! It's moving from the representative figure of the glory and presence of God to above the threshold of the door, and over the actual cherubim of God's glory in verse 18. From there the glory moves to the East gate of the temple courtyard in verse 19, and just there it stands and it pauses - and just as it halts above that gate there of the city of Jerusalem, Ezekiel receives a further oracle and a further vision from God.

Finally the glory moves on to the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem - totally and utterly outside the city limits. Now, do you know what that means? It means, finally, that the city of Jerusalem is effectively doomed. Because God's presence has moved away, totally outside the city, it is doomed and damned, it is cut off from God, it is abandoned of all divine aid, it is waiting for the axe to fall - their true protector God, Jehovah, has gone! The city is left empty of God, and God says to them in roundabout terms: 'If you want your idols to protect you, you can have them now - I'm gone'.
This is a terrifying passage of scripture, when we think that the glory departs in stages. You know, it doesn't just disappear. The glory just doesn't go overnight, but it's in stages - and the amazing thing is: some of those stages are closed off to the rest of the city. They can't see the glory moving from the Ark of the Covenant into the main holy place, they can't see that - but it's happening nevertheless! It's not until they see it go away from the city that they realise that God has gone!

That's what happens: it's often missed by most when the glory departs. One of the most frightening passages of scripture is Judges chapter 16 and verse 20, where it speaks of Samson. We read there that Delilah said to Samson: 'The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him'. Now, finally, 'Ichabod' could be the denominational tag of the children of Israel. How could the glory of God dwell in such a wicked place? When you think of the vision that we saw last week of all those abominations that got worse and worse as you came nearer the holy place of God's temple, it couldn't - the glory of God could not abide there! The throne of glory had to be vacated, and now it was empty, now God was not there - and now, effectively, it had become a throne of judgement by His absence.

The glory was removed because God says: 'I will not share my glory with another'. The idols and the sins of the people had driven God away, and oh that we would learn this in our Christian walk: that it is exactly the same today! When we sin we lose the glory! Without the glory of God the temple just became like another building, didn't it? It was just bricks and mortar. That's like us, for when the glory departs our lives we're just like ordinary people - we behave like ordinary people, we talk like ordinary people. It's the same with the church: when the glory departs, what are we only an organisation! The thing that makes the difference is the power and the presence of Almighty God!

Where there are two gods in the temple, one god will have to move. It's the same in the church: only one can have the preeminence. It's the same in our lives - isn't it? - our bodies who are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Whatever idol we have within our hearts must come down so that God can reign alone and have absolute authority in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. As Craigie says: 'It is better to remove the false presence than to have the true presence depart'. Is it not better to pull down the idols than to see God move out of our lives? Isn't it awful to think that sin caused God, and still causes God, to evacuate His own home?

We thought last week that this covenant relationship between God and His people is like the marriage relationship. Do you know something? God hates divorce, but here it's God leaving the home. God, if I can say it reverently, is packing the case and closing the door behind Him, and He's gone. God's presence is the most precious thing that we have. If you go through the Scriptures you will find that, you find these verses - Psalm 23: 'Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me'. You find that God is described as being with us, being around us, being in us, being in the midst of us, being underneath us, being near to us, and being before us. That is the most precious thing that we have: God dwelling with us!

That's how we measure spirituality, that's how we measure a church. I wonder: how do we measure churches today? We probably measure them by the traditions of men, or by the forms of their doctrine, or even perhaps by their numbers - and when people attend a place in droves we say: 'God must be there! There's a lot of people there! Therefore we must do what they do in order that God would be here!'. But I hope you know that God doesn't always bless tradition, and God doesn't always bless the things of the past, and neither does He always bless the places where there are crowds upon crowds. If you remember the Lord when He went to seek twelve disciples, where did He go? He didn't go to the Bible Colleges of the day, He went to the ordinary working man. When He trained them, what did He do? He didn't set them down an exam for a degree, but He took them into His presence for three solid years! That's what we need! We need His presence.
That is why Ezekiel was brought by the Spirit of God to revisit the glory of God. The second thing he saw was, as we've already mentioned, the glory removed - because all the people didn't agree. Remember there are the people in captivity in the concentration camp by the river Chebar, and there are also the people back in Jerusalem, they're still in Jerusalem - and they didn't agree. In fact, at the entrance of the East gate Ezekiel sees a group of men, chapter 11 and verse 1, in fact 25 of them. It says of them that their function, what they were doing, was giving counsel to the people - and that suggests they were elders.

Again we see 25 of the religious and political leaders of God's people at the gate. Included in their number, if you look at it, were princes of the people, leaders of the people. They are named as: Jaazaniah the son of Azur - now that's not the same Jaazaniah son of Shaphan in chapter 8 and verse 11, this is a different man - then there is Pelatiah the son of Benaiah. These are princes, leaders of the people. In other words, there must have been a small council of high officials of the King, perhaps 25 of them as seen here - and these men wielded great authority, there were even times when these men were able to influence the King and the decisions that took place in Judah.

Ezekiel is told in verse 2, if you look at, that these men are devising mischief and giving wicked counsel in the city. Now I believe that means that they were contradicting the prophetic word of God. Jeremiah was prophesying, Ezekiel was prophesying, Daniel was prophesying in Babylon - but these political and religious hierarchy were contradicting, arrogantly, saying: 'We're alright! The temple of the Lord! The temple of the Lord!'. They were arrogantly asserting their own security and their own position. Of course that wasn't only in their own lives, because they were leading others and they were telling them: 'Look, you build that house you were talking about. You do the extension, you build that business, build the hotel - everything is going to be alright. People aren't going to come and destroy the city and set it alight, everything is going to carry on as normal! There's no threat!'.

You see, that's the danger of false prophets. You wonder why sometimes Paul condemns them so strongly: the reason is because they lead simple souls astray! These men had listened to those who cried: 'Peace!', when there was no peace. It had filled them with a self-confidence. If you look at verse 3 of chapter 11, in the first part it says: '[They say to the people], It is not near; let us build houses'. 'This judgement is not near, where is the promise of it coming?'. Literally what it seems to mean is this: 'Those who are afar-off in the land of exile, they can do what they like. If it pleases them they don't have to build anything, they can take the prophets advice - but you set about building your houses, and that doesn't concern us what they are doing'. Do you remember Jeremiah prophesied to the people in captivity and said to them: 'You better settle down there, because you're going to be there for 70 years', remember that? These leaders of the people back in Jerusalem are saying: 'Let them listen to all that nonsense, they can do what they like - but you build here. They might like to build there thinking they're staying, but we know we're staying in Jerusalem. You build, everything will be alright!'.

Their attitude is confirmed in the second part of verse 3, where they say: 'this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh'. Now a caldron is a very solid thing - but what they are actually saying is that the flesh is the best part of the meat, it's actually the real beef. They are saying: 'We're not the offal, we're not the offal that has been rejected of God and sent into captivity. We're the meat, we're the fillet. We're in a caldron, we're protected, don't you worry everything is going to be alright for us! We're not going from the frying pan into the fire!'. What a picture of the unregenerate man, especially the unregenerate religious man: 'I'm alright'. How many times do you hear this: 'I don't need to be saved! I'm not a bank robber, I'm not a terrorist, I'm not a rapist, I'm not a murderer! I'm alright, I go to my church, I'm baptised, I do everything well'? But those are the ones the Lord will say to: 'I never knew you!'.

Their attitude is further seen in verse 15: 'Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get
you far from the Lord: unto us is this land given in possession'. What they're literally saying is: 'The exiles are the ones that are far away from God. This land was given to us, this land is our possession, why do you think we're still in it? We're here, you're the ones in exile - you, Ezekiel, all your people - we're still here!'. Possession is nine tenths of the law, isn't that right? That's the way they were thinking: 'God has pleasure in us, we're still here. We must be God's remnant, we must be the ones who are pleasing God - it's the captives who are under God's judgement' - but God, by the Holy Spirit through Ezekiel, is saying: 'Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall'.

The facts of the matter can be found in verse 7, look at it: 'Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Your slain whom ye have laid in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the caldron: but I will bring you forth out of the midst of it'. 'I'm going to boil you in the pot!', that's what God's saying! 'I'm going to boil you!'

Verse 8, 'The sword that you feared, you're going to die from it'. In verse 10 the same message: 'The land is not going to be your possession, but rather the Lord will bring you out of the land and judge you at the borders of Israel', verse 10. If you read 2 Kings 25 and 21 you will find that the fulfilment of it is when the citizens of the city of Jerusalem were all led out and slaughtered at Riblah by Nebuchadnezzar.

The fundamental challenge here is the claiming by God's people of the land: 'It's our land! We're in the land that God has given to us!'. The language that the prophet uses here is deliberately chosen to create the idea of an anti-exodus. You remember the exodus, where the Jews were delivered from Egypt into the promised land, well the language Ezekiel uses is here deliberately trying to evoke into their mind an anti-exodus - out of the promised land back into Egypt, only it's Babylon!

He says: 'I will drive you out of the city, just as Israel was driven out of Egypt', look at verse 9, it says that. Once the promise was to deliver Israel from the land of the Egyptians, but now God is threatening to give them into the hand of foreigners! The judgements that once came, the plagues that came upon Egypt, God is going to pour those plagues upon His own people. The phrase that He uses in verse 10: 'the borders of Israel' is meant to bring to the mind of the children of Israel the conquest into Canaan land, where all of the area was sectioned and divided under all the tribes that were established. God is saying: 'Those borders, I'm going to take you to the very end of them, and I'm going to give all those borders to your enemies'. Because of their failure to keep the Lord's decrees, and to keep the laws in the land, they were being pushed out of the land.

They had become worldly, if you look at verse 12 God says: '[You have lived] after the manners of the heathen that are round about you' - and that's the message. When God's people become like the world, the glory goes! Ezekiel falls to his knees again, because Pelatiah dies - in fact, as Ezekiel is actually prophesying all these things, Pelatiah dies. Now Pelatiah is in Jerusalem, remember that Ezekiel is only seeing a vision, Ezekiel is still in captivity. But Ezekiel, as he's speaking in captivity, as he's seeing this vision of Pelatiah standing before him, Pelatiah - out of the vision, in real life - literally drops dead! 'Pelatiah', do you know what it means? 'The Lord causes a remnant to escape' - that's what his name means! When he died, and the word got back to Ezekiel, he thought the hope of a remnant had died! He was thinking: 'Well, if the people of the land aren't even safe, Lord, who are You going to save?'.

Who will be left if those in the land are destroyed? God answers his question, and He tells him about the glory restored in verses 14 to 21. Look at verse 15, God tells him: 'Your brethren, Ezekiel, your kindred, all the house of Israel - you are going to be the one, the future of Israel lies among the exiles'. It is Ezekiel's brethren, literally it means in the Hebrew 'the men of your redemption'. 'The men of your redemption, Ezekiel, the people that I have sent you to redeem, they are the future. Your fellow exiles!'. The Lord's movement is not just a departure from Jerusalem, now you must understand this, but it's a departure to Babylon. It's a departure to a certain people.

If you look at verse 16: 'Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little
sanctuary in the countries where they shall come'. It literally means 'a sanctuary for a little time'. The Lord's going to perform a new exodus, after this anti-exodus where He takes the people into captivity. He's going to perform a new exodus and bring them all back again as His true people out of all the nations that they have been scattered into. Then the land will be redeemed by the Lord! If you look at verse 18 you will see that the people will go into the temple, this new people of God, they will take down all the idols and they will set up the glory of God again.

How's that going to happen? That's a bit of a change, isn't it? If you look at verse 19, here is the answer: 'I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh'. It's a change of heart. God was going to create a new people, He says: 'I will give them one heart', do you know what that means? 'An undivided heart'. 'I will give them a new spirit...I will cause them to receive a heart of flesh' - and if you remember, in chapter 3 and verse 7, He called them a hardhearted people! In contrast, He says in verse 20 - so many times He has said: 'They have not walked in my statutes, they have not obeyed my laws' - verse 20, 'This people shall walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God'. Do you know what that statement is? That was the goal of the exodus and the settlement, conquest, of Canaan land - that's what God's saying. 'I'll give them a land, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God'.

It's been all doom and gloom, hasn't it, this book of Ezekiel? All these chapters are full of judgement, but what a picture of hope! 'I'm going to save a remnant'. You know we studied the book of Haggai and Habakkuk, and we read about their exodus. There was a day coming, unknown to these people, where men like Zerubbabel, and Joshua the high priest, and Ezra, and Nehemiah, were going to build the temple to the glory of God again - because God was determined to save His chosen people! But for those who sinned and stayed in the land there was no hope, verse 21.

As we close, I really do want to bring this to you - because even when these men, this remnant, built the new temple there was disappointment, because there was an expectation that there would be something greater to come. Of course, as we look at the last several chapters of this book, we will find that there is a millennial temple, and there's still a temple to come - and that is a greater thing that will happen. But, you know, if you look at Matthew chapter 23 very quickly - Matthew chapter 23. Ezekiel chapters 10 and 11 are a great commentary of this passage of Scripture. Verse 37 - the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh came to Jerusalem, and He Himself now is standing on the Mount of Olives. He says: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!' - there are the hardhearted, stiffnecked Jews again! God's prophets are sent to them, and they would not! What will happen? Verse 38: 'Your house is left unto you desolate' - there will be a desolation. Verse 39, what is the consequence? 'Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'. 'You will not seen me until you receive me again' - what is verse 1 of chapter 24? He talks then about the temple, and how Herod's temple would be destroyed.

Isn't it amazing: the temple in the Gospels is not Herod's temple, it's the Lord Jesus. That's the temple in the Gospels - John 1 and verse 14: 'We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'. He dwelt among us, He tabernacled among us in flesh - but they wouldn't receive Him! He, as the glory of God, comes from the Holy of Holies, moves to the threshold, moves to the gate, and at this moment stands on the Mount of Olives.

We are the glory today, we are the temple of God. You go to Revelation chapter 2 there's a church, Pergamos, and there are some awful things said about that church. Do you know what the Lord Jesus says? 'You better repent, or I will come and fight against you', imagine that! If God's glory can leave His Old Testament temple, Revelation chapter 2 tells us that God's glory can leave His New Testament temple - and
He can leave this temple, and worse than that: a church can become a synagogue of Satan. Isn't that a terrible thing?

But, my friend, the wonderful message that I leave with you tonight is this: there is hope! There is hope, because God always has a remnant - and if you want to be that remnant and worship God in spirit and in truth, He will let His glory rest upon you! When the glory departs it's not long until the outward edifice falls down - but, my friend, when the glory comes in it shines to all the nations around, and it glorifies our Lord Jesus. There's much more for me to share with you, but we'll get on with it next week.
Ezekiel 12:1-13:23

1. The Drama Of Approaching Exile (chapter 12)
   i. Stepping through a wall (verses 1-16)
   ii. Shuddering through a meal (verses 17-28)
2. The Doom Of Apostate Preachers (chapter 13)
   i. False Prophets (verses 1-16)
   ii. False Prophetesses (verses 17-23)

Let me welcome you to our Bible Reading tonight, it's great to see you all gathered with us. I know there are some folk visiting with us, perhaps for the first time, and it's great to see you all with us this evening. We ask that the Lord will bless us together around the word of God, and in His presence. Ezekiel chapter 12, beginning our reading at verse 1 - and the subject this evening, the title is: 'The Signs and Blunders Movement'.

Verse 1: "The word of the Lord also came unto me, saying, Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing, and remove by day in their sight; and thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house. Then shalt thou bring forth thy stuff by day in their sight, as stuff for removing: and thou shalt go forth at even in their sight, as they that go forth into captivity. Dig thou through the wall in their sight, and carry out thereby. In their sight shalt thou bear it upon thy shoulders, and carry it forth in the twilight: thou shalt cover thy face, that thou see not the ground: for I have set thee for a sign unto the house of Israel. And I did so as I was commanded: I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for captivity, and in the evening I digged through the wall with mine hand; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bare it upon my shoulders in their sight. And in the morning came the word of the Lord unto me, saying, Son of man, hath not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said unto thee, What doest thou? Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; This burden concerneth the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that are among them. Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity. And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulders in the twilight, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby: he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with his eyes. My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there. And I will scatter toward every wind all that are about him to help him, and all his bands; and I will draw out the sword after them. And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries. But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and they shall know that I am the Lord. Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; And say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord God of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of the land of Israel; They shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein. And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. And the word of the Lord came unto
me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord God; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God. Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God.

"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The Lord saith: and the Lord hath not sent them; and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The Lord saith it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord God. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the Lord. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord God. Likewise, thou son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy thou against them, And say, Thus saith the Lord God; Woe to the women that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of my people, and will ye save the souls alive that come unto you? And will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies? Wherefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against your pillows, wherewith ye there hunt the souls to make them fly, and I will tear them from your arms, and will let the souls go, even the souls that ye hunt to make them fly. Your kerchiefs also will I tear, and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand to be hunted; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life: Therefore ye shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations: for I will deliver my people out of your hand: and ye shall know that I am the Lord".

"The Signs and Blunders Movement'. If you're engaged in any small sense in any Gospel Ministry, you will know this: messages of the Gospel, especially messages about the future and eternity, often go unheeded.
That is why few people are saved, because few actually hear the message of the Gospel and listen to it and heed it. In fact, we find ourselves in the predicament of the old prophet Isaiah in chapter 53: 'Who hath believed our report?'. Who has believed our message, the witness that we are giving? It seems that no-one has believed, and that is the way it seemed for Ezekiel in his day. You remember the occasions after certain visions that he had, how he fell down on his face before God and cried to God: 'Ah, Lord God, will You not leave any of us alive?'. It seemed that, although God had promised a remnant after all of His judgements, that as far as Ezekiel could see in his visions of judgement, there were no people left alive. That is probably because very few people heed the message of judgement.

If Ezekiel was expecting a sudden revolutionary change in the thinking of the exiles, if he expected them all to fall down in repentance and in tears, and turning in faith to their God as a result of his prophesying and his preaching - he was brought down to earth with a gigantic bump. That's that we see in chapter 12: God, in verse 2, again declares that Israel is a rebellious house. They haven't changed! In fact He says in verse 2 that they don't see what the Lord shows them, and they don't hear what the Lord says to them. They have eyes to see, but they don't see. They have ears to hear, but they don't hear. Why is that? Because they are a rebellious house, they are stiff-necked, stony-hearted people!

That's what we see in chapter 11 and verse 19 - the Lord promises that He will give them a new heart, one heart, put a new spirit within them. He will take out the stony heart. Now that was in the vision that Ezekiel was seeing, but it had not yet - in chapter 12 - come to fruition. The people of Israel still had a cold, hard, stony heart toward God. C.H. Spurgeon said on one occasion: 'Men display great ingenuity in making excuses for rejecting the message of God's love. They display marvellous skill, not in seeking salvation, but in fashioning reasons for refusing it. They are dextrous in avoiding grace and in securing their own ruin. They hold up first this shield and then the other to ward off the gracious arrows of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which are only meant to slay the deadly sins which lurk in their bosoms. Men are experts at avoiding the gospel and the grace of God'.

That, in effect, is what chapters 12 and 13 are all about. Men and women, just like you and I, who have ears to hear but do not hear, and eyes to see but do not and cannot see! That is the theme: looking and not seeing, hearing but not listening. For that reason Ezekiel was to carry out his actions - this is the reason why he dramatises his message from God, because these are a people who need all that God can give them to bring them back to Himself. So, he is told to carry out these actions as they watch. Seven times in verses 3 to 7 of chapter 12 you find that statement: 'as they watch'. This is to be done in their seeing and in their hearing. But the fact of the matter is, as we go through this passage and through the book, we find that despite a verbal prophecy from the Lord, and despite a visual enacting of sign acts by the prophet, it doesn't result in them understanding. In fact it cements them, and further digs deep the grave of their inability to understand.

In fact in this passage, chapter 12, you find out that they actually asked Ezekiel: 'What are you doing?'. The Lord says that, He says to Ezekiel: 'Tell me, aren't they saying 'What are you doing, Ezekiel?''. Though they see, they don't get the message. Though they hear, they don't understand it - and even when Ezekiel finishes this sign act, and then he orally tries to explain to them what these parables of drama mean, their reaction is found in verse 27. Look at it: 'Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off'. Ezekiel comes to them and tells them that the end is here - not the end is nigh, the end is here! This is coming upon you, this is the judgement for your sins, but still they think to themselves: 'But he doesn't mean us, does he?'.

Even though they hear every word he speaks, and see every act that he does, it is clear that they understand nothing of his message. They are a rebellious people who have ears and do not hear, eyes and do not see. So, again Ezekiel is given this instruction of these sign acts - that's why the first half of our title is: 'The Signs Movement'. Ezekiel is told to dramatise the impending exile that will come upon them right through chapter
12. The first sign act that Ezekiel is instructed to perform is the stepping through the wall that you find in verses 1 to 16. That is depicting the action of the people going in exile - now, you remember that Ezekiel is already in exile, he was taken in the second deportation from Jerusalem into exile beside the river Chebar in the land of captivity there in Babylon. But there still is another deportation to take place, the final deportation where King Zedekiah will be taken out of Jerusalem and, indeed, no-one will be left and the whole city will be burnt to the ground. That is now what Ezekiel is pointing to.

He's speaking, as he steps through this wall as an act, of the final deportation of people into Babylon. God tells him: 'Ezekiel, you've got to put together a sort of lunch box, an exile survival pack. It's to contain a few belongings that you might need in exile, and that you would need to carry along that journey to captivity'. This consisted simply of an animal skin to hold food in, and perhaps to act as a pillow along his journey as he takes a rest. There would also be within that pack a mat for him to lie on, and sleep upon. There would be a little bowl for him to eat out of and drink out of. All of these things Ezekiel was to get together out of his little home, and he was to bring it as a survival pack on his back, to show these people that this is what they're going to need as they go into exile. All this preparation, God says: 'You must do it in the daytime. You've got to do it during the daytime so that everybody can see'.

Now it seems to entail a lot of preparation, whatever it was. If you can imagine him breaking down this wall with his bare hands, it probably would take all day - but that is to emphasise to the people the seriousness of this, and to grasp their attention, to give them eyes to see and ears to hear that this is what they're going to have to suffer. 'So, Ezekiel, you prepare like this all day, but the departure won't come until the evening'. The reason why the departure doesn't come until the evening is to signify God's delay in the judgement - that God is coming, and it may seem that God has been delaying, but He is just delaying until the appointed, allotted time. The gloom is gathering - in other words, God is signifying for them that the cup of His wrath is slowly but surely becoming full, and it is only a matter of time before it will overflow upon them.

That's what verse 4 says: 'Then shalt thou bring forth thy stuff by day in their sight, as stuff for removing: and thou shalt go forth at even in their sight, as they that go forth into captivity'. This is very significant. He waits until the middle of the night, God tells him: 'Don't go until the middle of the night'. We have seen in these studies, over the past number of weeks, the parallels - it's as if, in this book of Ezekiel, the whole of the Old Testament history is being repeated. You see the exodus, you can go right back into Genesis and see the creation, and there's so much of Old Testament history mirrored in this book. Here again you find the exodus mirrored. If you remember, in Exodus chapter 12 and verse 29, it was in the middle of the night that judgement fell upon Egypt: 'And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn'. God is doing it, but He's not doing it any longer to Egypt, He's doing it to Israel!

This is a frightening and appropriate backdrop for the drama that Ezekiel is depicting. At night, then, Ezekiel begins to dig through the wall - probably the wall of his own house - and go through it, taking this baggage on his back with him. You see that in verse 5: 'Dig thou through the wall in their sight, and carry out thereby'. Then God says: 'You see as you do that' - if it wasn't hard enough to dig through his own wall with this baggage on his back, God tells him that he's to cover his face with a veil so that he cannot see the land - verse 6. The point of that is that the people of Jerusalem, and their prince specifically as the representative of the children of Israel, they will go into exile just as Ezekiel is going through this wall, just as he is acting out - their eyes will be covered, in that they will never ever see the land of promise again.

Look at verse 11: 'Say [to them], I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity'. The meaning of this parable is found in verses 10 through to 16, and we don't really have time to go into all the intricate details - it's debated what they actually mean - but, specifically, it concerns King Zedekiah. If you know your Old Testament history you will know that after King Jehoiachin died Zedekiah became the King, as it were - the Prince he was, and becomes the King. In Old Testament
historical politics, theoretically Zedekiah becomes Nebuchadnezzar's puppet - politically he does everything that Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon wants him to do. Because of this, and because this is only the icing on the cake of the iniquity and idolatry of the children of Israel, Zedekiah the prince, the King, is taken as the pinnacle and the picture of all Judah's sin. So it's narrowed down to him.

The imagery here is very complicated, but the message is absolutely clear. Not only will there be a third and final exile, bringing out those still remaining in Jerusalem and Judah, but the point that is being made here with all the imagery of the exodus in the past is that this is an 'anti-exodus'. God's people - who had been promised the land, and taken into the land by every cost, and God has determined to bring them out of Egypt, bring them through the wilderness with all their sin, griping and murmuring, and bring them across the Red Sea and eventually through the Jordan into the promised land - God was determined, but the condition of the covenant was that they obeyed God in the land. They didn't, and now there's an anti-exodus.

This anti-exodus, at least in these chapters, is being centred on the prince Zedekiah - his personal transgressions. Ezekiel, up to now, has not concentrated on the king as yet, but now he homes in - specifically he's focusing in his prophecy on the King as the representative of the people, and indeed his sins representative of all the people's sins. Ezekiel is told to cover his face - can you imagine the tragedy of that act, as he covers his face to show that the people that will leave the land of promise will never ever see that land again? They will never ever return out of exile! If you were to turn to 2 Kings chapter 25 - you don't need to turn to it - verse 7 tells us of the fulfilment of these prophecies. You read that at a place called Riblah the Babylonians killed all of Zedekiah's sons, they brought all of the King's sons out and slew them! The seventy elders, that are probably the ones that you saw within the visions here in previous weeks, were all brought out as the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem and were all slain. Then it says that they took King Zedekiah, and they took him into exile, and they poked his eyes out and blinded him as a direct fulfilment that he would never ever again see the land of promise! What a picture, what a drama of the approaching exile as Ezekiel steps through that wall.

The second sign that he is asked to give is shuddering through a meal in verses 17 to 28. He is asked to eat and drink with trembling hands and with a shuddering body. Now, if you were to go to the book of Amos I think - if memory serves me correctly - chapter 1 and verse 1, that word 'tremble' that is used in this passage depicting Ezekiel moving, eating this meal, is a word that is translated in Amos as 'earthquake'. So, it wasn't a sort of nervous jitter, it was a real move. It must have been a real sight for the people to see this man trying to drink a cup of whatever it was, and a meal of whatever he was having, but it going all over the place - maybe dribbling down him, maybe all over his face! A sense of uncontrollable moving and trembling and shuddering.

Now the thing that struck me as I was looking at this today, was that Ezekiel didn't try and win and woo his listeners, that could not hear and could not see, by doing absolutely anything! He didn't try and win them at the expense of truth and at the expense of what God told him to do - I daresay this was a very unattractive sight to see this man shaking like an earthquake as he's eating his meal. But that is what God told him to do, and that is what he did! He was depicting the terror that the people would feel as they were taken into exile. He was saying: 'The violence that you have filled the land with, with all your sin, and with all your rebellion - it's going to return upon your own heads in the devastation of your cities and the devastation of this whole land. I will show you!'. If you underline every time you find this phrase, it's remarkable! Surely you've noticed it as we've been reading: 'They will know that I am the Lord'. It's powerful, isn't it?

It's wonderful that we believe in a sovereign God, isn't it? You know, even in this passage, the remnant isn't forgotten. His grace is not forgotten. Even though things are so bad in His own nation, He's still sovereign. He's still a God who can override these things. In fact I go as far as to say that He is a God who will save His own people at any cost! When God makes a promise - and God promised the children of Israel that He would
save them even if it's a small, small remnant - He is a God of His word! Even in the face of all this sin, even in the face of all the idolatry and all of the abomination to His holy soul that is vexed - He is not powerless, even in the face of ears that will not hear and eyes that will not see He will get His message through. The remnant will come, one day, to see that they have escaped - and they will realise that they have escaped in order that they receive the inheritance of the land. But do you know the awful thing about the remnant receiving the inheritance of the land? Who's in the land? The people of Judah are in the land, the remnant - you remember last week - would be the people in exile, the people in the concentration camp, Ezekiel's brethren, his friends, his kith and kin. In order that they became the people again in the land, the people in the land had to be taken out!

That's the tragedy - because the people in the land would not recognise their sin, God would replace them! It was an unpalatable truth that the people in the land did not want to see. They had ears to hear, but they wouldn't hear; eyes to see, but they would not see - it was unpalatable. The message that we preach today - isn't it amazing that it hasn't changed too much? The message that we preach is unpalatable to the world! God must judge sin, and if God doesn't judge sin upon Christ for your surety and your atonement, He will judge sin upon you in hell! That's not too popular, is it? It's not popular to preach that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Indeed, in Rabbi Harold Kushner's (sp?) recent book entitled: 'How Good Do We Have to Be?' that he wrote in 1996 - he argues the notion, and I quote: 'God does not hold us to strict standards of right and wrong. The idea that God knows every secret nasty thing we ever do, even our secret nasty thoughts, and that every sin separates us from God's love - the whole argument of His book is that it cannot be'. That's the way people think in our land, isn't it? They prefer to be optimistic with regards to God and with regards to their future. They don't heed the warnings of 'Flee from the wrath to come!' - they want to think the best thoughts about the future, because honesty and truth are devastating to them. The truth that 'God seeth me' is awful! God sees what I do, it doesn't matter the facade that I portray to the Iron Hall, God sees my heart! That is devastating to human beings.

God's visual aid is what we preach, isn't it? Ezekiel had to show this by stepping through a wall - God's anger towards sin - they'd be cast out. Ezekiel was showing, through this sign act of shuddering through a meal, the terror of the Lord. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God - but what is it that we preach? What is the message that is unpalatable to the world today and that we are rejected for? It is this: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'! It's unpalatable! It might be 'Gentle Jesus meek and mild', and 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so' - but in reality, when a man grows out of his childlike simple faith he begins to realise that the message of the Gospel is a stumbling block to him and foolishness, because it tells him that 'Because of my sin Christ had to die! Because I'm a sinner and I cannot approach God, and I cannot reach God with any moral standards or any theological ladder, because of that the Son of God had to die!' That's unpalatable, but that's our message: the judgement of God seen in the life of Christ, a Man of sorrows; seen in His death, as He lays upon Him the iniquity of us all; seen in His resurrection, that because He is risen we can rise again. But the point is this: if He doesn't rise again, we don't rise again - and if we don't accept His rising again, we won't rise again!

That is the message that people cannot handle: God's ultimate acts of judgement upon sin, and therefore His deliverance in salvation. All that God wanted these people to do was admit their sin and take hold, by faith, upon the means of salvation - but they heard but they would not listen; they saw, but they would not take heed. Well it's just as well, isn't it, that we don't believe that sin does not separate us from God. We believe it does. Why do we believe that? Because it separated Christ from God at Calvary. It's just as well, isn't it, that we have the Holy Spirit today - Amen! Though men have eyes to see, but they do not see; and ears to hear, but they do not hear - the Holy Spirit is the one who was sent of the Son of God to open men's eyes, and to open their deafened ears, to unplug them. That is this sign act that we portray: Christ and Him crucified, and risen, and the Holy Spirit comes and He opens the eyes of the unbeliever to see this. But do you know something? As old Duncan Campbell said, and I agree with him totally, he was an old highland Calvinist, but
he said this: 'We do not believe in any form of God's sovereignty that nullifies man's responsibility'. We do not believe in any form of God's sovereignty that nullifies man's responsibility.

This is our message: Christ and Him crucified, risen, interceding in heaven. But that's not our role over, but we have got to be Ezekiels who portray that message and act it out! That's what Paul did when he said: 'I bear in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus. I am crucified with Christ'. What's that text? 'I fill up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ' - we could spend all night on that one! The point is this, the Lord says that we have a part to play in playing out these signs. We are the witnesses before a watching world. In Acts 1 verse 8 He said: 'Ye shall be my witnesses'. We - this is an amazing thing - we are the letters from Christ to the world around us! Second Corinthians 3:3: 'Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart'.

This is not just verbal, it's not just verbal you know - standing up and giving your testimony, singing gospel songs, or giving out a tract, or preaching in the Open Air - this is visual. The world needs this more than anything today! The world needs to see people living the Christian life, living the life of witness of Christ, the sign act of the dying and rising and living now of the Lord Jesus Christ in your flesh. You see words today may, on their own, not open the blinded eyes or unplug the deafened ears. What needs to happen is what happened 2000 years ago when the word became flesh and dwelt among men! That's still God's plan: incarnation, that Christ be formed in you! The world needs to see it, but my friend before you try and do it, remember that just as it was costly and uncomfortable for Ezekiel it will be costly and uncomfortable for you. How would you like to go home and dig a hole in your wall, pull all the bricks and mortar down, and get this lunchbox from your house and put it on your back, put a veil over your head, and walk through it in the middle of the night? Do you not think that cost him? Do not think it cost him to lie on his side - one side for 390 days and another side for 40 days? To get up and eat famine food, to do all these things, to shave his beard off and save his hair off? It cost him! It cost him to live the word of God!

Oh, how it cost our Lord when He became flesh. Indeed, we underestimate what this was - the incarnation. It meant Him leaving His home in Glory, but more than that: coming to earth and taking upon Himself humanity, and indeed many of the weaknesses and limitations of humanity. Hunger! Thirst! Tiredness! Weariness! It cost Him to humble Himself. One writer says this rightly: 'Evangelicals have often been accused of making the word that became flesh back into words again'. Evangelicals have often been accused of making the word that became flesh back into words again!

The fourth century Emperor Julian complained to his pagan priests in the day in which he lived that these impious Galileans, speaking of Christians, were looking after the pagan poor as well as their own people were! The complaint of the Emperor: 'These people, these Christians, are doing a better job than we are for our own people!'. That's living it out, isn't it? Such selfless sacrifice, sacrificial behaviour, it was staggering in Ezekiel's day. Can you see them all standing around all day watching him running to and fro, getting all these things, digging through a wall? They're still standing there in the middle of the night watching: 'What on earth is that man doing?'. It's still staggering today when men and women in this world that are living for self and sin see you and I laying down our lives for them! They can't understand it! 'Why do you do it? What's in it for you?'.

Isn't it amazing? But do you know something? As our culture becomes more and more anti-Christian and anti-gospel, the only way to reach rebellious people is to go after them. Ezekiel had to go after these people, he had to bring them in contact with his vision - but even when he did go after them it didn't open their eyes! It's necessary to preach the gospel, the word of God, it's necessary to live the word of God out - but even when Ezekiel did all that, and even if we do all that, it will never open men and women's eyes! If you look at this passage, especially in chapter 11, you will see that they needed one heart, they needed a new spirit in
them and they needed new hearts. That's still what men and women need today, they need new hearts - and that's something only God can give them. Unless the Lord opens their hearts all our labour will be in vain. So what do we do? Do we sit around and wait until God opens their heart? No! We preach the word, we live the word, and we pray relying on God - knowing that He wants to save men and women! When we do our part and implore Him to do His part, the two will come together!

What a picture of the drama of approaching exile. Well, the drama of nine o'clock is approaching as well, and I want to get on to the second point: 'The Doom of the Apostate Preachers'. This is fascinating. It's not chapter 13, as it says on your sheet, it's chapter 12 verse 21 right through to the end of chapter 13. The reason why it is such is, in verses 21 to the end of chapter 12, there you find the prophet expressing the dilemma of the people trying to distinguish between true and false prophets. It was very difficult, when all these men were running around with false prophecies, to know who was true and who was not. Ezekiel, is he true? Are all these other prophecies, like Hananiah in Jerusalem - the one that we thought about a few weeks ago that said the people would get out in two years, and they went to Ezekiel for a vision because it was time that prophecy was fulfilled - is he a true prophet or not? How do the people know?

In order to deal with that he first of all deals with the cynicism and the general confusion that resulted from these conflicting messages that the people were hearing. In verses 21 to 28 he talks about the confusion over the prophecies, and he does this in two ways - he mentions two slogans of the day. The first slogan is in verse 22, these are proverbs that people used in that day, and the first proverb suggests the ineffectiveness of the word of God. Look at verse 22 of chapter 12: 'The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth'. The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth - what the people were saying was: 'We've heard this for years! What are you trying to tell us, Ezekiel? We've been hearing this talk of judgement since the eighth century BC!'. Therefore they concluded that nothing would ever happen: 'Time has gone on, nothing has happened!'.

So God says: 'Well you tell them, Ezekiel', verse 23, 'the days are near when every vision will be fulfilled. I'm going to fulfil it! Every vision will be fulfilled because of my action. There's going to be no more false visions, Ezekiel, no more flattering words and divination among the people', verse 24, 'but the Lord is going to speak and you mark my words, Ezekiel, when I speak what I say will happen', verse 25, 'and there will be no delay about it! They'll not be able to say the days are prolonged and every vision faileth, for the false prophets will be cut off and everyone will know who the true prophet is - Ezekiel. More than all that, they will know that I am the Lord'. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones said: 'The great watershed that divides earth into two populations are those who will believe God's revelation, and those who will not'. Isn't that it in simple terms? Those who will believe God's revelation and those won't.

The first phrase was: 'The days are prolonged and it hasn't happened yet'. The second is found later on, verse 28: 'The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off'. Now these weren't people who weren't believing God would do it, but they're just people who say: 'God's going to do it, but you know surely there's another generation yet? Surely we'll be able to live our lives, God's not going to do it' - these procrastinators! It wouldn't affect them, it wouldn't affect their particular generation, but it would hit a future generation. Had not a whole line of prophets prophesied a Babylonian invasion down the years? Surely one more generation would come before the axe of judgement descends? God says: 'They're going to receive a word from me as well', and He turns this proverb round on its head in verse 28 if you look at it. He says: 'Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God'.

These false prophets did not regard the future, and we live in a world today, a society, where its values, laws, environmental conditions, do not consider the future. We were preaching last night: 'Fear not him that can kill the body, but Him that can destroy both soul and body in hell' - that's foreign, isn't it? Live for the day!
Don't be thinking about eternity! I mean, let's face it - I heard someone say recently, they were talking to someone, witnessing to someone and they made a remark of some kind such as: 'If I had to live this life again, and at the end of it all I found that it wasn't true, I would live it just like this all over again'. Well, I wouldn't! For we are of all men most miserable if there is no resurrection. I wouldn't be losing my life now if there wasn't a gaining of it later. We are fools in the eyes of the world! In the eyes of the world that cannot see a future day of prize and eternity and judgement and glory, we're fools - and we are fools! We're fools for Christ, because we believe God's revelation!

Even though men live today without regard for the future, they don't think of the consequences, God will judge false prophets. The first thing He deals with are the false prophets in verses 1 to 16, and He basically says: 'Their prophecies are from themselves!'. It's in their imagination! They prophesy out of their spirit! The origin of their prophecy is the difference, and they've got to know that I am the Lord. They can't just prophesy out of their heads, or out of their hearts, they've got to prophesy the revealed word of God. They follow their own spirit - verse 3 of chapter 13 - they follow their own spirit, but they have seen nothing. They even use the right language, verse 2 of chapter 13, they say 'Hear the word of the Lord', they say 'The Lord declares', but they have no calling from the Lord! They even have a hope to see that it will happen, they really believe in their head and heart that all this is going to come to pass - but God hasn't told them and God has not called them!

These false prophets, do you know what they were doing? They were speaking in regard to their own hopes, rather than what the Lord said. They seduced these people, these poor people, into a false security - and it would be devastatingly exposed in the coming day of judgement. God criticises them burningly, He says: 'You're like foxes in the desert, scavengers. All you're interested in is what you can get out of the ruins of Jerusalem - it's self-interest. You're not interested in the people themselves. You're pursuing your own prey', verse 5, 'You're not going to be the one's standing in the gap on the day of judgement, pleading for the people when the judgement comes. You're only in it for what you can get out of it - your own security and safety'. Verses 10 to 16: 'You're another wall. You're a badly built wall, a rickety wall. You're not interested in building properly the city of God, but all you want to do is merely', and that word is 'whitewash', that mortar that's talked about there, 'All you want to do is whitewash'. Do you see in the Hebrew language? It literally can be translated 'vanity', or 'hogwash'. 'You only want to hogwash an outward hypocrisy, but you're not interested in the people'.

Oh, I've so much to say. Even the prophetesses came in, and they had magical charms in verse 17. They had these kind of ties, a magical ritual, that they put round their arms. Verse 18 says they made veils and put them over their heads, and it has a magic connotation. They were attracting the people through this conjuring and this magical power that they seemed to have. They had no divine calling, they only followed the pursuit of personal profit and gain. Verse 19 says they were in it for the barley and for the bread - but what they were doing, verse 20 says, was ensnaring people like birds, exploiting the people, making them the disposable means of their profit.

We must finish, but what I have to say is this: there are men in our land tonight, and there are evangelists coming to visit our land - even in the Odyssey* - and they are false prophets. Now, you be warned! For many of them are in it for the money, to line their pockets, and they attract people with magic - not the word of the Lord, with magic. Do you see these missions that are now been advertised by the miracle and not by the Gospel? That is not our message! We could outline this for hours, but the point is this - and this is my final climax of everything that we have said tonight - and it's what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:8: 'For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?'. If you don't tell it like it is, if you don't become a watchman of God and just present the word of God, what will happen? I'll tell you what will happen, the instruction to the watchman: 'If you tell them and they go ahead, well, they're damned; but if you tell them and they're saved, that's great'.

*Conference centre in Belfast
These prophets were telling them what they wanted to hear, and they were damning their souls and weren't telling them the truth to deliver them. My friend, as we live in such a pluralistic, wishy-washy - and even in evangelicalism, where men line their pockets and are afraid to preach it like it is in case they get kicked out, lose their job. You might say: 'Well, that's OK for you, you're secure in here' - that's alright, but my point is this: I intend to always endeavour to be in a position where I can say what the Lord puts upon my heart, regardless. Whenever I can't, I'll be away! My friend, that is the key: if the trumpet sounds an uncertain sound, what will the people do? What will they do? We need to present in our words, and in our lives, the message of God.
Ezekiel - Chapter 9

"Strange Answers To Strange Prayers"

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Ezekiel 14

1. The Answer That Was Not Expected (verses 1-11)
2. The Intercessors That Would Not Have Mattered (verses 12-20)
3. The Judgement That Would Not Be Averted (verses 21-23)

Now let me welcome you this evening to the Iron Hall, to our Bible Class. It's our last Bible Reading in this season, it's great to welcome you here tonight to this final study in the book of Ezekiel for this season. Thank you for coming, and let me give you a big thank you also for supporting us right throughout the year in the studies here on Monday evenings. It's been great to see you, we don't take for granted by any extreme your attendance here week after week.

Ezekiel chapter 14, and excuse the screechiness of my voice - I've got a bit of a cold, so there'll be not as much steam tonight maybe, but we'll get through it nevertheless. Ezekiel chapter 14, this is the only chapter we're looking at tonight. We've been looking most of these evenings at two chapters at a time, but there's so much in this chapter - there's so much in all of them - but there's so much in this one in particular that I want to spend a bit of time over it.

Verse 1: "Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselv..."
and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves. Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. For thus saith the Lord God; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast? Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, even concerning all that I have brought upon it. And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord God".

The title that you have on your study sheet this evening is: 'Strange Answers to Strange Prayers'. The question often arises on the Christian pilgrimage: does God answer prayer? Does God answer prayer? That often stems from an experience in your life whereby you've sought God over a certain matter, you've sought Him perhaps with crying and tears, yet the answer that you sought never came. We often tell the children that God always answers prayer, and I'm not sure that that is correct - but nevertheless we could say that there are a number of answers to prayer that we can get. We can get the answer 'Yes', we can get what we're asking God for and what we're pleading for. I believe it is true to say that we can also get the answer 'No', when we ask for something that is not according to God's will He is not obliged to give us it. There may be the answer 'Wait, it's not My time yet. Ye have need of patience, though I tarry, I will not tarry' - God will eventually give what you're asking, but He tests us and He causes us to wait for the answer.

But added to those three normal responses that we know to come from prayer, there must be times in our experience when God answers us in a different way than we expect. In other words, when we pray to God for something and He does answer us, but He doesn't give us specifically the thing that we have been looking for. Perhaps there are even times when God gives us an answer to the question that we should have been asking. In other words, God, by the answer that He gives us, tells us: 'Look, this is the thing that you need, not the thing you're asking for - this is the thing you ought to have been asking for'.

In chapter 14 of Ezekiel you have a scenario a little like that, because again in verse 1 you find that the elders of the children of Judah have come again to God's prophet to seek God's word. They've done it before, and now they come again, but as we read down this passage we find that their question to God's prophet is but a veneer of an orthodox faith. In other words, it's like the Pharisees that we've been studying on Sunday mornings as we go through the Sermon on the Mount, there was this outward religiosity, this outward conformity to rule, but inwardly there was dead men's bones. We've seen this in weeks gone by, that what these people needed was one heart - in other words, not a divided heart. What they needed was God to put His Spirit within them, because His Spirit was not residing in their bodies. What they needed was God to do heart surgery, and to take out their stony heart, their cold, subordinate, awful rebellious heart out, and give them a heart of flesh and a heart of obedience to God.

So, as we see them coming to God's prophet, we see the veneer of an orthodox faith. But yet they come, and I believe they're sincere enquirers. I believe that, as they come to God's prophet, they are seeking for a response from God. You have to remember that these are leaders of an exiled people, an exiled community, and I believe perhaps they're coming to Ezekiel with a particular question, addressing God, asking Him: 'What is the way forward for us? What is going to happen? I mean, are we really going to be judged? Are we really going to be destroyed?'. They come looking for an oracle from God, a prophetic utterance to know the future of Jerusalem and the future of the people of God.
We don't know what their question was, but I suspect it may have had something to do with their leadership of the people, as the people continually came to them and asked: 'What is going to happen?'. Perhaps they couldn't cope with the questions of the people of: 'How long are we to remain in exile? How long are we to suffer? How long is it going to be until armies come from Jerusalem and deliver us, and take us back to our riches and back to our land and our home and our loved ones?'. The substance of the question is not really the important thing, what is important is how God answers the question. For God doesn't answer their specific question, but God answers the question they should have been asking - and that was a question regarding their spiritual condition. If I can say it reverently: God never beats around the bush. God goes straight to the jugular, He goes straight to the problem.

That is exactly what He does here. He doesn't answer them and address the question about their earthly geography in Babylon, rather than in Jerusalem. He doesn't talk to them about their physical exile away from the promised land, but He comes to them and brings straight before them their awful spiritual poverty and condition. Therefore they get, as it says on your sheet, the answer that they did not expect. They had come to seek God's word. They had come with their question, yet with the veneer of an orthodox faith, and they come - not realising it, perhaps - that they are guilty of breaking the first and second commandments. Guilty of breaking that commandment that says: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me'; guilty of breaking the commandment that says: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image of any living thing'.

So, they come to enquire of God, and they're standing before a holy and a righteous God as transgressors of the law, as abominable sinners, as idolaters. Now, if you look at verse 3 you see a contrast between these men - remember these are the elders in exile, not the elders that we were thinking about in the vision in weeks gone by who were still in Jerusalem, they haven't been exiled yet those 70 elders that we were talking about - but these are elders, the leaders of the people in the concentration camp that Ezekiel lives in by the river Chebar. Now here's the contrast between these elders and the ones in Jerusalem, verse 3: 'Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart' - and you should ring that every time it's mentioned throughout this chapter, it's mentioned about three times in verse 6 again and verse 7.

Here's the difference: in Jerusalem the elders were leading the people openly, there was an open shamelessness in worshipping the gods of Babylon. Remember that Ezekiel saw the vision of that statue of Asherah, possibly, outside the city. Remember God brought him nearer, into the very temple, and took him through that hole in the temple wall, and showed him upon the walls of the temple all of those graven images of all the abominations of filthy unclean beasts that the men of Israel were worshipping - probably gods of Egypt. You remember that God took him even further into the temple, nearer the Holy Place, and he saw men who had their backs to God's Holy Place and were bowing down worshipping the sun. Remember he saw, out in the court, women in tears weeping for Tammuz - and you remember that Tammuz was the fertility god, and by weeping to Tammuz they believed that they would get fertility in their land and in their harvest and in fruit.

That was Jerusalem, all outward - they weren't ashamed of it! But here in captivity it's in the heart - they have the outward veneer of Judaism, and religiosity, and the covenant of Jehovah, but deep in the recesses - and I say this so often because the verse of this hymn grips my soul: 'In those dark chambers where polluted things hold empire o'er the soul'. There were idols, there was Baalism, there was Asherah, there were all sorts of foreign gods of Medo-Persia and Babylon and Egypt, and all sorts of nations, and all the Gentile peoples round about Jerusalem and Israel. They were bowing down to those gods in their heart. With all of that it's still amazing, isn't it, that they didn't hesitate to come to God, isn't it? They didn't hesitate to hedge their bets, to seek God's guidance in addition to their little closet deities. They were following every other god, the Jerusalemites were doing it openly, those in captivity were doing it in their heart, but nevertheless when their back was against the wall, when there was trouble coming, they did not hesitate one moment coming to God with all the other gods in their heart and asking God: 'What are You going to do to help us?'.
Do you know what God said? 'You don't deserve a response! You don't deserve to be answered!'. Even though God told them they didn't deserve a response, He responds anyway, and He says: 'I'm not going to respond through Ezekiel as I have been doing. You're not going to hear the word of God through the prophet - you want to hear me speak to you? Well, I'll speak to you directly!'. We see in the chapters that will follow how God speaks to them directly in His judgement from heaven. God does not address their specific question, but rather He probes beneath the surface to the deeper problems in their spiritual life, the problems of the enquirers. As we read these words together today, as they have been right throughout this book, they are terrible words of judgement - and especially in this chapter they have a tone of a legal sentence, that God has come in His judicial robes and that God has plunged the hammer down upon the desk and pronounced a legal sentence upon His people. God comes to them in mercy, but yet in judgement, and calls them to repentance, calls them to turn from their evil idolatry and their evil ways - but the whole weight of His message is judgement! If you don't repent you will all likewise perish! If you do not turn to God from your idols, if you do not turn to God He will turn His face away from you!

It's an awful thing to think that God was threatening to avert His face from every one of these people who had idols set up in their heart. One author puts it like this: 'When the idolater turns aside it is sin, but when God turns aside it is death'. Awful! Because they turned to their sin, God would turn away from and it would mean spiritual death because the wages of sin is death. But my friend, I want you to see that, just like there was a rainbow in the vision of the glory of God and the chariot throne in the first chapter of this book, and as we've seen right throughout awful hellish chapters of judgement and God's retribution upon the people, right throughout it all there has been this little speck and ray of hope. The reason why God is bringing judgement upon them is not just for punishment for their evil deeds, but God is using this judgement to serve for their salvation, God is wanting to drive them from their evil deeds, to drive them their gods and goddesses and their sins of idolatry. It is His purpose in a heart of love and faithfulness to turn them to Himself again, to restore them to a full knowledge of Himself. Isn't it amazing that even in this awful judgement, God is wanting to bring them back in grace again! Even in the midst of all of this God's grace is working!

In verse 3, which is the key to this whole chapter, we see that these children of Israel, the children of God, were doing what the Lord said a disciple cannot do - do you remember? We cannot serve two masters. The result of serving two masters will be judgement by the Lord - it's very clear. It wasn't openly serving another master, it was subtle, in the heart, inwardly, the spiritual desire for other things, other gods, other occupations, other habits, other spending of your energy and your money and your life and your time. In a world in exile that was crumbling around them, their lives were being devastated, they turned their heart away from God and turned it to the world and the gods of the world. Now I cannot enter in, for one moment, and neither can you, to the anxiety and the pain and tribulation that they were going through in exile. I don't know what it was like, and as I look at the signs that Ezekiel was asked to perform, and the awfulness of these signs - and these were only typifying the suffering that would come upon these people - they were awful! I wouldn't like to go through the signs of Ezekiel, never mind the actual fulfilment of his prophetic acts.

Yet in all of this, perhaps to numb the pain, perhaps to observe that it seemed that God had abandoned them - and: 'If my God has abandoned me, I'll have to seek another God. I need another God to comfort me, I need another God to save me and deliver me from my enemy. If the Lord cannot deliver me, then why not try Marduk the god of Babylon? Why not try Baal or Asherah?'. People do it today: 'I can't escape from the horror, from the captivity, the prison doors within my soul, so I turn to the god of drugs, I turn to the god of a new car, the god of a house, the god of a career, the god of a new business deal'. The thing is this: when we don't find satisfaction in our hearts, this is common to humanity whether it be Babylonian humanity in the ancient Near East, or 21st century humanity today in Ulster, men and women turn away from God to turn and soothe their heart, to dull the pain, ultimately to find satisfaction. Their hearts can be torn between two loyalties, and even the children of God's hearts can be double minded.
We too can be attracted to the false promises of idols, can’t we? The spiritual grass greener on the idolatrous other side. Now come on, young people, we must be honest with these things, and older folk you’ve got to be honest with the young people - they have never had it as bad. What they are facing, and the attractiveness that it seems, as the world worships these idols of sex, drugs, rock and roll, everything that you can imagine - they seem in the eyes of men and women to be satisfying them, that's why they are running after them! The spiritual grass is always greener on the idolatrous other side, but you know the awful result is what you find in verse 5. God says: 'I will take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols'. When you look for a satisfaction and a comfort and a dulling of the pains and anxieties of the world in another god, in another deity, or in things that take away your attention from God Almighty, what happens is: you backslide from God! What happens is, as God says to these elders: you cannot expect to receive a word from the Lord, for God is not deceived.

I suppose, theoretically, Ezekiel could have been deceived by these men. He wasn't, but one thing is certain: God cannot be deceived! Is that not the theme of the book of Ezekiel? You go back to the chariot car in chapter 1, and the wheels within wheels that were touching the earth, but were also touching the cherubim and the throne of God - what was covering those wheels? Eyes, all over, inward, outward. In fact as we looked at the chariot - I think it was in chapter 10, as Ezekiel saw it again - I think he said, if I'm right, that not just the wheels were covered with eyes but the whole of the chariot was covered inside, outside, with eyes. The omnipotence of God!

Saul found to his detriment that man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. 'Do you want a word from the Lord, elders of Israel? Well, you'll get one - not through the prophet, but directly from me', saith the Lord, 'I'm going to demonstrate to you my attitude towards you by making an example of you before all the nations and all the world'. Verse 8: 'I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord'. 'Just as Lot's wife became a proverbial example of the dangers of looking back, of the dangers of looking back to the world and all that is in the world, so I will make Israel a byword - I will make them a proverbial warning of the dangers of what it is like to have a divided loyalty, what it is like if you do not follow the Lord fully!'.

I don't know about you, but as I have been studying these words of Ezekiel they have probed my spiritual anatomy like an x-ray. They speak so accurately of the human condition, and the first thing I want you to see of the human condition, yours and mine, in these elders, is their blindness that God exposes. Imagine, you know all the words of judgement that we've had hitherto in this book, and that Ezekiel has delivered to the people - yet they still have not understood anything of Ezekiel's message. They haven't realised yet that God has put them where they are in exile because of their sin, because of their idolatry. They haven't seen, and made the equation in their head: 'This is the wages of our sin. This is the consequence of what we have done'.

The Lord summed that up last week in the statement: 'They have eyes to see, but they do not see; they have ears to hear, but they cannot hear'. They don't see that this is all a judgement for their sin, and the amazing thing of it is, as we look in hindsight: they are still in exile, and they are still indulging in exile in the sins that took them there in the first place. They're like the criminal in prison for murder who, in prison, kills a fellow convict and then wonders why he can't be released from his cell. In exile they commit the same sins, and then they come running to God's prophet looking to God's prophet for when they're going to be delivered! It's worse than that because they wanted to cover every possibility of safety, they didn't just run to Jehovah their covenant God of Judah, but they ran to every god that they could within their heart. They were playing it safe. They came with their faith to God, but they thought that that faith could be usefully supplemented by a little worship of this god, and that god, and the other god. Some could help, perhaps if Jehovah failed, Baal would help. Perhaps if Marduk failed, Asherah would help. 'We'll hedge our bets. The
laws of probability tell us that if we follow as many gods as possible then we will be alright' - but God says: 'I am a jealous God! I will not share my glory with another, I will not be set in your spiritual deity trophy cabinet with other gods shining'.

How blind they were! The amazing thing to me is this: they were not the least bit uneasy coming to Ezekiel for God's help. Isn't it amazing? Thinking that God didn't know what they were up to, thinking that God couldn't see into their heart! Running to the prophet of God with all this darkness and idolatry in them, and what a picture that is to me of my own life at times, when I will pursue my own idols, run after my own pet sins - the things that satisfy for a moment my flesh, and my lusts, and my hate, and all that wells up within my heart - but when the need arises I don't hesitate to seek God! Isn't that right? When I need Him, I run to Him. I'm not ashamed, I don't hesitate to ask Him for help and for answers - and the amazing thing about the blindness of the sinner is that they cannot even see the inconsistency in such behaviour.

I think the fearful thing about all this is that, subconsciously in our mind, we begin to believe that God doesn't really see what we're doing. Or maybe not that God doesn't see what we're doing, but that it doesn't matter to God because we've been forgiven, we're redeemed, we're on our way to heaven, and we can have these little idols in our heart yet still the Lord will hear us when we run to Him in trouble - but the message of this chapter in Ezekiel is: God saw what they were doing, and what a shock it was to them when He said: 'Yes, you want me to speak, well I'll speak!', but they didn't like what they heard.

You see the blindness of the sinner exposed, the second thing I want you to see is the hypocrisy of prayer exposed. You see the elders had a request for God, and they were going through Ezekiel to give that request to God. They required an answer from God, and we asked at the very beginning tonight the question: does God answer prayer? The biblical answer to that question is: yes, of course God does - but we said that the answer may not correspond with our request. Now God said clearly in verse 3: 'You don't deserve an answer', but yet He gives an answer to the question - but He answers the question that they should have asked! He told them the thing that they needed to know.

Sometimes the things that we need to know are the most uncomfortable things of all. It's amazing, isn't it? They came to hear words of comfort, but the answer was not what they expected. They came for a balm to their ears, they came for a salve to their conscience, they came for words of soothing succour from a gracious, loving, long-suffering God - but what they heard amounted to a death sentence upon them, that God was finished, that God was coming in judgement! Yet the miracle of it all is: in the very midst of that judgement God's mercy can be found in the fact that He answered them at all!

Hypocritical prayers are just like this. I want you to look into your own heart tonight and be honest with yourself, ask yourself: am I like these men? The hypocritical prayer closely imitate the conduct of real prayers. Isn't that what they were doing? Coming to ask of God with outward sincerity, in other words they were stirred by the messages of the prophet - and that has to be said: they had to hear something of what Ezekiel was saying that drove them to say: 'Well, can you not give us a message of comfort? Can you not tell us when it's all going to finish?'. So the message of this man stirred them, otherwise they wouldn't have went to that man, they would have went to the false prophets who were saying: 'Peace! Peace!'. Yet in all of the stirring in their soul with the messages from God, they were still hypocrites!

Then we see that they came to the prophet to hear a word from God. Isn't that amazing? You can be stirred by the message of God, in fact you can seek God for a word from Himself, yet still be a hypocritical sinful prayer. As we see them coming for a word from God, we see that their cover is blown because they lacked the essential qualities of a real enquirer of God. What I mean by that is: they didn't want God's will, but they wanted to be confirmed in their own error and their own superstition. Sometimes people come to me and ask my advice, and sometimes I think in my mind - I haven't always said it to them - but sometimes I think: 'Are
you coming to me because you want to hear something, or because you want advice?'. We can be like that with God, can't we? We come wanting to hear a certain answer, wanting to be led a certain way. These men didn't come wanting to know the will of God, but they wanted to be confirmed in their own error and their own superstition. They wanted to be told: 'Look, we'll deliver you, we'll get you back somehow to the land of promise - and it doesn't matter deep down in your heart that there are idols from every nation and every religion in the world'.

Another thing was: they retained their sin in their heart, though they didn't show any outward manifestation of it. Do you know something? That is the prayer meeting all over! Isn't it? You can stand here, and you can pray to God - and I can't see what's in your heart, you can't see what's in my heart. There were idols on the throne and the altar of their hearts, but they had no outward manifestation of it like the elders in Jerusalem - but yet they were determined to retain their sins in their own hearts!

The third thing that I see in them is that they took no steps to remove the occasions for their sin. Look at verse 3, this spoke to me so specifically in my life, verse 3 is a wonderful verse: 'Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face'. Right, now, what is He saying? 'The very sin that is in your heart' - it wasn't as if they were trying to avoid falling into that temptation, but they were taking the very thing that was their pet sin, and the sin that so easy beset them, and they were setting it before their face! You run to God, don't you, and say: 'Lord, I've a terrible problem with lust', but what are you putting in front of your face? You can't put The Sun and The Star in front of your face if you have a problem with lust and you're praying to God to overcome it. My friend, we have all these sins within us, but when we put these stumbling blocks before us it's like a magnetic field that draws them out of the heart of the old man that's still residing within us!

The sin that made these men and women hypocritical prayers was that they were coming to God, and I've said it before, and saying: 'Lead me not into temptation', but their own feet were leading them into temptation! They put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. Half-heartedness has been the problem of Christianity all down through the ages, and it can be seen today even in the secular world, because there is a philosophy that pervades most of society and the workplace - if you're a businessman you will have encountered this - 'I've done my duty. I've done it! I've done what you asked me'. You don't go the extra mile, you don't do one minute over, but you do right up to the exact amount of time you're meant to do. You spend and be spent about what your employer asks you, all the requirement of life and work and habit - you fulfil that and nothing more. Just enough. Most people, it would be true to say, in life would be absolutely ecstatic if in their life they were just always meeting the requirements, if they were just getting the pass mark and no more.

Now, my friend, that can pervade and filter into Christian discipleship. You hear some young people asking the question in the whole sexual realm, as they go out together: 'How far is too far?'. They ask it with regards to the world and the pubs and the clubs: 'How far is too far?'. It's asked about worldliness in the church: 'How far is too far?'. It's this concept: 'What does God expect me to do? What is the bare minimum that I can pay God, and then know that I have done just enough?'. I think we all know that that's not Christianity. I think, deep down in our hearts, we all know that God asks of us 100%. We all know what is meant to be in our lives, but the problem is that we may not be satisfied with that!

That is seen in the studies and the surveys that have taken place in recent years in the Western church. It is said generally that most Christians live their lives with little difference to those who are living in the world. Ethics in work, most Christians are no different. Sexual ethics, no difference. Moral, theological ethics - all these things compared to the world, why is it today that there seems to be no distinction? The answer can only be that there is a divided heart! Outwardly we can appear fit, we can appear orthodox, we can appear spiritually well, but it could be that beneath all the churchgoing - beneath the facade of fresh suits, and
Yet what do we do? This is what I want you to see: when the troubles come we run to God! We want God on our side, and like Israel we seek His help, but we're not willing to give up our other options. I remember when I was going to Bible College, I came straight from school and went straight to Bible College. Men of God were saying to me, not men of God here now, but in other places were saying to me: 'Well, would you not do a year's teacher training, just in case it doesn't work out? So you've something to fall back upon'. My friend, that is the wisdom of this world, but that is not following God 100% - that is seeking Him like these Israelites, seeking Him for your help and guidance, but having your other options just behind in case He doesn't come through. It can be those cherished sins within our breast - and, my friend, it is not an option to approach God with those within us. We cannot keep one foot in the idolatrous camp of the world, and one foot in the kingdom of God - for the double minded man, you see this passage, will receive nothing from the Lord. The Lord says: 'I have nothing to say to you, and the only word that I will give to you is judgement'.

If we had time tonight we could go to the apostle James, chapter 1 verses 7 and 8 - listen to what he says: 'A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord'! The only way to deal with your idolatries is to do what God said to these people: repent! Repent! The simple act of repentance, and repentance is turning your back on any other source of hope, any other source of satisfaction or self-justification, and to find refuge in the Lord alone. It's the attitude of Toplady in his wonderful hymn:

'Nothing in my hands I bring, 
Simply to Thy cross I cling'.

The cross! Nothing is a greater idol-smasher than the cross, because the cross is the place where self dies! Idols feed self, but at the cross self is crucified, self is dealt a bloody blow. It is the spirit and expression of our first hymn:

'The dearest idol I have known, 
What'er that idol be. 
Help me to tear it from Thy throne 
And worship only Thee'.

Was our Lord Jesus Christ half-hearted in His commitment to us? Was He? He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. That is why we cannot be anything but 100% happy in giving all to Him:

'Saviour Thy dying love, Thou gavest me, 
Nor should I aught withhold, my Lord from Thee'.

Oh, I had so much to say to you tonight, but we're quickly running out of time and I want to get onto the second point - the intercessors that would not have mattered. If you look at verses 12 to 20, Daniel, Noah and Job are mentioned. The reason why they are mentioned is each of them were men, righteous men, unique men in their society. In other words, when the rest of the world's society and civilisation in which they lived were going a-whoring after other gods and other idolatries and awful things, these men remained unblemished and unblameable in their generation. You remember that's said about Noah, he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. You remember that was Daniel, as he refused the king's meat and the king's wine in the court of Babylon. You remember that was Job, God said to the devil: 'Look at my servant, Job. Have you considered him? There is none like him in all the earth'.

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For their righteous behaviour in the midst of a corrupt generation, that is why God mentions them here in this book. God is saying that in the same way as their righteousness didn't save their own generation, even if they were here and now in Ezekiel's day it still wouldn't save his generation. There's a principle that we find here for nations: if a nation persists in its sin, it will not be delivered from judgement - even if Noah, Daniel, and Job, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, the apostle Paul - we hark back and only wish the apostle Paul was here - it wouldn't matter!

What you have here first of all is corporate responsibility. In other words, we hear a lot about the individual today, but what we see if we go into Joshua chapter 7 is that you read of Achan, the sin of Achan. There was sin in the camp, but what you read is this: because of that individual sin in the camp, the curse of God came upon the whole camp - and in fact you see the suffering of Achan's family for his sin. That's not an Old Testament thing - you come into Corinthians: 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Purge out therefore', Paul says, 'the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us'. You remember what I said to yesterday morning, if the child of God in the old dispensation was going to offer a sacrifice, the paschal lamb, and on his way he remembered that there was leaven in the house, he had to go back and purge out the old leaven.

God reveals Himself as one who is a jealous God, one who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the third and the fourth generation of them that hate Him. What do you hear from the heart of a sinner today, even sadly from the heart of some believers in modern Christianity? 'I'm not harming anybody. I'm not asking you to do what I'm doing. It's my own business what I do, it's my life'. That's not New Testament Christianity, for the fact of the matter is that the church is a body - in the same way the eye cannot say to the ear: 'I have no need of thee', the eye cannot say to the ear: 'I cannot harm thee'. What you have here is Christ's life, it is not your life, it is Christ's life. What is your business becomes my business, because you might be the eye and I might be the arm.

The righteousness of these three men would not make Jerusalem or Israel escape the judgement of God, even if there were three men with the qualities of Noah, Daniel, and Job, Israel would be judged. You think about this: Abraham and Sodom, he pleaded for the city, he intervened. You read in the Old Testament of the king of Judah, Josiah, as he pleaded God for the nation. There was an idea in Judaism that if there were these type of men among the people of God, interceding for the children of God, that the nation was invincible. They believed with the presence of Jeremiah, Obadiah, men like Habakkuk within the city, that God could not curse them, that God could not destroy them. But here is the fact, God is saying: 'Look, you remember Noah - he was saved and his seven household, but the rest of the earth was damned'.

In other words, because of his righteousness he saved himself alone, he couldn't save anybody else. Josiah's praying proved futile too. Daniel, living in the court of Nebuchadnezzar when Ezekiel wrote, it didn't deter the exile, it didn't deter the judgement of God - but I'll tell you what it did do, and this is the crux of the matter for us today in our Laodicean generation: one man standing in the very court of idolatry and sin in Nebuchadnezzar's palace, Daniel stands there as a monument to godliness and to holiness. Don't swallow this nonsense that the heroes of God are in bygone days that have gone into history, men like Moody and all the Reformers, that that could never happen again - don't swallow that! Because even if we are in the Laodicean age today, God can raise up men and women who are faithful to Himself. It might not save the nation, just like it wouldn't save them if Noah, Job, and Daniel where there in Ezekiel's day - but I'll tell you what it will do: it'll bring glory to God. Let me say this categorically: I have a passion for souls, but the glory of God is infinitely more important.

That judgement would not be averted, they would be cut off from God's people unless they turned and returned to God, unless they repented and went back to God, unless they took down those idols from their
hearts - unless, in our scenario today, unless they come to the cross and are crucified with Christ, and let the life of Christ flow through them, unless they divorce themselves from all their idolatrous, adulterous idols.

In this passage you have the cry of the covenant of the Canaan land of promise: 'I will be among them, I will be their God, they shall be my people'. Do you know something? There's a day coming for us, and it doesn't matter what Israel does, it doesn't matter what the church does, it doesn't matter what the world does, we will hear a great voice out of heaven saying: 'Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God'. What a blessed hope! May it spur us to see the glory of God return again into our lives.

Let us bow our heads and, as we think about the word tonight, we all have idols that we worship and that we don't want to let go of. We all continually bring them before our face, tempting ourselves - but, you know, God gives power and God gives grace. If we will repent He will replace that idol with Himself and with His holy presence. Father, help us to repent - not a once and for all thing, but daily, as we've been singing, to take up our cross and put to death daily those things that would rise up in our breast as idols that would take away glory from Thee. We thank Thee for all that we have learnt in these weeks, and the one pre-eminent thing that we finish with this evening is the prayer that Thy glory would return upon us, that men may look upon Thy church here in the Iron Hall, and say: 'The glory of God dwelleth there'. We thank Thee for Thy faithfulness, and we pray that Thou wilt go with us now - in Christ's name we ask it, Amen.
**Ezekiel - Chapter 10**

"A Vine, A Wife, Two Eagles And A Twig - Part 1"

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Now, I did forewarn you to make sure that you read chapters 15, 16 and 17 - and I gave you plenty of notice because I told you on Thursday evening, but I'm quite sure that some of you have forgotten, or some of you have been procrastinating and haven't got round to it, and some of you are here and you didn't even know that and you may feel a bit lost tonight. So make sure when you get home, if you haven't read these chapters already, that you read them when you go home and hopefully things will be made a bit clearer to you.

What we will do is - we'll be going through the chapters tonight, and hopefully you'll get the gist of the whole thing as we go through - but to start off with we'll read the first chapter, which is the shortest, as we begin these three chapters together tonight. "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work? Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them. And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord God".

We'll read the first few verses of chapter 16: "Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, And say, Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite. And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thy own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers'
skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God. But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was”.

The title tonight that we have for our study is: 'A Vine, A Wife, Two Eagles And A Twig'. Any of you that are preachers, and good preachers, and any of you that like listening to preaching will know that illustration is part of the art of preaching. Good illustration is essential to good preaching. The reason that is is because the illustration, if you like, is the window that shines light upon the truth. In other words, you can tell anybody a theological truth, but if you have the power to illustrate it in some way you can shine light onto that truth, if you like, then the penny drops and that truth becomes a living reality that they have grasped. The impact of illustration can be seen in much literature, and many of you I'm sure - as I am - of Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress'. That is all, simply, that Pilgrim's Progress is - it's an illustration, an allegory, a representation of the Christian life and the Christian pilgrimage - as Christian himself, that chief character, goes through life: getting saved; his burden rolling away; going through temptations, turmoils, trials; and eventually getting to that Celestial City that he has been bound for.

But as we go through the Old Testament Scriptures, we find that the great prophets of God were artists in preaching by illustration. Ezekiel is one of the chief of those, and we're going to look at four of his illustrations tonight - he has six in the whole book, but four come together in chapters 15, 16 and 17. Greater than Ezekiel was the greatest preacher of all, our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the absolute epitome of the art of illustration. But we're going to look at Ezekiel this evening, and we see four illustrations that he gives us - an illustration in chapter 15 of a vine, an illustration in chapter 16 of a wife, then in chapter 17 the first few verses an illustration of two great eagles, and then in the last few verses of chapter 17 an illustration of a twig.

So let's look first of all at this parable and illustration of the unfruitful vine in chapter 15. The history books tell us that a gigantic golden vine decorated the temple gates, and as you walked through those temple gates you would see this great vine - and there would be, dropping from that vine, clusters of golden grapes about six feet tall. That was there for an illustration to the people of Israel themselves as they walked through the temple gates to worship the Lord. It was a reminder to them of God's true vine - Israel - that they were God's true vine, and perhaps as they walked through there they would reminisce of how they were taken out of captivity in Egypt and they were planted as God's true vine in a choice land, in a land flowing with milk and honey, the promised land.

As we go into the New Testament the Lord Jesus Himself, at least five times, uses parables that relate to the figure of the vine. Of course, we know from John chapter 15 that the Lord alluded to Himself in the flesh, the Messiah, the Christ as the true vine. So the imagery of the vine is littered right throughout the Old and the New Testament. There are three things that I want you to note about the vine, and indeed Ezekiel's illustration of it, this evening. The first thing is simply this: the vine is a common symbol for the nation of Israel. Within the Scriptures, in the Bible, the vine is a symbol and a type of God's people Israel.

Turn with me, so that I can prove that to you, to Hosea. You have Ezekiel, then Daniel, and then Hosea - chapter 10. We will be looking at a lot of Scriptures tonight, so you better wet your fingers as we go through these - chapter 10 and verse 1. Speaking of the degradation and the emptiness, spiritually, of Israel, Hosea says: "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he
hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images". Hosea says Israel is like an empty vine. That's the Old Testament, and I could show you many more instances of that imagery. But then, if you will, go to Matthew chapter 21 you will see how the Lord Jesus Christ takes up that imagery as He does in many instances. Matthew 21 and verse 33, the Lord speaks and says - again using illustration, a parable - "Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country". Now if you know that parable, you will know that the Lord begins to illustrate how He, as the son of the husbandman, had come into that vineyard Israel. He had come as their Messiah, but He came unto His own and His own received Him not - but what I want you to see is the imagery of the vine and the vineyard, speaking of Israel.

Now, what we don't want to do tonight in Ezekiel is to confuse much of the vine imagery that there is in the word of God. So what I want to do is, I want to break it up into four for you. There are four ways in which Israel is illustrated in the word of God as trees, or vines. The first is this: you find the olive in the word of God - the olive tree. Then on occasions you find the fig tree. Then there is the bramble bush, and then there is the vine that we'll be thinking of tonight. Let's go through these for a moment. You don't need to turn to it, but I'm sure many of you will be familiar with Romans chapter 11. In Romans 11 the nation of Israel is typified and pictured, illustrated there, as the olive tree.

Now I want you to remember this, or write it down, that the olive tree illustrates and is representative of Israel's relationship in covenant with God. So whenever you read of Israel as the olive tree, God is illustrating the covenant with Himself that the people had. Now at the moment the nation of Israel, presently, that covenant is in temporary suspension - in other words, their fellowship with God Almighty has been cut off. They have broken their vows of the covenant, so it's in temporary suspension. Because of that God has scattered the nation of Israel all over the nations of the world, and it is us - the Gentiles - who are entering into the privileges that Israel might have enjoyed if they had obeyed the Lord, trusted the Saviour, and believed on their Messiah. Now, of course we know from prophetic teaching in the word of God that there will be a day and a time that will come - Romans 11 teaches us that the nation of Israel will be grafted in again to the vine. This time, instead of Israel being cut off and the Gentiles being put into that vine, the unfaithful Gentiles will be cut off and Israel once more will be brought into covenant relationship with their God, and they will be part of the vine. But what I want you to note tonight is that the olive tree always symbolises the covenant relationship between Israel and the Lord.

Then there is the fig tree, and that speaks of Israel not in covenant, but Israel as a nation, as a people. If I could put it to you like this: the Jews - that would be a better way to term it. The fig tree speaks to us of the Jews. Now, who are the Jews that the fig tree speaks of? Well, they are the descendants of Benjamin and Judah. The descendants of Benjamin and Judah are the people that made up the population of the city of Jerusalem. You might think in your mind that the city of Jerusalem was just full of Israelites or Jews, but that's wrong in a sense because it's primarily made up of the descendants of the tribe of Benjamin and the tribe of Judah - that is the population of Jerusalem. That is significant when we remember that it was the population of Jerusalem that the Lord Jesus wept over and said: 'Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I would have taken you as a hen gathers her chicks, but ye would not!'. Now that's significant: the nation of Israel, the Jews. That's why when the Lord Jesus passed by that fig tree that failed to bear fruit He put it underneath the curse of God. Israel, the nation, the Jews tonight, this very moment as we speak, are under the curse of God for their unfaithfulness - and there will be no fruit from the nation of Israel until they are restored again by the grace of God.

I hope you see the distinction. The olive tree speaks specifically of Israel in covenant relationship with God. The fig tree speaks specifically of the nation of the Jews, if you want to narrow it in even more: the Jewish people, the descendants of Benjamin and Judah, who dwelt in the city of Jerusalem in Christ's day. Then
thirdly there is the bramble bush, and this is a very graphic illustration and picture. It speaks to us of the way Israel has become under the divine judgement of God. Because God has cursed the fig tree, like the Lord Jesus did as He walked by it that day in Palestine, it has become a bramble bush! It is no longer full of luscious fruit that benefits the nations round about her - remember Israel was born that she might shine a light unto the nations, that she might be a witness to the Gentile world around her, that she might be salt in the earth. But because she has been unfaithful, not obeyed the gospel of her Messiah, she has been cursed by God and she has become a prickly bramble bush!

Very striking symbolism, isn't it? The olive tree of the covenant of God. The fig tree of the nation that is cursed. The bramble bush, that prickly plant that is no longer a blessing to the world around, but seems to be a curse as it is cursed. But what Ezekiel speaks to us, in chapter 15 this evening, of are none of those three, but the vine. The vine speaks of none of those things, but rather it tells us of Israel looked at as a people in a spiritual relationship with God. The vine speaks of Israel's spiritual relationship with God. Now you might say: 'What's the difference between a spiritual relationship with God and a covenant with God?'. Well, a covenant with God is a legal thing, it's a material thing in a sense - a real covenant is a piece of paper, black and white, an agreement. God made an agreement with Israel that day at Mount Sinai, but that's not what we're talking about because God had a relationship with men even before that, because He had a relationship with Abraham before the covenant was ever given at Mount Sinai. We are speaking of the spiritual relationship as God's people - and because of that the vine should be bringing forth fruit.

From that spiritual relationship those people, that are God's people, are to bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to the glory of God. He says in Isaiah chapter 5 that He has planted them as a noble vine, He has cared for them, He has done everything possible for them - but there is no fruit from them. So the Lord says: 'I've done everything possible to make these people a faithful people to me, but there is no fruit coming from them - all the fruit that they have is for themselves'. Nothing had changed in Ezekiel's day, and so we're asked to consider the vine from God's standpoint. That is what we have here: the vine from God's standpoint.

That's the first thing that I want you to notice: that the vine is the symbol for the nation of Israel within the Bible. Specifically here it is a symbol for their spiritual relationship with God. Here's the second thing: the only purpose and value that the vine has is to bear fruit. That's vitally important: the only purpose a vine has is to bear fruit. As you read down this chapter - we don't have time to single out the specific verses, but from round about verse 2 right through to verse 5 - you can see how Ezekiel goes through the various uses that perhaps, maybe, a vine tree could have. He thinks about housebuilding - but it's no good for housebuilding because the wood of a vine is too crooked, it's all rickety and crooked, you couldn't build a house with it. The question is asked: could it be used for furniture? Maybe a peg to hammer into the wall to hang something on? And the answer comes back: no it couldn't, because it's too soft, you couldn't hammer it into anything. Could it be used for fuel? Maybe it's only good enough to be burnt? Well, even when it is burnt it's not good enough for fuel, because it burns so quickly and rapidly - it doesn't linger and smoulder for heat. That proves to us that the only use that a vine has is to bear fruit.

Now the third thing that I want you to notice: because the vine has refused to perform the only purpose and prescribed duty that God has given it, God will destroy it. Now that's fundamental to our understanding of chapter 15 - God will burn it up if it does not bear fruit! We've been learning in these studies in Ezekiel that the way in which God is going to burn these people up, His chosen people in relationship to Him, is by sending the Babylonians down from the North to come and literally burn the city of Jerusalem. Now let me make an interesting allusion to the words of the Lord Jesus in John chapter 15 - and we're going to spend a bit of time on that a little bit later. Our blessed Lord said: 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned'.

Turn with me to Revelation chapter 14 for a moment, and remember we're not speaking now of believers in this dispensation yet - we're talking about the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. That is what we're still
talking about in Revelation chapter 14, because the Lord is speaking of that nation here, and He is in fact speaking of God's final dealings in a day yet to come with the apostate nation of Israel. Just before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Israelites Messiah, a remnant will be recognised by Him. That will happen - not all Israel will be saved in the sense of the nation and everybody that's a Jew, but true Israel - the true nation of people that will follow God will be saved. They will say: 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord', and the Lord will have mercy on them, defeat their enemies, and save them. He will take that remnant and recognise them, and He will plant them again in the land of Palestine. He will plant them one day to become a fruitful vine right throughout the thousand year reign of the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But before that, in John's vision in Revelation 14, John sees a vision of a mighty angel coming forth from the temple which is in heaven. This angel has a sharp sickle in his hand. And John, as he sees this angel coming with a sickle in his hand, he hears another angel commanding the first angel to send forth, verse 18: '[Send forth] the sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe'. Now, a century and a half before Ezekiel. Isaiah said in chapter 5 of his book and verse 2 in the parable of the vineyard: 'He looked that it should bring forth grapes'. God looked for fruit from the nation of Israel, 'and it brought forth wild grapes'. Not fruit, but wild grapes. Now stop for a minute and pause, here is a principle that we must learn as believers in this age: that this - and what we're going to read in Revelation - is the awful condition and description of a people in complete disregard and disobedience to God's word. A people who reject His Son, a people who reject their Messiah and their Lord, and a people who will fail to recognise the lordship of Christ.

So let's look at what happens to them. If you scan your eye down the chapter you will find this: that angel does take the sickle, and he thrusts it into the earth, and he gathers those wild grapes of the earth, and he casts them into a winepress. It says that Christ the great Judge and Warrior of God, He presses down those grapes in the great winepress of the wrath of God. That winepress is trodden outside the city, and as we read down this passage we find that that wine comes out of the press like blood. In fact, it is blood. This passage says that even the bridles of the horses feel the blood coming up to their level. It says that the blood goes as far as 600 furlongs - do you know how far 600 furlongs is? The whole length of the land of Palestine! There is a day coming when Christ will return as the Judge and the victorious King, and He will come to the nation of Israel and He will take His sickle, and He will pluck up all those wild grapes that have not borne proper fruit for Him. He will tread in His wrath, and the whole nation and land will be drenched with their blood.

Is it any wonder that it's called the trouble of Jacob? Do you marvel that it is called the Great Tribulation that the world has never seen before, and then God's wrath will be poured out upon His vine? Now, after this, the Son of Man descends to take His kingdom, He descends to reign upon the earth - and He recognises a small remnant as His own vine, and He will place them in the land again, and for a thousand years there will be a presence to glorify God in His vineyard once more. But what about today? Today the Lord, as He wept over Jerusalem and said: 'Oh, I would've brought you to myself, but you would not', the Lord finished those remarks by saying: 'Behold your house is left unto you desolate' - desolate! Let me say this before we move on to the second parable: there are two things that are needed for a vine to bear fruit, just two things. The first is that a vine needs to be pruned, and the second thing is that it needs to abide.

In Ezekiel chapter 15 and verse 3 we see that the vine needs to be pruned. The Lord says: 'Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?'. In other words, you have to cut this vine up. You have to abide in the vine - and I want us to turn to John chapter 15, because this teaching is found by our Lord in this chapter chiefly. The Lord says in verse 6: 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned' - pruning. Maybe you prune the roses, well if you prune vines that's how the fruit comes - you have to keep pruning it or the fruit will not come. Now, it's not a very pleasant experience - no-one likes cutting something that we think is going to bring forth fruit, it doesn't seem to make sense to cut the very life until
the sap comes out. We feel that we're doing violence to life when we do that. Of course we know when we see the fruit blooming the next year that that is not the case, but pruning is a painful experience - but it's necessary to bring forth new life.

This is a spiritual principle: in our lives as believers, as God's people today, pruning is necessary to bring forth fruit in our lives. Now let's take a moment over this. I think there are some folk here this very night, and God is pruning them. Job knew what it was to be pruned. If you turn to Job, just before the Psalms, chapter 14. He describes pruning himself - Job 14 verses 7 to 9, he says: 'For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant'. It doesn't matter whether the root's rotting, it doesn't matter whether the fruit falls to the ground and rots, if it's pruned it will get the water.

Now that's what Job said, but then Job had to go through that experience - and if you turn to chapter 17 of Job and verse 1 he describes what he felt like when he was in the middle of that pruning experience, he says: 'My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me'. Have you ever felt like that? You've felt as if you're loathsome to other people, your breath. You've felt as if no-one wants you, your days are corrupt - you feel extinct, nobody wants you and you feel that you'd rather die - maybe you feel you're going to die. But let me tell you what happens: that's pruning that is so painful, but if you turn to chapter 42 of this book - chapter 42 and verses 11 and 12. You know what happened to Job in the interim: he lost his family, he lost his outhouses, he lost his farm, his buildings, he lost his children, he lost his cattle, he even lost the confiding of his wife and his friends - but here in chapter 42 and verses 11 and 12: 'Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house' - he had bread, but he was starving; he has a house, but his house came down around him - 'and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold. So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning'. Now that is what pruning does! Pruning is necessary to bring forth fruit in our lives - but what do we do? Let's be honest tonight, what do we do when we're pruned? We resist it: 'Lord, what are You doing that for? Lord, is there not another way? Is there not an easier way?'. We curl up like the hedgehog in fear, we don't want it to touch us. 'Lord, who let this into my life? Lord, why am I suffering?' - and we resist God breaking us.

For you who are being broken I want you to turn to Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 - this is a Bible study, so let's keep the book speaking. Second Corinthians and chapter 4, and here's the answer why we are pruned as believers, verse 7: 'We have this treasure', and that's the life of God, 'in earthen vessels', that's our bodies - the life of God is in our body that's like a clay pot - 'that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus' - why? - 'that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body'. Why are there cracks in your clay pot my friend? That the life of Jesus may flow through them.

Do you see it? If you're not pruned, there'll be no fruit. That's why the writer to the Hebrews says: 'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby'. Do you know what that means, 'Them that are exercised thereby'? It means this: whether you bear fruit or not will depend on how you're looking at your pruning. How do you see it? Is it God being cruel? Is it the devil attacking you? Maybe it is, like Job, but is God allowing it for your pruning? Oh, if you could only see that you're suffering tonight, my friend, because God wants you to be a chief saint, and He wants the cracks in your body, the cracks in your personality and your soul to be the cracks through which He seeps His life to the world around. Pruning is necessary for fruit.
Secondly, abiding is also very necessary. These children of Israel withered because they did not abide in their covenant relationship with God, isn't that plain? They didn't abide in the vows that they took, and you can see that in verse 8 of chapter 15 - but what I want you to do you is see the Lord's words in John 15 that I hope you're at at the moment. Verse 4, He says: 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing'. The principle applies to us today: no pruning, no fruit; no abiding, no fruit - and here's the greatest tragedy of all: no fruit, no testimony. That's what happened to Israel: there was no testimony to the nations any more for God, and there was no testimony, no fruit - that branch had to be cut away. What's our fruit? Galatians: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control, temperate - is the fruit there? Come on now! For if the fruit's there the life is there.

Oh, our time is slipping away - we have 10 minutes or so. Let's look at the second parable before we go, because this is a tremendous one. Sixty three verses in this chapter, the longest chapter in the book of Ezekiel, and indeed the longest parable in the whole of the Bible. Let's go back to Ezekiel chapter 16. Now Ezekiel - I'm sure you've noticed up until now in our studies - has a knack of seeing things as they really are. He doesn't mince his words, and he doesn't do it here. What Ezekiel is seeking to do is to tear down the misconception of 'Jerusalem the Golden' - but rather in this chapter you will be horrified to find he is describing 'Jerusalem the Harlot'. The story is of an adopted girl who becomes a prostitute. As you read down through this chapter you will see some sordid detail, indeed the rabbi Eleazer Ben Harikans (sp?) in the mission in the Jewish teaching books says this: 'This chapter should not be read in public, and it should not be translated in public' - it's so sordid! In fact the great preacher C.H. Spurgeon when he lived, in Victorian England of course, felt that - I quote: 'A minister could scarcely read this in public'. If you go home and read this it's certainly very interesting reading, because there's no decorum at all in this passage. There's no holds barred, everything is just let loose, and this lustful tirade of iniquity and prostitution - and it's from God, these words are from God!

You see, that's the whole point - if we miss the terror and the tragedy and the abhorrence of these words, we miss God's point. Ezekiel is not wanting to be polite about the sins of God people! In fact, this is what his job is, and this is what the job of a prophet is - to come to the people of God and to expose their sin, and to expose it in all of its ugliness because it is abhorrent to God, and God wants us to know it's abhorrent!

God had found in a field an abandoned little baby. It was despised, it was abandoned, it was lying dying - a little baby girl, and her name was Israel. God graciously lifted up that little child and adopted it, that little rag-tag girl lying in its own blood without its umbilical cord cut yet - it hadn't been washed, it had never been cradled. God lifted it, and that was very strange in those days - we don't think there's anything strange about it, if you went out to Thorndyke Street and saw a child lying in the street in blood you would lift it - but not in those days. If you lifted every child you saw lying in blood, your house would be bursting at the seams - especially little girls. They weren't a breadwinner, they were no use to some families - as far as they were concerned - and they were frequently left out in the street to die. But the Lord lifted her up, and when she became of age He entered into the marriage bond with her. Now that would astound people of this day too, because if a man actually did pick up a baby like this it wasn't to care for it, it was to let her grow up and then make her a prostitute and get gain through it. But for a man to pick up a child like this and love that child, and actually enter into the covenant of the rite of marriage, was astounding.

But what happened is tragic. God dressed her, God put the most beautiful clothes on her, adorned her with the most costly jewels, provided the finest food available for His beloved. In verse 15 we read these tragic words: 'But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pourest out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was'. That orphan spurned the love of God, the
faithfulness of God. She became vain and proud, and eventually she became a common harlot on the streets. That intolerable action against her husband could not go unpunished - why could it not? Because the passage tells us that her husband wasn't just her lover, but her husband was the judge in the town. He had to be seen to do right, not in society alone, but in his very own house. So he delivered over this harlot to her murderous lovers and let them abuse her, let them punish her. Her wickedness by this time had surpassed even her older sister Samaria, that's the capital of the Northern Kingdom, that had already been judged by God from the Assyrians. Also her younger sister, named as Sodom - Sodom! Israel's sin, Judah's sin, Jerusalem's sin had exceeded the sin of Sodom!

After He had chastened her, the miracle of it all is this: God would restore her, and God would bring her back to Himself. Why? Because He made a promise hundreds of years before to the father of the nation, Abraham - and when God makes a promise, God keeps it. It's an astounding story, isn't it? The interesting thing about it is that in the story the Lord basically says in His own terms: 'You're only a chip off the old block'. He says: 'Your father was an Amorite, and your mother was a Hittite' - and how is that in Israel, how could that be possible? It can be possible simply because the Hittites and the Amorites used to reside in what is now the city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem used to be a pagan city before the conquest into Canaan land. What the Lord is saying is this: 'You've gone back to your roots, Jerusalem. My people, you're like the Canaanites that you were meant to have wiped out of the whole of the promised land, but you're going back to their wicked, evil practices!'. Then He says: 'You've broken my marriage vow' - and the marriage vow that Israel made with God was at Mount Sinai when God ratified his covenant with Israel, but they had broken it. Then it talks about this woman being clothed in beauty, and garments, and jewels - this is all Israel's history right from the start to the end - and that's talking about the reign of David and the reign of Solomon. You remember the Queen of Sheba came and she said: 'The half has not been told! The riches! The gold!'. Then a tragedy comes in because Solomon, in his wealth, builds temples to the false gods of his foreign wives. Then you have the sins of Ahaz and Manasseh, of idolatry - and even in chapter 16 and verse 20 you read about child sacrifice, they were offering their children to Molech!

Now you might know and be familiar with the story of Hosea and his wife - but if you think she's bad, she was only a promiscuous woman, this woman in this chapter is far more depraved than all that. I mean, when you read this it's absolutely astounding - it literally says: 'She sleeps with anyone!' The language of lust in this chapter is terrible, and the Lord says: 'Jerusalem, you're not even like a normal prostitute' - this is what God says - 'for a normal prostitute gets money for what she does, but you pay to be a prostitute!'. Isn't that amazing? In fact, I'm sure many prostitutes do what they do for material gain - not her. Israel did what she did for the sin itself. She was insatiable in her lust, and if you read the history of Israel you will find that she sought security in other nations, making alliances, and didn't trust God.

Now I want to deal with this, so please bear with me as we finish tonight. What was the reason for all this impurity? Why does God need to go into this like this? Verse 49, look at it, God tells them the start of all this terrible sin: 'Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom', and He says, 'You've got worse than her: pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy'. Do you know what way another translation puts it? 'You were arrogant, you were overfed, and you're unconcerned'. Arrogant, overfed and unconcerned - do you know what that is? Put it in another word: materialism. My friend, that's the way we ought to preach today. We ought to be exposing sin.

Let's ponder for a moment as we close, in the last couple of minutes - bear with me tonight. What is the cross? I believe the church should stop trying to please people and start trying to win people - save them! The cross is the most bloody, gruesome demonstration and illustration of sin and what sin does - and when we look at the cross we feel our ugliness, we feel our sinfulness - and when we apply that bloody sacrifice, praise God, it's efficacious to our atonement! Now please rejoice with me as you look at these verses as we
close. As you look at verses 53 to 59, do you know what God says? He says: 'I'm going to restore Sodom, I'm going to restore Samaria, I'm going to restore Jerusalem, I'm going to restore all that plain' - that's amazing! God is talking about what the Bible calls the times of restitution of all things spoken of by God's holy prophets. Even Sodom and her daughters would be restored! Now it's not talking about the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah - for, as Jude tells us, they're suffering the vengeance of eternal fire at this moment in time. But the miracle of God's grace and what God is going to do in the future is this: God is going to raise from the ashes, Sodom and Gomorrah as cities! God is going to put into them a regenerated people in the millennial reign of Christ to worship Him. How do I know that? Because Sodom and Gomorrah are found in the area that Abraham was promised right in the very beginning. It's amazing, isn't it? Although they forgot their legal covenant with God made at Sinai, God couldn't forget His covenant, His unconditional covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Let me say this as we finish. Listen to this, believer, that applies to us - do you know how? We've entered into the blessings. Paul could say: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God'. Isn't that wonderful?

'Oh perfect redemption, the purchase of God, To every believer the promise of God. The vilest offender who truly believes, That moment from Jesus a pardon receives'.

Praise the Lord! I have much more to tell you, two more parables to get through - but come back next week and you can hear all about those two. He's a wonderful Saviour, isn't He? It's amazing when you think of it: Sodom and Gomorrah rained down with brimstone from heaven, but there's a day coming when even those wicked, sinful places will be restored by the grace of God to praise Him. Do you know something? We mightn't live in a Sodom or Gomorrah, but our old lives were no different - but He has made out of them trophies of grace, hallelujah!

Father, we thank You tonight, we thank You for amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Father, help us to be taken up with the wonder of it all, that He has put away our sins for ever by the blood of His cross. Glory to His name tonight, and bless us now as we leave. Amen.
Ezekiel chapter 17, let's turn to it together. You didn't receive a study sheet in your hymn book this evening because we're still on last week's, we didn't get through it, we only got through the first two parables of Ezekiel - chapters 15 and 16, and we had to leave chapter 17 until this evening. So hopefully you were given a sheet on your way in if you've forgotten last week's sheet, or if you weren't here last week - but don't worry, there's not too much on those sheets because we only got halfway through it. Let's read this chapter together, I did ask you to read it before you came this evening - and I would instruct you, and ask you, to do that every week because it will make it easier for me, and I'm sure it will make it easier for you if you've gone over it before you come here.

Chapter 17: "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel; And say, Thus saith the Lord God; A great eagle with great wings, longwinged, full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar: He cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants. He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree. And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs. There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and, behold, this vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation. It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. Say thou, Thus saith the Lord God; Shall it prosper? Shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? It shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof. Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? Shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? It shall wither in the furrows where it grew. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these things mean? Tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon; And hath taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him: That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand. But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. Say thou, Thus saith the Lord God; Shall it prosper? Shall he escape that doeth such things? Or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts, to cut off many persons: Seeing he despised the oath by
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breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these things, he shall not escape. Therefore thus saith the Lord God: As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head. And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me. And all his fugitives with all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds: and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken it. Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it: I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it".

Now, last Monday evening the title of our study was: 'A Vine, A Wife, Two Eagles And A Twig'. As I've said already, we didn't get time to deal with all of that last week. We only dealt with the vine in chapter 15, the unfruitful vine, and we dealt in chapter 16 with an unfaithful wife. Therefore that leaves us the remaining two parables in chapter 17, which is the parable to do with two eagles and then in the last few verses the parable to do with the twig. We saw last week - at least I hope we saw - that allegories and parables have a definite power in communication. We saw how the prophets of old, and indeed our Lord Jesus Christ - our Prophet and our King and our High Priest - used parables and used illustrations to communicate biblical and spiritual truth to us. We mentioned Pilgrim's Progress and how, in a contemporary sense, men and women have still used it and preachers of today use it to communicate spiritual truths to our hearts. The illustration, the representation of biblical truth by a story, a parable, or an allegory, tends to shed light upon the truth and lets the penny drop in our intellect, and often deep down into our heart.

Even the world sees this. Harriet Beecher-Stowe's (sp?) famous book, maybe you've heard of it, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' was probably the greatest influence and had the greatest impact on the future of slavery in the United States of America. I'm told by historians that it had a greater effect on that slavery trade than all the political speeches by her contemporaries. By making a story, by making an allegory, she seemed to get right into the hearts of men and women and show them the fallacies and the sin, indeed, of the slave trade. Now as you have seen, and as we have seen together in these studies, Ezekiel has already used a variety of forms of metaphorical language: illustrations, parables, sign acts, dramatical situations that he has performed before the people. Many of them have been subtle in the meaning, some of them not so subtle, some of them glaring in their powerful effect.

This chapter that we're looking at this evening, chapter 17, combines both parable and what I want to call a riddle. So in this chapter you have two types of illustration: the parable and the riddle. Ezekiel takes the two of them and combines them together. This chapter reads like a kind of puzzle, or an enigma that he wants the people of God to work out in their minds. One commentator defines a riddle as this: 'A riddle is a statement that hides the truth it imparts'. A riddle hides the truth that it wants to communicate to you, it wants you to work it out for yourself, whereas a parable is a little different. He says: 'A parable makes the truth clear by putting it in a fresh light'. So a riddle hides the truth to get you to try and work it out, but a parable declares the truth and shines a light upon it. Now in this chapter 17 of Ezekiel you have both of these things: you have a parable - Ezekiel is tending to shine a light on this truth, yet at the same time he seems to be holding it back. I'm sure as you've read this chapter you've been a bit confused and puzzled at some of the things within it.

Now, in this chapter the great prophet assumes the persona of a type of political cartoonist. Many of you read the broadsheets and even the tabloids, and you will see from time to time when something catastrophic takes place in the political world that a man will put pen to paper and draw a cartoon. During the war times you
would have had Britain depicted as a bull terrier, or bulldog; you would have America often depicted as a bald eagle. This is similar to what Ezekiel is doing in this passage of Scripture, he's taking up his prophetic pen and he's drawing a caricature of the political events that are taking place in the ancient Near East in his day. He is putting his words into pictures - and in that sense, therefore, this chapter functions both to conceal some truths and to reveal other truths.

So let's look at it: what does it conceal and what does it reveal? Well, you have two eagles and then you have the figure of a cedar tree, and then you have a vine. As I said earlier we looked last week at an unfruitful vine, then an unfaithful wife, and now the last two points - if you still have your sheet - two foreign eagles, and a future tender twig. Now let's look first of all at these two foreign eagles in verses 1 to 21. The passage introduces to us this first political character in illustration. We see a huge eagle with beautiful feathers coming, flying to the land of Lebanon, and landing at the very top, the tip, of a cedar tree. That eagle bends its bald head down, and with its hooked beak breaks off the topmost shoot or twig of that cedar tree. Then it flaps its wings again, and it flies to the land it came from, and it carries this twig - the Bible says - to a land of merchants and a land of riches, as the Bible says: 'a land of traffic'.

Now in the cedar's place, before it leaves and takes that twig to this land of merchants, it plants in place of the twig a vine. Before it goes it farms and it tills that vine, and if you like it gives every possible opportunity and advantage for that little vine to grow, and that little vine to bear fruit one day. The passage tells us that the great, huge, elegant eagle provided for that little vine; that he planted fertile soil; he gave it an abundant water supply; in fact all the conditions necessary for its maximum growth this eagle gave that little vine. The parable goes that, in those great conditions that it was planted in, and the great care that the eagle took over it, that it began to grow. It spread out, it produced branches and limbs - but if you look at verse 6 you will see something very characteristic about it. Look at verse 6, it says: 'It grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature', that's very important.

This vine had everything done to it that any vine could hope for - and it did grow, it did bear fruit - but yet the word of God testifies that it remained of low stature. As we read this parable down the chapter, we find that this vine that the eagle planted desired more for its life than the eagle provided for it. It began to realise that there was an alternative source of life. As we read on we find that the vine turned away from its first provider, that great eagle, and it sent its shoots toward the second eagle that we read of in this passage. The bird, the second eagle, is described in similar language to the first eagle. It's talked about as a huge, powerful eagle; it's described as having beautiful wings, just like the first eagle - but there's one difference between the first and the second eagle, and that's this: the second eagle was not great in its glory and as great in its power as the first eagle. Another difference we find: the first eagle had done everything it could for the vine to grow, for that vine to prosper, the place where it planted it, the water that it supplied for it, the good soil that it was in, how it was tended for - but as we read down this parable we find that the second eagle did absolutely nothing for the vine. Yet this ungrateful vine turned from the first eagle to the second eagle and pledged its allegiance to this one that was really unconcerned for it. Verse 7 tells us that, look at it: 'There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and, behold, this vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation'.

The fate of the vine is predictable. The grass was greener on the other side, and by desiring the life that this other eagle could give this vine it was seeking to gain something more, something that it didn't have, and instead what it really did was to throw away everything that the first eagle had given it. This second eagle did absolutely nothing for it, and all the vine succeeded in doing was to arouse the anger of the first eagle - after putting all its work, all its effort, all its compassion and resources into this vine, it is spurned! The anger of that first eagle, we find, is aroused - and it comes and it will tear the fruit, and uproot that vine from its place, and devour it and destroy it. Look at verse 9: 'Say thou, Thus saith the Lord God; Shall this vine prosper'. After the eagle planting it where he did, and tending it and caring for it, and giving it water and looking after
it - and then it begins to grow toward the second eagle, it's ungrateful, it's unthankful, it's going to an eagle that doesn't care for it. God asks the question: 'Shall it prosper? Shall that first eagle not come and pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? It shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof'. It'll not take much for that great eagle to come and destroy it.

Now you might say: 'That vine is very foolish, isn't it?'. Well, it's more than that: the vine is not acting foolishly, it is acting absolutely suicidal! Now you might be baffled at what this parable and story actually means, but the hearers in Ezekiel's day probably would have known immediately the true interpretation of this story. Let me give you it: the first eagle, the first great eagle that comes and takes this twig from the top of the cedar tree and then plants a vine and takes the twig to Babylon, speaks to us of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. If you recall the history that we've been learning going through the book of Ezekiel, you will recall how Nebuchadnezzar came into Jerusalem like a huge, great eagle and swooped and went to the top of the tree of Jerusalem and took captive the King of Judah, Jehoiachin. So this huge first eagle speaks to us of Babylon.

Now, let me prove that to you, it's important that you know that this is true. Turn to Jeremiah chapter 48, and remember that Jeremiah is a contemporary of the prophet Ezekiel, Jeremiah 48 and verse 40, speaking of Nebuchadnezzar and indeed the Babylonian Empire: 'For thus saith the LORD; Behold, he shall fly as an eagle, and shall spread his wings over Moab'. If you look at chapter 49 and verse 22: 'Behold, he shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread his wings over Bozrah: and at that day shall the heart of the mighty men of Edom be as the heart of a woman in her pangs'. If we had time we could turn to Daniel 7 and verse 4, and Daniel in one of his visions sees the Babylonian Empire rising out of the sea, and it was as the form of a lion with eagle's wings.

So this eagle speaks to us of not only the Babylonian Empire, but indeed the King - Nebuchadnezzar. It's pictured in this parable as flying, mighty wings, flying to the top of this cedar tree. Now what is the cedar tree? The cedar tree is the city of Jerusalem, to be more specific the cedar tree is the royal house of King David. Now what does this great eagle do? He flies to the top of the tree, Ezekiel says he breaks with his beak the highest branch of the cedar. So if the cedar tree is Jerusalem, more specifically the house of King David, the highest branch of the cedar tree is the King of Judah at that day. So Nebuchadnezzar comes, what does he do? He goes into Jerusalem and he plucks off the King of Judah. Of course, you know as you've been following the book of Ezekiel that Jehoiachin was carried to Babylon along with the prophet Ezekiel, and they were all held in those concentration camps. That is speaking to us of the eagle flying to the top of the tree, he plucks off that highest twig and branch of the tree, and then he flies back to a land of merchants and a land of traffic. No prizes for guessing the fact that that is speaking of the nation and the empire of Babylon, the commercial centre of the world.

Now let me give you a bit of history. After deposing Jehoiachin, as we've just spoken of, after Nebuchadnezzar took him from Jerusalem and took him into captivity in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin's uncle whose name was Mattaniah. Nebuchadnezzar changed his name to Zedekiah, and he took Jehoiachin's uncle and he set him back in Jerusalem to be like a vassal King, if you like, his puppet King in subservience to himself. Do you see what's happening here? The great eagle comes to the cedar tree, plucks off the sprig, takes Jehoiachin into Babylon - but before he takes Jehoiachin we read in this parable that he sows some seed and he plants a vine where he plucked up that cedar tree in Jerusalem. That seed that he sows is Zedekiah - that puppet that he wants, politically, in the land of Jerusalem.

Zedekiah is pictured as growing into this spreading vine of low stature. Look at verse 5: 'He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree'. Now, if you know anything about the biography of King Zedekiah you will know this much: he did not
possess any of the qualities that make for a successful King or a successful administrator. As we read his life story we find out that he was neither faithful to the God of Israel, nor to his heathen overlord, Nebuchadnezzar. He was faithful to absolutely no-one! Almost immediately he was made King by Nebuchadnezzar and set in Jerusalem to reign there as his puppet, almost immediately he began to plot with Egypt how to overthrow the great empire of Babylon. Immediately he wanted to free himself from the yoke of Babylon.

So that is the first eagle - and it'll all become clear as we go along, bear with me.Then there's the second eagle that we read of in this passage. It's great, but it's not as great as the first eagle - and the reason why that is is that the second eagle speaks to us of Egypt - specifically of Pharaoh Hophra. The reason why we find Egypt in this passage is because King Zedekiah was trying to make an alliance with Egypt to overthrow the Babylonian yoke. This was Zedekiah's foreign policy. Now, you might say it was more than foolish - it is more than foolish, it is absolutely suicidal! For, as you see, this eagle didn't tend for the vine, this eagle didn't care for the vine, it was disinterested - just as Egypt was disinterested in Judah, or disinterested in overthrowing Babylon. In fact this great eagle, great though it was, was no match at all for the Babylonian Empire.

Now all of those things that I have just told you might seem very unclear to you, but to a person living in Palestine, in the ancient Near East in Ezekiel's day, all of that was just like political caricature and cartoons. The bulldog that was Great Britain, the eagle that was the United States of America - as far as they were concerned the penny would have dropped right away. This is what the prophet is speaking of, it would have been so clear - and this is what is the revealed aspect of this parable and this prophecy. If you think that was confusing, that is what is revealed in the passage! What is concealed in it is a different matter! There is a riddle in this passage, and there is an enigma that is even harder to work out and even deeper in its meaning. But if you will come with me tonight, I believe if we delve into it we will find out something intrinsic and fundamental for the church today, for individual Christians today, and indeed for the world today.

Let's unclothe and break down this code within Ezekiel's enigma. Well, if you look at this passage you will see that this great eagle flies to Lebanon. There's something very significant in this, because you might say: 'Well, all the cedars were found in Lebanon' - and that's true, it is proverbially the home of the cedars, but there's more to it than that. God is speaking in code, if you will turn with me for a moment to 1 Kings chapter 7 verse 2 we'll find out and unlock this code - 1 Kings chapter 7 and verse 1 first of all: 'But Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house. He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon; the length thereof was an hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits', and so on, and you get all the details of Solomon's house. What I want you to notice is this: verse 1 speaks of Solomon building his house: 'He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon'. If you were to go, we don't have time, but if you were to go to Jeremiah chapter 22 and verse 23 you would find again there with a capital 'L', Lebanon being the name of Solomon's house.

So what I want you to see is Ezekiel, and indeed the Holy Spirit through Ezekiel, is inviting the listeners of this parable to think of Lebanon as not just the tree, in fact not just Jerusalem, but he wanted the people to go back and think of who actually settled the Davidic dynasty in the land of Jerusalem and Judah. Ezekiel is wanting the people to go further back in history and ask the question: 'Who actually give us this king?' - whether it be Zedekiah, whether it be Jehoiachin, whether you go right back to Solomon or David - go right back, who was it that brought us from the land of Egypt into the promised land? Who was it cleared the land and gave us Canaan land? If you think about that, you have to say: 'Well, that was God, it was God'. Think about this - there's a paradox here, for in one sense what is revealed to us is this: this first eagle is flying to the top of the cedar tree, breaking off a branch and taking that branch - King Jehoiachin - into Babylon. It is that first eagle that is spoken to us as Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire that is sowing the seed,
planting the vine - King Zedekiah in Jerusalem - to control things for him. But here we have something entirely different, here we have a parallel where God is asking the people to consider who is actually doing this! Yes, this great eagle is King Nebuchadnezzar, but ask yourselves the question, people of Judah: who in the beginning set up the Davidic dynasty? Who in the beginning took you into Canaan land? And then they must ask the question: 'Well, who is operating in our land at the moment? Who is it that is really letting us go into captivity? Who is taking control of all these affairs?'

I hope you can see that the deeper meaning in this parable is to see that God, God Himself, is actually in partnership with the Empire of Babylon accomplishing His will! That's remarkable! The thing that is revealed in this passage is that the huge first eagle is Nebuchadnezzar and the Empire of Babylon, but the thing that is concealed - and almost abhorrent for us to think of it if it wasn't in Holy Writ - is this: God, God is juxtaposed as that great eagle. God can be seen as Nebuchadnezzar, at this moment, doing God's work! It's baffling, but let me prove this to you in case you're doubting me. The image of this vine being planted is that nothing was spared on it, isn't it? It was planted by waters, it was fed, it was given everything it needed in perfect soil. But if you go to Isaiah chapter 5, turn with me, Isaiah chapter 5 and verses 1 to 7. You have the parable of a vineyard, and if you're not familiar with the imagery of the vineyard get last week's tape, because we spent a bit of time on that. Here we have another parable, and it says: 'Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes'. So you can see in verse 2 that this husbandman that is planting a vineyard, speaking of God planting Israel, did absolutely everything he could. He looked after it, he built a wall around it to protect it. Then in verse three he says: 'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?'. God is saying of Israel: 'I did absolutely everything I could, yet it still brought forth wild grapes'.

Do you see the parallel? This eagle that is planting the vine in Jerusalem is doing everything it can, the eagle speaking of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet God, in Isaiah, says: 'That is what I did for Israel'. In fact, if you want to go with me to Psalm 80 you will see even further the parallel between this parable and what God is doing. Psalm 80 verses 8 to 11: 'Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river'. Do you see it? Not only is it speaking of how God has looked after Israel in Jerusalem, but it also speaks that God took Israel out of Egypt, cleared the land of Canaan for them, put out all their enemies, settled themselves down, looked after them, and there they are.

This riddle before us describes the history of Israel's relationship with the Lord much better than their history to date with Babylon. Now, the significance of it all is this: Zedekiah absolutely missed the whole point of what was going on in the world at this time. Zedekiah broke his oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar. Now, let me bring this all together by turning you to 2 Chronicles chapter 36. Remember the imagery is that the tree was planted by the first eagle, but then the tree began to grow and follow the second eagle and bring its allegiance to it. In 2 Chronicles and chapter 36 and verse 13 we read: 'And he', speaking of Zedekiah, 'also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God' - note that - 'made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel'. Now listen: that vine that was Nebuchadnezzar planted in Jerusalem, as it stretched toward the King, the Pharaoh of Egypt, before that Nebuchadnezzar had made that King Zedekiah take an oath that he would follow him, that he would be his vassal King in Jerusalem. Not only did he make him take an oath, but he made him take an oath upon the name of the Lord!
Now let me bring this together for you. In Old Testament times, when you made an oath in the name of the Lord, do you know what you were doing? You were inviting God, Jehovah, into the agreement to be the guarantor, to bring into effect the covenant curses attached to it. You're always told to always read the small print at the bottom of any agreement - well, at the bottom of every covenant in the ancient Near East all the curses were underlined and, depending on who you swore by in the covenant, that guarantor was to bring into effect the curses underneath if you didn't fulfil your covenant obligations. This is very hard for us to understand, but let me give you an illustration. There was once a covenant treaty document between a Hittite King, Mursillus, and a man called Duppi-Tessub, and it concludes with these words, listen: 'The words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet, should Duppi-Tessub not honour these words of the treaty and the oath, may these gods destroy Duppi-Tessub together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, his land, and all together with everything that he owns'. Do you see that? That is what is at the bottom of the covenant! These pagan men swore by their god, and King Zedekiah in agreement with King Nebuchadnezzar swore that he would have allegiance to him - but what's he doing now? He's looking to Egypt!

I hope it's coming together for you, but it will come together more when you realise that it wasn't just Zedekiah's rebellion against his covenant overlord, Nebuchadnezzar, that was the problem - but we have seen that that great eagle, typifying Nebuchadnezzar, also typified God! Do you see it? When Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah swore by the name of God, they invited God to come in and to take upon Himself those curses and act upon them! Go to Deuteronomy 17:16, you don't need to turn to it, and you will find there that Israel was told - in the covenant way back there at Sinai, that was ratified in the plains of Moab - they were told that they were never to return to Egypt for anything, and they certainly were not to return to Egypt for wild horses. That is what they're doing now. William Kelly says these words, and I think they're tremendous, listen to this: 'Had it come to this, that the heathen King Nebuchadnezzar had more respect for the oath of Jehovah than David's son, the King of Judah?'

Isn't that amazing? Sin is sin, no matter what way we want to look at it or colour it - but it's even worse and inexcusable in those who know God, and those who are in a covenant relationship with God and know His word. The thing about this parable is this, and if you miss this you miss it all, for Zedekiah missed it: Nebuchadnezzar taking over Palestine and bringing them into captivity was God's judgement. Verse 19 bears that out: 'Therefore thus saith the Lord God; As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head'. He didn't recognise that this was the plan of God: and Egypt would be destroyed, Zedekiah would be destroyed, the whole vine and the land would be destroyed because of it. He failed to to see it, maybe he didn't want to see it.

One thing is certain and it's this: he failed to humble himself under the mighty hand of God. Let me take you back a wee while. Their forefathers had put their faith in the Ark, do you remember? They ran into battle with the Ark like a talisman, a lucky charm. They put their faith in the Ark, rather than what the Ark represented. Then they say to Samuel: 'Give us a King', and what they're doing now is they're beginning to put their faith in kings instead of who the king represents. I'll take you on further: the top twig is taken into Babylon, the King is gone and they don't have a King - so what does the vassal King, the puppet King do? He starts to put his faith in Egypt instead of putting his faith in Babylon whom God is moving! It's amazing to me that God wanted them to trust Babylon - that's right!

How Israel in the past looked to Egypt. Now this is frightening to me, because the parallel with us today is insurmountable. Egypt, you know, is a type of the world - and we need to ask ourselves the question in the light of this parable, and we've a little bit more to do, but we need to stop and pause and say to ourselves: whenever trouble comes into our life, whenever we have problems, what do we do and where do we go? Whenever the chastening of the Lord comes upon us do we turn to the world? Is that what we do? We can bring it closer to home and we can say: where do we look for our freedom from? Zedekiah just wanted to be
free - young people, if you're looking for freedom and you're a believer, you needn't look for it in the world because you'll not get it there! You need to look to God! If you're not saved, you need to look to God for your freedom!

It sounds terrible, doesn't it? It all seems hopeless, but I want to tell you that it wasn't hopeless. I want you to turn with me to 2 Samuel chapter 7 - and this is the last passage you'll turn to tonight, I promise - this is a promise. Second Samuel chapter 7 and verse 16, and you'll remember that David wanted to build the temple and God told him: 'No'. But God also told him something else in verse 16 of 2 Samuel 7: 'Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established'. Let me tell you something: was everything in a terrible state that they couldn't go back? Was everything lost? Was there no hope? Praise God, there was hope! Even though a son of David had been taken into Babylon; even though a son of David, Zedekiah, was in cahoots with Egypt, not looking to God but looking to a foreign superpower - there was hope, why? Because God is a God who honours His promise! Hallelujah! Our sin and our failure doesn't derail the sovereign purposes of God, He is a God of His word - and He promised that there would never be a lack of a man from David's family to sit on His throne, never!

That brings us to this tender future twig in verses 22 to 24 - what a climax! God Himself says: 'I'm going to come and do it' - hallelujah! He's not going to send Nebuchadnezzar as His servant this time to take the twig and to plant another vine in Palestine, Zedekiah. He's going to come Himself and He's going to plant the finest vine, the most tender twig of all Israel. He says in verse 22 that He's going to put it in the highest mountain of all. He'll no longer work through an intermediary, oh no, He's going to come Himself and sort this thing out. If you look at verse 23 you can see that He says this twig would grow into a noble tree, this twig would bring blessing to all who came near by its fruit and shade, it would provide shelter for birds of all kinds. In other words, what thousands of years of politics in Palestine has not been able to do, this King who would sit on David's throne would come and do in a moment of His rule. Verse 23 says that through all of this the entire world would know the plan and the power of God. It says all the trees in the field, the nations, will understand that the rise and fall of the empires are in the hands of the sovereign God.

Is there any hope for Israel after God judges them? Praise God there is! You would think there wasn't after reading this tonight, but there is! As Nebuchadnezzar once installed Zedekiah in Jerusalem, so God says: 'I'm going to come and do the job. I'm going to come and I'll install My own leader on Mount Zion'. In contrast to the rebellious vine, Zedekiah, that would wither; this cedar of God's planting will thrive, it will be fruitful, it will bear grapes unto God. Who is this twig? Who is this vine? One commentator says this: 'Its substance remains a mystery in detail, but gives new grounds to look towards the future' - some men, I think, of their learning they become as fools, don't they? 'This is a mystery' - how's it a mystery? It's staring us plainly in the face! It's not a mystery! It may have been a mystery to these people in this day, how they could get out of it all, but what God is talking about here is not about a matter of sending armies to go into Babylon and bring the King back; it's not about a matter of Him saving Zedekiah from Egypt and setting him up, or even bringing a new King - whether it be Zerubbabel or any King - but what God is speaking of here again is something that will top all the rest!

Praise God that our failure doesn't derail His faithfulness! Listen to these words, let them thrill your heart as they thrilled mine today - the angel came and said: 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end'. Remember Mary and her magnificat in Luke 1 as well, what did she say? She said exactly what Ezekiel said in these last verses, listen: 'He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree'. Who are we speaking of? We are speaking of Messiah. David's greater Son, a twig - Isaiah in chapter 11: 'There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots'. Isaiah 53:2: 'For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground'. Zechariah 6:12: 'The BRANCH', that's His name, 'and he
shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD'. And the Lord Jesus Christ in John's Revelation, John's vision of Christ exalted and uplifted in the future, in chapter 22 says: 'I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star'. Praise His name! On that dark, lonely day on Golgotha's Hill as He was lifted up, do you know what He did? In that great nest He brought birds of every feather, and every nation, and every tongue, and every people. To that tree of Calvary He brought the trees of the forest of the world to shelter, not only did He die there for His own people, the Jews, but He said: 'If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me'.

When He came at first He was rejected, He was crucified, and that can't be what Ezekiel's talking about. My friend, when He comes again He will come to rule the world with a rod of iron. He will come and return in power that He might take the kingdom and administer affairs of the universe for the glory of God, for the blessing of all mankind, from Israel, from Jerusalem, from Palestine - and the high tree of Gentile supremacy will be brought low down, and the low tree of Judah will be lifted up again to flourish, and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and His Christ - hallelujah! It's wonderful!

In 1970 the French celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the third republic, but there was a group that didn't celebrate it - they were the royalists. They thought the monarchy should still be there, and in their newspaper headline it read this: '100 years of the republic, 100 years of calamity'. An editorial in 'Aspects de la France' said this: 'Today more than ever, every thinking patriot, every intelligent man, can only want to put an end to the long period where the King's absence has been cruelly felt'. Praise the Lord: the King's absence is cruelly felt today, but for a world that is crying out for peace and prosperity, the King of kings and the Lord of lords will come, and His presence will be felt!
Ezekiel 18, and I hope you’ve done your homework and read it before you came. We'll take time to read it together this evening. We're going to look at Ezekiel 18 and 19 - not so much chapter 19, that will come into it near the end of our study, but I want to specifically home in on chapter 18. Please do come with me with your concentration this evening.

Verse 1 of chapter 18: "The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman, And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covedered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD. If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things, And that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman, And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live. As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity. Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he
shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal". Now mark that verse: "Ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye".

The title that we have this evening is: 'The Administration of the Government of God'. There are many great principles right throughout the holy scriptures, right throughout the New and the Old Testaments - but there are two outstanding principles that we find. There is the principle of grace, and there is the principle of government. God's grace and God's government. Grace is quite simply defined that in every age of time, whether it was the Old Testament or New Testament, any soul that has ever been saved has been saved by God's free and sovereign grace. We believe in our gospel, that we've been singing about already this evening, that grace is possible for repentant sinners upon the merits and the worth of the redemptive sacrifice of our Lord Jesus at Calvary. Need we go on? We could stop there, couldn't we? How every soul by sin oppressed, that has found mercy with the Lord, has found that mercy through the cross of our Lord Jesus - yes, even those in the Old Testament before the cross. Those in the New Testament have a backward aspect concerning the forgiveness of sins, they looked back to the day at Calvary that either they could remember in early New Testament days, or that we look back upon in scripture - but also those in the Old Testament, they were forgiven upon looking forward, anticipating that great sacrifice of redemption through the cross.

That's what we're told in the book of Romans, and I want you to turn with me to Romans chapter 3 for a moment. This is important, Romans chapter 3, the reason why I'm laying this down is that there is a common misconception that the Old Testament Jews got to heaven, if you like, by obeying the law and by the sacrificial system - that is not correct. Romans chapter 3 and verse 24 outlines that for us, Paul says: 'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God'. Now that expression that you find in verse 25, 'for the remission of sins that are past', does not simply mean that God now forgives our past sins when we believe in the Lord, but what it literally means is this: He also forgives, or remits, the sins of those who lived in past ages - and He does that through the redemptive sacrifice of the Lord at the cross, and through that perfect work. Now, because of that - verse 26 - now, because of that great sacrifice, God can be just and the justifier of all who have faith in Him, because He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification.

That's the grace of God - hallelujah! The grace that we rejoice in this evening, the grace that has been bought for us at Calvary through the shed blood. I often think of it like a tree, and you have the Old Testament saints leaning forward on the tree, and you have the New Testament saints leaning backward on the tree. One is looking forward to the cross, and the other is looking backwards. Now that is the grace of God, isn't it
wonderful? The grace of God that wipes away all my sin! We are guilty - Paul, in the court of law, as he stands in this great book he outlines everything, in chapter 1 especially, that is against us, being sinners. In this very chapter he says we all fall short of the glory and standard of God, but yet Christ - God commendeth His love toward us in that Christ died for us!

That is grace, but what we sometimes misunderstand is that this great grace does not set aside God's government. Let me explain that for a moment: all believers today are under the grace of God, praise Him! We've believed in His gospel, all our sins are forgiven - and this is an eternal thing, we will be in heaven because of God's grace. But all believers today are still under the government of God the Father. In 1 Peter 1 and verse 17 Peter outlines that when he says: 'Without respect of persons God judgeth according to every man's work'. It doesn't matter whether you're a believer or unbeliever, a Jew or a Gentile, you are under the government or judgement of God in the sense that He weighs up the works that you are doing - not to give you eternal life, you're given eternal life through grace, but that doesn't wipe aside God's government.

It is true today, as in past ages, that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap - Galatians 6:7. If the grace of God is that we are saved by that grace through faith, not of ourselves, it's a gift of God lest any man should boast; God's government is that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. That's true of you whether you're a saint or whether you're a sinner. Let me outline it a bit more: there are temporal consequences to your sin and to mine. We may go through life, we may sin and that sin may be forgotten about in our past, but we may still live with the consequences of that sin. We may even get on our knees and confess that sin, we may have the joy and the sense of relief of God for giving us that sin, but we may face the consequences of that sin right throughout our believing lives.

A prime example of that is the character of David in the Old Testament. You remember, if we were to turn to Psalm 51 you would have that great confession of David's adultery with Bathsheba, his murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah - you have it there. I believe that actually Psalm 51 is a prayer that was prayed before the prophet Nathan came to see David. The reason I believe that is that when Nathan came to David with his divine authority, Nathan said to him right away: 'The Lord also hath put away thy sin'. The Lord put it away as soon as he confessed it, but you will remember that Nathan also added: 'The sword shall never depart from thine house'. From that great divine declaration as you read - and I'm reading through these books in my own daily readings - it's immense to see how David's sons, David's friends turned against him, and there was rebellion right throughout the house, and sin, and incest and all sorts of calamities that came upon David because - although he had been forgiven by God's grace - he still had to live with God's government.

I'll give you a modern-day example of it. You're a notorious drunkard, you drink from your teenage days right through till you're 50 years of age, and you wreck your liver and you burn your stomach out, and the blood runs out of you because of your sin. You come to a crusade and you hear of Jesus, the Son of God who shed His blood to die for you, and you take of His free gift of salvation. The Lord forgives you, praise His name, He wipes the slate clean, He puts your sin as far as the east is from the west, He puts it behind his back and He says: 'I'll remember it no more' - but one thing He doesn't do is He doesn't give you a new liver and a new stomach, He doesn't do that! The murderer who gets saved in the Maze [prison] - if there's any murders left in the Maze - they don't get out as soon as they put their faith in Christ, no they don't: because they have to face the consequences of their sin!

I hope you're beginning to see the difference between God's grace and God's government. Now let me say this: it's important to differentiate between the two of these, because God's government has no relation to your salvation. This passage that we're looking at tonight has chiefly to do with God's government, nothing to do with salvation. So everything I'm about to say this evening has no relation to your eternal destiny, but what it has a relation to is the way you live upon the earth.
So let's look at it first of all, what you have in the first four verses or so of Ezekiel chapter 18 is what I have entitled: 'Anti-Governmental Propaganda'. It is anti-governmental in the sense that it is against the government of God. There is a saying, a proverb that you find in verses 1 to 4, that is against what we've just been talking about. Look at the verses: 'The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying', and here's the proverb, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?'. What does that mean? 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'. Well, if you imagine this: maybe you go home and you open the larder and you lift a bit of stale bread, you butter it and put a bit of cheese on it, then you put it in your mouth and it goes down to your belly - and you wake up in the middle of the night three hours later with a sore tummy. That's what happens, but what this proverb is saying is that you eat the stale bread and your son wakes up in the morning with a sore tummy.

Do you see what they're saying? Look: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' - these sour grapes have not affected the father, the sour grapes have affected the children. So this is a saying that is going around Palestine, and what it is really saying is: something that our fathers have done in our past, in our history, we are suffering for it today! 'Lord, it was our fathers that sinned against You, so why are we in captivity? Why are we suffering for their sins that they committed hundreds of years ago?'. God refutes that proverb, and we'll see it in a few moments later, but the primary bottom line of what God says to clear away that proverb is this: 'Individuals are held responsible before God for their own sin'. Individuals are responsible for their own sin. Look at verse 3 for an interesting note, God says: 'As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel'. Incidentally, in light of what I said yesterday morning, God there is swearing again: 'As I live, saith the Lord'. God is determining that He will rid this proverb out of the whole of His land.

Now, what were the people saying? Let's bring it nearer to home, they were saying: 'Our fathers sinned against God, but we are their children, we are the generation in exile, we are the ones paying the price, and that is the way the world is and there's nothing that can be done about it'. Do you see what they're saying? By going over and over again this proverb they're saying: 'Things aren't fair! God's unequal! This world is imbalanced!'. A similar thought is expressed in Lamentations 5 and 7, which proves to us that this was a very common saying, for you read there they said: 'Our fathers have sinned, and are no more; and we bear their punishment'. 'Our fathers did the wrong, they're dead and gone, we're bearing the punishment!'. You go on to Jeremiah 31, you find there that Jeremiah also confronted the same proverb which suggested what they were saying, that they weren't guilty of this punishment, their fathers were, but they're having to endure it.

Now what is the Lord's response? Well, first of all you see in verse 4 He says this: 'All souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die'. Now what's His first response? The first thing is for Him to say: 'Look, whether you're a father, whether you're a son, whether you're in present-day generation or whether you're talking to me about your ancestors - all of them belong to me!. Everyone belongs to me!'. The Lord is not only sovereign over flesh, but He is saying: 'I am the Judge of all the earth, shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'. He's saying that there is no unfair punishment to the next generation for the sins of the father, instead what He says at the end of verse 4 are these words: 'The soul who sinneth is the one who will die'. Everyone is guilty and responsible for their individual sin. God deals with everyone individually according to the record of his behaviour, that is what the law declared. This passage is just echoing what you find in Leviticus 18 and verse 5, where God said: 'He that doeth these things shall live in them' - outlining all the sins that you could do, and God says: 'If you do those things you're going to have to live in them and live with the consequences of them'.

What is the gist of what Ezekiel is saying? I'm led to believe that President Harry Truman of the USA's past had on his desk a sign: 'The buck stops here'. That's what Ezekiel is saying: 'Don't you blame your ancestors
for the punishment that you're under now. If you're under punishment now, God is a righteous and just judge and you're under punishment because the soul who sins is the one that will die. You're responsible!'. Let me say again, I want to reiterate this in case there's any misunderstanding: this was not a promise of eternal life in heaven, but this is a promise to the Jew of long life on earth - those who will be obedient to the divine law will spend their life prosperously on earth, and the violation of the law when it was exposed resulted in death. I'll give you an example of adultery: if you committed adultery you didn't get off the hook, you didn't get a divorce as we saw a couple of weeks ago, you were stoned! 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die', not eternal security, not salvation, but responsibility.

Now, because of this false proverb, God had to come - and this is the second point of your first outline - God had to come and reassert His government, and to do that the Lord gives several examples of His principles of judgement and government. The first is found in verses 5 to 9, we'll not take time to read it but I want to iterate it for you, He says this: 'A man who shuns sin and lives righteously, shall surely live'. If you live righteously, you will live, verse 5 begins: 'If a man be just...', and then it tells us at the end, '...he will live'. If one behaves himself righteously, if a man walks uprightly, if his life is one of integrity and moral rectitude God will take note of this and God will deal with that man accordingly. If he is a man who shuns idolatry, who keeps himself from immorality of every kind, who deals honourably with all men so that his business affairs are above reproach, he's charitable towards the considerate and the poor and the needy, he's endeavoured in life to deal truly with all men, honouring the law of God in obedience to its precepts - if that man lives a life like that, he shall surely live saith the Lord Jehovah.

Again, don't confuse it with the Gospel, this has to do with blessing on earth, not with eternal things. But you see it: a man who shuns sin, lives righteously, shall surely live. That's the first principle He lays down. The second is found in verses 10 to 13, and it goes like this: 'A righteous man's wicked son shall surely die'. The Lord's beginning to address this proverb. They were saying: 'Because of the sins of our ancestors we're dying!'. God writes that off straightaway, He says: 'No, that's not true. A righteous man's wicked son shall surely die' - in other words, he will die because of his own sin. The Jews in captivity here in Babylon are very similar to the Jews that the Lord Jesus faced when He was upon the earth, for both of them have this in common: they prided themselves on having Abraham as their father. Go to Luke 3 and verse 8 and you find there the Lord castigating them and saying to the Pharisees: 'Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham'.

Now, what is the Lord saying? He's saying exactly what Ezekiel is saying: 'It's no good you having a good father, it's no good you having Abraham as your ancestor, a righteous ancestor - that's no good to you at all if your own life is wicked, if your life is full of sin and your life is full of the transgression of the law'. You have that right throughout the Scriptures in illustrations. If you take good King Hezekiah, a faithful king, a king as far as we can understand who upheld the laws of God in his life - but who was Hezekiah's son? Manasseh, and Manasseh was one of the most ungodly kings, and certainly was an ungodly son. So you see that if you have an upright father, it doesn't always work out that you will be upright! Where such is the case the son must answer to God individually for his own wickedness. What does He say? 'He shall surely die, His blood shall be upon him' - he cannot blame anyone else, he can't blame his father for his suffering, he must bear his sin!

The third principle is found in verses 14 to 17. The first one tells us that a man who shuns sin and lives righteously shall surely live, the second says that a righteous man's wicked son shall surely die, this one says: 'An unrighteous man's righteous son shall surely live'. If you're an unrighteous father and your son grows up and becomes a righteous man, he will live - but the unrighteous father shall die for his iniquities, verse 18. OK? So what are these people in Israel saying? 'We're suffering for our fathers sins, they're dead and we're suffering for it'. God says: 'No! For if your father was unrighteous and you are righteous as you're protesting:
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he will die for his sins, but you will live'. The wicked father will be judged, but the upright son will be
honoured of God - therefore the proverb they used was only an excuse for themselves to blame God, to
blame their ancestors for their own individual sinful responsibility. Do you see how God is wiping this all
away?

Then fourthly He lays down another principle in verses 21 to 23. Here He turns it on its head and He now
looks at the positive, the way back to God. He says this: 'A wicked man who repents and turns from his sins
will live'. So if you like - I don't know whether we could caricature God saying this - but if you like, God is
saying: 'Even if your proverb were true, and you are suffering for the sins of your fathers, if you repent your
sins will be forgiven! But that's not even the case, if you realise yourself that you're sinful, and confess your
sin, you could be forgiven and live!'. That is the very thing that they were not doing - you remember how
many times Ezekiel was told by God: 'Go and speak to this rebellious house, go and speak to this stiffnecked,
hardhearted, hard headed people!' - and Ezekiel had to be given a harder head to speak to them!

Then fifthly and finally in verse 24 Ezekiel outlines the fifth principle, and it's this: 'A righteous man who
turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity shall die'. So on the one hand he's saying: 'If you're
unrighteous, if you're a sinner and you turn and repent from your iniquity you'll live! But at the same token,
if you're a righteous man and you turn away from your righteousness to iniquity you'll die!'. Now this isn't
'saved and lost', remember this has got nothing to do with your eternal life and your soul's salvation, this has
to do with conduct and the responsibility and consequences of your sin down here on earth. As you're
reading this passage, maybe like me you're wondering and you're thinking: 'Well, is there not something in
the Old Testament about children suffering for their father's sin?'. Well, you're thinking of Exodus 20, and if
you turn to that for a moment to the law - Exodus 20 - let me clear that up for you. Exodus 20, and it would
seem apparently contradictory, in the second commandment here you have it, God says: 'Thou shalt not bow
down thyself to these graven images, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the
iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me'.

Now that's true, what Moses has said there in Exodus, of course it's true. What he is saying is that children
and generations following are generally involved in the consequences of their ancestors' sins. Generally
speaking we suffer for the sins of our fathers, but what Ezekiel is saying here is something more specific.
Ezekiel is homing in on individual responsibility, and what he says is also true - he is saying that everyone is
personally responsible for his or her actions. You can't blame it on another person! OK, so you were dealt a
bad hand in life - that's Exodus 20, you're suffering for something that someone else has done in your past,
maybe being born into a home where there was a drunkard, or your mother was abused or something like
that, or you were brought up to take the Lord's name in vain or go to places that you shouldn't, and you were
given an example of a lifestyle of sin to follow from a parent. OK, that's Exodus 20 - but you are responsible
for the road that you have taken, that's Ezekiel. But you see, these wicked Israelites blamed God for their
afflictions, they blamed their fathers for their afflictions, and they would do anything and everything but
blame themselves!

Now let me make an application, because I think this is terribly important and I want to spend a bit of time
on it. There are many believers here in our gathering tonight who have unbelieving children. There are many
of you here that are born-again and godly people, and have been praying for years for your children. Maybe
they once started out well and professed faith, and maybe they're nowhere at all with Christ this evening.
You did all that you could, you brought them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, you can remember
when you had a bit of control over them - you combed their hair, you put the short pants on them and
brought them to Sunday School, brought them to the children's meeting, and to the Gospel meeting. Maybe
you can remember them singing in a choir, or taking part, or even giving a word of testimony - but there
came a time, and it's etched on your heart like a scar, when they went to school or maybe they went to
college or university or went to work, and they began to realise that there is a big wide wicked world out
there.
I don't know what their psychological process was, but I suspect perhaps they thought: 'I wonder are these folks at home religious fanatics, and I've just been brought up this way but this isn't the way things are meant to be?'. They were brought up in the safety and the haven of the ark of God in your home, but a day came when they looked out and saw that ocean out there - and they got a little rowing boat and they rowed out of the ark just to see what was there. We're all affected by it, if it's not our children it's our parents, it's relatives, it's loved ones, it's friends. Can I address a few things before we look at that specific subject? First of all: people in the Iron Hall, leaders in the Iron Hall, we need to cater for and protect our young people today, now! We need to create bulwarks within the family of God, we need to devise a protecting frame in the church to build bridges for our young people, so that when they go out and discover that there's a big wicked wide world out there they can come back to us and feel comfortable coming to us, and the communication lines are open to ask us the questions that matter. We need to think about this very seriously, we must now begin to do all that we can to save our young people!

Oh, if you think a Bible study, quoting them a verse of Scripture, and encouraging them to come to the prayer meeting is going to do it, you need to waken up! It's going to take more than that! We need to see that our young people have needs, and their needs may be a friendship, their needs might be a cup of coffee and a question asking how they're doing! Our young people need to see that we care for them, and if we don't find the need that they have and meet that need, let me assure you that the old devil will do it! He'll do it. That's the first thing, but here's the big question for many of you - for many of you that's too late, isn't it? You've done all that you can and they're still in the world, and you're trying to pray them back, you're trying to encourage them back, you don't know what to say - you want to witness to them, but you don't want to put them off in any way. What do you do? Maybe there's times that you think: 'Was it my fault? I mean, I know those verses: if you train a child in the way that he should go, when he is old he'll not depart from it. I mean, does that mean that I didn't train him in the way that he should go? Because he's not walking, or she's not walking, straight any longer - have I done something wrong?'. Can I give you a word from God tonight from Ezekiel? You've done nothing wrong! Please hear that, broken heart!

Now, I'm not saying that some parents don't do things wrong - I'm quite sure they do, and they don't do all that is required in bringing up their children, but there are many godly parents that are torturing themselves with the thought that it is their fault! Ezekiel says this: 'No! Your righteousness has no bearing on the unrighteousness of your sons, neither would your unrighteousness have any bearing on his unrighteousness. Each person is individually responsible, and the soul that sins is the one who will die'. The reason why I'm saying this is first of all because it's from this passage, but you know there are some dangerous and demoralising teaching trends going about in Christendom today - some of which are very popular and coming from leading teachers who espouse the idea that if your grown-up children aren't saved or walking right with the Lord, you're not fit to serve God. That's in literature, that's in hardback and paperback, that's in commentaries that I have read today in my study - the idea that if you were truly called to the ministry, or to the pastorate, or to the leadership position in the church, if you were really called your children would be saved - so if you children aren't saved you have to ask the question: 'Has God really called you?'.

Now I know that you're thinking of 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 5: 'For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?'. I know that verse, and what's more I know Titus also - that an elder is to have faithful children. It's surprising to me that men who have godly children and saved children, all of a sudden become Greek scholars and are able to tell you and I, perhaps that don't have saved children, what that word 'faithful' means. I don't believe it means 'believing children' as some would teach - oh yes, don't get me wrong, the point of what Paul is saying is: how are you meant to rule the church if you can't rule your own home? But you're not going to try and tell me that when a father is 70 years of age, and his son of 50 is running around with every woman in the district, that you have a right to go round to his
door and knock on it and say: 'Do you know what your son's up to? Can you not control your own home?'. Come on! There is no doubt that there are times when the problem has been the way parents have brought up their children, but we need to be sensible. You know, the children of this world, sometimes, are wiser than us lot. We get some silly ideas into our heads! My friend, listen to Ezekiel: 'Every single sinner is responsible for his own life'.

A preacher friend of mine once knew a very godly man, and he loved him because he always spoke of Christ. This man, my friend, would want to speak of anything - maybe the football or the weather - but this man just gossiped Christ. Asking him one day, he says: 'I was praying that I would talk about Christ all the time, and the Lord showed me that you were a man like that', he says, 'How do you do it?'. Well, he says: 'When I'm thinking about gossiping about anything else I gossip about Christ'. That godly man who gossiped Christ had another friend, and his friend came up to him one day and said: 'You know, if anybody is bound to have believing children I think your children, of all children, will be saved because of the way you speak and the way you live'. Do you know what that man said? 'Yes', he said, 'They will be saved, if they believe' - if they believe. You see, that's what Ezekiel is telling us: it's individual responsibility.

Now, for you who are hurting - and that doesn't solve it, you want to see your children saved. Turn with me to Isaiah chapter 54, and we will take time over this because I think it's very important, Isaiah chapter 54. What do you do then if your children are not saved? What do you do? Isaiah 54 and verse 13: 'All thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children'. 'All thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children' - now I know that this passage has to do with Israel, I know that this passage has to do with the millennial reign of Christ, I know all that, and it will be specifically fulfilled on that day. But if you look to verse 17, this is a verse that we take: 'No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD' - this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. I think we can take it, but just in case you're doubting that keep your finger there and turn with me to John's gospel chapter 6. Keep your finger in Isaiah, and turn with me to John 6 and verse 44, the Lord speaking in His discourse about how men and women come to Christ says: 'No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of', or better, 'from the Father, cometh unto me'. Where's He quoting from? He's quoting from Isaiah chapter 54 and verse 13, and the Lord takes that verse from Isaiah, and what does He do? He applies it to those who come to Him, who have learned from the Father. Look at Isaiah 54 again, verse 13: 'All thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children'.

Now listen, listen to what I'm not saying: I'm not saying that your children will be saved, I'm not saying that. I am not saying that this is a promise you can claim to get household salvation. It is entirely up to them - that is what Ezekiel is saying. But what can you do? What I think this verse means is this: the Lord chose to teach your children, how did He do that? Well, He chose to teach them when they were at your knee. He chose to teach them through a mother or a father's Bible story before they put their head to the pillow. He chose to teach them through an RE lesson at school, through the Sunday School and the children's meeting and the young people's fellowship. That is how the Lord has taught your children, isn't it? But then there was a time that they wouldn't listen to your teaching or anyone else's teaching, they would no longer bow their will to God. They left your school, they left whatever school they had been in being taught by God, and they've gone out into the world. Now, let me say what this verse means: when they go out of your school, God, I believe, enrols them in His own private school. I believe that He will teach them - He will teach them! I'm not saying they'll be saved, but what I am saying is: I believe that God won't leave them alone, God won't leave them alone. He's in His school, and I ask you: would you want him to be anywhere else? They're in His school, they've left your school, and He will do everything to win them. Of course, Ezekiel says, it's up to them - they must believe, but He will teach them Himself. And, oh, what a school to be in - if He wants to
take a leg off them, if He wants to take a child off them, if He wants to let a partner stray from them - He'll do whatever it takes to bring them, but they must come!

If this is the case, do you know what you've got to do? You've got to pray, and trust God to do His job. I read a book, oh, a few years ago by a woman - I can't even remember her surname, her first name is Barbara, and her books are very humorous and have very humorous titles. I think one of them is: 'Stick a Geranium in Your Hat and Praise the Lord' - that's a strange one! What's that? Johnston! Barbara Johnston! There you are, somebody is as low in their reading habits as I am! The title of her book is like that, do you know why? You can say: 'Isn't that a terrible thing?', I know some of you are saying, 'What a title for a spiritual book!'. Wait till I tell you something: if you had a son that became a homosexual, and came through the door and told you, maybe you would need a laugh once in a while. That was her story, and she went through turmoil - but do you know the point that she had to come to? She draws a diagram in her book and it shows her coming up to the throne of God, up one step, two steps, and three steps, right up to the top with a box. In that box is a little baby - do you know who the baby is? Her wee boy. There comes a time, my friend, when you have to abandon them to God - let Him take them into the school.

I finish with this: the prodigal son - have you ever wondered, I mean if your son came to you and said: 'Give me all your money Dad, you're going soon - I know you're done. I can hear your ticker, it's not just as rhythmic as it used to be. You're going, give me all the money, I'm going into the world to live it up'. What would you do? You'd give him a crack round the ear, and say: 'Get out! Some view you have of me!'. Do you ever wonder why the father gave him everything and let him go? I'll tell you why: because the father knew about God's school. He abandoned him, and you know the story don't you? You know the story.

The funeral lament that you have there [Ezekiel 19] is simply two parables: one about a lioness and her cubs, one about a vine and the branches - do you know all that it says? It's saying this to Israel and to Israel's King, you can read about them when you go home, all it's saying is this: 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die. Your kings are suffering and the nation is suffering because of your sin'. Now listen, that means we have a responsibility - the Lord says He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, He cries to His people: 'Why will you die, O house of Israel? Wherefore turn yourselves, and live'. The miracle of God's government is this: if you repent - if you repent.

I read this, and I will finish with this, from one of Spurgeon's sermons. This is what he says, and please take this to your heart tonight: 'God is not willing that any should perish'. Lost person, I don't know whether there's anybody here, God will get nothing out of you dying and going to hell! Spurgeon says: 'Oh, my brothers and sisters in Christ, if sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees imploring them to stay, not madly to destroy themselves. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let no-one go there unwarned or unprayed for'.

As you lift your heart to the Lord, why not lift a name up to the Lord, or names? Let the Lord deliver you of any guilt, maybe you have done things in the past that maybe have hindered your children - well, confess them now, but realise that they will answer for their own sins, not yours. Pray to God that He'll teach them, and He'll teach them in such a way that the Father will draw them to Christ. Father, we thank Thee for these comforting words from Thy word. Lord, there's an awesome responsibility on us as Thy children to realise that we can confess our sins too, but it doesn't always wipe away the consequences. Help us to realise the seriousness of sin, but help us also to remember there is an open access of repentance that all may enter in and live. Bless us now, Lord, as we go home, and take us now in safety we pray. Amen.
Ezekiel 20, and I hope that you've read these verses before you've come, it's verses 1 to 44 that we really want to concentrate on tonight. So let's read them together, beginning at verse 1:

"And it came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me. Then came the word of the LORD unto me, saying, Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye come to inquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you. Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them? Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers: And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the LORD your God; In the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands: Then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt. Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they may know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out. Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness. But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: I am the LORD your God. Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my sabbaths: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness. Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand,
and wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth. I lifted up mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries; Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live; And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the LORD. Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me, in that they have committed a trespass against me. For when I had brought them into the land, for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to them, then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savour, and poured out there their drink offerings. Then I said unto them, What is the high place whereunto ye go? And the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day. Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations? For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you. And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone. As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols. For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. I will accept you with your gifts, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to them after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations? For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you. And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone. As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols. For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wic
That's not just an Old Testament picture and image, for as we go into the New Testament - and particularly Paul's epistles - we find that Paul takes this Jewish image and applies it to the church, and indeed to redemption and salvation that we have in Christ. I give you one example, Colossians 1 and 13, Paul says: 'Christ hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son'. There is the image of a road of deliverance, coming out of the kingdom of the power of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. As you read Jewish Israelite history, particularly in the Old Testament, you find that every time God's children were in bondage God always provided a highway, an exodus of deliverance for them. Always there was a provision, if you like, a way of escape.

In the passage of Scripture that we read together this evening, Ezekiel 20, we see that God again provides for His people a highway of holiness. But the tragedy of these verses is that God's people have turned this highway of holiness into a road of rebellion. This passage is simply a journey, and you will go tonight through a journey of Israel's long history with God. It is a road of rebellion, and we will eventually see where it started, where it went through, and where one day it will end. God no longer uses metaphors and illustrations and descriptions to speak this message through His prophet Ezekiel, as He has been doing in parables and in sign acts and dramatic acts that He has told in recent days that we have looked and studied within this book - but now God comes out blatantly, categorically, without a metaphor, without an illustration, and just speaks to the people about their sinful, rebellious history.

I don't know whether you can remember, but in chapter 14 something similar to this passage happened. The elders of Judah came unto Ezekiel and inquired a word from the Lord. So in verse 1 we have exactly the same thing, and if you look at it you will see that the elders came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord. But again, as in chapter 14, Ezekiel refuses to be inquired of by them - and really that is God refusing to be inquired of by them. So before we go any further and study the intricate details of the history of Israel right throughout this passage, there is one great question that faces us as we look at these elders of Judah coming to inquire of God's prophet. We've got to ask ourselves: well, why are they coming? I think, perhaps, that the message that Ezekiel has been preaching and acting and telling and representing and illustrating in so many varied ways was starting to come home to the leaders of Judah.

This is almost a year since the last time we are given date of one of the prophecies and words that Ezekiel has spoken. So a year has transpired, and they are beginning to realise that there is not a delivering army coming from Jerusalem to take them out of Babylon and bring them home and restore them to their riches and prestige. They're beginning to realise that the word of God is coming through, and I think that they're coming now to the prophet of God, even recognising he's the prophet of God, and they are genuinely looking for a word from God - a word of guidance. It begs the question: is this faith? Is this faith on the part of these elders? The elders are quite conservative and orthodox in their approach to God here, they're going through all the right channels: they're coming to the prophet of God, they're seeking a word from the Lord as any good man of God ought to do - but as they come to inquire of the Lord, God doesn't speak to them!

God, I don't know how He did it, but God warned Ezekiel: 'These elders have divided loyalties. They're coming to you in all the right trappings, they're going through all the right channels of intercession, through God's chosen prophet - perhaps they're recognising that God's heavy, judgemental hand is upon the nation - but, Ezekiel, be warned: don't think that they have heeded your message, they have divided loyalties!'. Instead of Ezekiel answering, and indeed God answering them, he recounts for them their repeated rebellions right throughout Israel's history from the very beginning right to the very end. God speaks to them of their sinfulness, of their rebellious nature. So was it faith? Well, I don't know, I wouldn't like to say whether it was faith or not - but I genuinely believe that they were coming to God looking for a word from God. But I also believe this: that they were insincere.
If I was to teach you anything from this portion of Scripture tonight, it would be this: sincerity is essential to be taught of God. Have you got that, especially the young people? If you want to be taught of God, if you want to be led of God, if you want to come to find out the great oracles of God and guidance of God in your life, if you want to be used of God: sincerity is an essential factor in your life. Ezekiel's counterpart, Jeremiah, testifies to us in his 29th chapter and verse 13: 'Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart'. Insincerity is the characteristic of these Jewish elders. Let's look at the formula, let's tease it all out: why did they have insincerity? The reason why they had insincerity was: insincerity is the fruit of divided loyalties. God warned him: 'These guys have divided loyalties, don't be taken in by them Ezekiel'. Their insincerity was the fruit of their divided loyalties.

Before we look at Israel's history down through the ages, it's so important that we lay this as a foundation, and that we realise that these elders went through the orthodox channels of approaching God. If you like, they were conservative in their theology. But the awful thing about it all is this: they could be orthodox and conservative in their theology, in their ritualistic practice, but they were as far away from God as any moral liberal! What a lesson for us today! What a lesson: that we can have all our 'i's dotted and our 't's crossed, we can come to God the Father through Jesus the Son upon the sacrifice that He has won, but if we are insincere - grasp this! - if we have insincerity in our heart God will not hear us!

It struck me today as I was studying this that only orthodoxy can be guilty of dead orthodoxy. Isn't that true? You can't be a dead orthodox if you're a modernist, or if you're a liberal - it's only people who are orthodox, it's only the conservative evangelical wing of the church that can be guilty of the sin of dead orthodoxy! What is that sin? I think we have an allusion to it in 2 Timothy 3 verse 5 where Paul says that you can have a form of godliness, but you deny the power thereof. He commands Timothy and the church: 'From such turn away'. I don't want to nail it down too specifically, but I want to give you a bit of a caricature of what it can be to be insincere and deadly orthodox. I want you to turn with me to the first few chapters of the book of Revelation, and this is supremely related to what we're going to learn later on.

Revelation chapter 2 and verse 1, the first church that the Lord speaks of is the church at Ephesus, and He says: 'Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour', they did works, they laboured, 'and thy patience', they had patience, 'and how thou canst not bear them which are evil'. This was a moral, if you like, a sanctified church, a holiness movement. 'And how thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars', so there were these men, false teachers, going around the church saying that they were apostles and commanding the church to do certain things. But this church in Ephesus was so orthodox, so scriptural, so theologically apt, that they were able to see these men and their falsehood, they were able to root them out and distinguish - what a church! 'You have found them liars. You have borne, you have had patience, for my name's sake you have laboured, and have not fainted. But - but I have something against you, you have left your first love! If there is a definition of dead orthodoxy, that's the best one - I think - in the whole of Scripture.

Sardis, in chapter 3 and verse 1: 'These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead'. What a description of dead orthodoxy that is! You have a name - Evangelical - but you can be dead! Then, if you look at verse 14 you find there the Laodicean church, and I think it is the most characteristic of our church age today: 'I know thy works', verse 15, 'thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that you were either cold or hot. But because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth! That's what the Lord thinks of dead orthodoxy.

Samuel Chadwick, that great man of God, said these words and I want you to listen to them very carefully: 'Truth without enthusiasm, morality without emotion, ritual without soul, are things that Christ unsparingly
condemns. Destitute of fire they are nothing more than a godless philosophy, an ethical system, and a mere superstition'. If we have truth, but we don't have the Spirit of God coursing through our soul, spirit and body - if we are not alive; if we are dead; if we have the truth without enthusiasm; if we have morals without emotion; if we have ritual without soul, we have a mere godless philosophy, an ethical system, and a superstition. One man was right when he said: 'There are three people living in each of us. There is the one we think we are, there is the other one people think we are, then there is the one God knows we are'. There was once a sign put outside a church by its minister, and it read this: 'This church will have either a revival or a funeral'. Either a revival or a funeral, what is he talking about? He got the point, he hit the nail on the head, he knew that dead orthodoxy is not enough - it's not! The Lord threatened, in Revelation, to take the candlestick of His presence away from a dead orthodox church. Old Duncan Campbell was right when he said: 'What we need is a baptism of holiness, a demonstration of godly living is the crying need of our day'.

Have you ever noticed the dearth within Christendom today? The lack of commitment, do you notice it? Do you notice the lack of soul, the lack of feeling, the lack of burden? It seems that Christians today have enthusiasm for everything but Christ, everything but the things of God. Vance Havener said: 'The same church members who yell like Commanche Indians at a ball game on Saturday sit like wooden Indians in church on Sunday'! Isn't that right? We can get enthusiastic about anything but God and Christ and the Gospel! Now listen: this type of fruitless, spiritless, dead orthodoxy is the result of years of rebellion - and it is usually due to divided loyalties. Have you got it? It was for Israel, for if you look at verse 16 of our passage you will see these awful sobering words at the end of the verse: 'For their heart went after their idols'. Their heart went after their idols! Do you remember in chapter 18 and verse 2 they were saying to themselves: 'We are suffering for the sinfulness of our fathers', do you remember that? 'We're under the judgement of our fathers, we're suffering for what they did thousands of years ago! Lord, You're not fair in Your dealings' - and God is coming down on them now, in His judgemental prophetic word, and telling them, going through their whole history from beginning to ending: 'You're blaming Me, but let Me redirect your thoughts to your own sins'.

He takes them on a journey down the road of their historic rebellion. Let's begin where God begins, He begins in Egypt. This road of rebellion starts in Egypt from verses 5 to 8, and the Lord speaks to them of another time where they were forced to dwell in the land of another superpower. Remember they are dwelling in Babylon at this moment in captivity, they've been taken out of Jerusalem and there they are in a foreign land. But God reminds them of a time where this happened to them before, when they were in Egypt. What we see here as God brings their minds back to Egypt, is He's starting a cycle in their minds, He's speaking to them of when He warned them not to sin - so there's warning. Then He tells them about when they rebelled in their past - they were warned, but then they rebelled. Then He tells them about how in Egypt, how in the wilderness, how in the promised land - even after their warning, after their rebellion - He restored them.

You see this great cycle of warning, rebellion, and then restoration - and it's repeated over and over again throughout this passage. But the staggering thing about the Israelites is this: that even when their sin was hurting them, they wanted it! They wanted to follow after it even when God warned them, they wanted their religions, they wanted the standards of the nations all around them. What a picture of our sin that is, isn't it? We all know what sin does to us, don't we? We know the way we feel after we sin, we know the consequences of our sin and the fruit and the heartache it causes to ourselves, to God, and even to others - but still we're attracted to it. Sin is timeless you know, it never changes its spots, it's got all the same characteristics in Egypt's day when Israel was there as it does now. You know evil history, even in our day today, it repeats itself - not because there are certain external circumstances, whether political or religious or anyway you like, it's not because of external circumstances that evil is present with us today, but it is because of the internal human sinfulness in every man, woman, boy or girl that has ever been born! That's why humanity's history is exactly the same as Israel's history in this passage.
What is it? Specifically in the church it is the history of failure and forgiveness. God warns us, we rebel against God, God restores us. In the life of a believer it's the circle, the vicious circle of failure and forgiveness; failure and forgiveness - and some of us are caught in that circle at this moment and we wonder will we ever, ever get out of it! I wonder is Israel's spiritual history your spiritual history? Failure, forgiveness; failure, forgiveness, and it's like a rollercoaster that goes up and down, up and down. You think somewhere that there is this victorious Christian life, that there is a way of being a mature Christian when you'll get beyond all this failure and failure and then forgiveness, and then failure - the same thing - and then forgiveness. Is there something more? Yes, there is - hallelujah! There is: but it cannot be accomplished with divided loyalties! That's the message!

The Lord says to them: 'When I chose Israel and revealed myself to them in Egypt, I swore that I would bring them out of Egypt to a bountiful land. They were told to abandon their idolatry, but they did not - but regardless of their idolatry', the Lord says, 'in the land of Egypt I brought them out. I didn't punish them'. God tells us in verses 8 and 9 that He didn't punish them because the Gentiles would have mocked them. The Gentiles would have turned on them in Egypt, and said: 'What kind of a God have you, where your God is punishing you?'. Why did He not punish them in Egypt? If you look at verse 9 you'll find these words: 'For His name's sake' - for His name's sake. Now that doesn't mean just God's reputation, but it means more: it identifies His whole personality. God's whole personality as God was at stake, and that's why He didn't judge His people in front of the Gentiles.

It started in Egypt with all their idolatry, and then it passed through the desert - your second point, verses 10 to 26. God outlines how, after He delivered them from Egypt, that He was leading them through the desert and they profaned God's Sabbaths that were a sign of His covenant with them - and there in the wilderness God restrained His wrath and He spared them from destruction. Now why did He do that? If you look at verses 13 through to 17 He outlines that He spared His judgement so that the heathen wouldn't laugh at His people. It says God swore that He would disperse them throughout the lands because of their disobedience, but again and again and again we find God holds back His anger against them - what's the reason? Look at verse 22, we find these words again: 'For my name's sake I withheld my hand'. They deserved judgement in Egypt, but He didn't do it in front of the Gentiles - why? For His name's sake. He takes them through the desert, they profane His Sabbaths, they still follow their idolatrous gods - but He doesn't judge them in amongst the heathen, why? 'For my name's sake'.

Then that road of rebellion arrives in the promised land, verses 27 to 29, and we find idolatry. It's becoming enshrined in the land of promise. God says: 'They use every high spot, and under every leafy tree is a shrine to their foreign gods'. As we read down this passage we find that their evils even included making their sons pass through the fire. In other words, they were offering their firstborn sons as human sacrifices to foreign gods. Look at verse 25 and 26, God says: 'Because of this I gave them up', your version says 'God gave them over' I think. 'God gave them up to statutes that were not good, and laws that they could not live by. I let them become defiled through their gifts, the sacrifice of every firstborn, that I might fill them with the horror so that they would know that I am the Lord'. Now some people have a lot of difficulty with this verse. God gave them up to defile themselves, the reason being that they would waken up and realise their depravity before God and come and repent.

I want to dwell on this for a moment because we need to see the sinful depravity of every human being. It's very important. You look at verse 25, some scholars - and I tend to agree with them - believe that this verse implies that the Israelites were using one of God's commandments as a justification to feed their firstborn sons into the fire. They were using God's word! If you go to Exodus, you don't need to turn to it. 22 and 29 God says to His people: 'The firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto Me' - isn't that right? Now what God was asking them to do was to commit their firstborn sons to Him in prayer and in dedication. But they were
able, in their depravity, as the people of God remember now, to take that verse and twist it round to justify child sacrifice to the god Molech.

There's no limit to backsliding, is there? These are backsliders, you know, there's no limit to it. I hear the Christian church today using all sorts of passages in the word of God and texts and verses to try and justify their backsliding and their sin - but all they have done is fallen into the trap of the devil, for that was the way the devil tempted the Lord. Remember, he took the word of God, he twisted it! That's the way he tempted Eve in the Garden, he said: 'Yea, hath God said?' - he twisted the word of God.

Now, God comes to these people in all their sinfulness, and He points out two facts to them. He's telling them their history so that they would realise that they were guilty of repeated rebellion against the Lord. Quickly look at verse 8, the start of it: 'They rebelled against me', verse 13: 'The house of Israel rebelled against me', verse 21: 'Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against me'. That's why He's going through their history to tell them: 'Look, I've done everything for you, but you still rebel against me'. That's the first thing, but the second thing is: the Lord tells them why He keeps forgiving them, why He is long-suffering and gracious, and why He doesn't judge them in front of the Gentiles. Look at verse 9: 'I wrought this', I didn't judge them, 'for my name's sake'. Verse 14: 'I wrought', I didn't judge them, 'for my name's sake'. Verse 22: 'I withdrew mine hand for my name's sake'.

He could have easily destroyed the nation, but what would the Gentiles have said about Israel's God if He had done it? Child of God in this dispensation today, I want you to see something beautiful. We don't have time to look through all these Scriptures, but I want you to grab hold of this phrase: 'For my name's sake', because that's powerful. When we go into the New Testament you find that, as a believer, it is for the sake of the name of the Lord that He forgives you and I. First John 2:12: 'I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake'. That's why He guides us, Psalm 23:3: 'He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake'. It's how He revives us, the Psalmist said: 'Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake, for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble'. It's for His name's sake that we ought to serve Him, 3 John 7: 'For his name's sake they went forth, serving, taking nothing from the Gentiles'. That church in Ephesus, in Revelation chapter 2 verse 3, it's said of them commendably: 'Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted'.

Any sacrifice we make for God is to be for this reason. Matthew 19: 'Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life'. Do you want to suffer for the Lord? 'Ye shall be hated', the Lord Jesus said, 'of all men for my name's sake'. You know, the great apostle would tell us in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that whatever we do, in fact all that we do should be for His name's sake - 'Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God'.

Now, when we look at the history of Israel we see how long-suffering our God is. You know, Satan wants you to believe that God is just this cosmic policeman in heaven, and that a little rebellion in your life is warranted because really God is a bit of a taskmaster. That's what he tried to convince Eve of in the Garden - but when we realise that we're rebelling against a loving, merciful, gracious, long-suffering God that gives us a long rope, then we see the truth! But we have to be careful: God is a very gracious and forgiving God, but we must be careful - and this is my concern in the age in which we live, and the trends within individual Christian's lives and within the church. I think that we are getting to the extreme of abusing the mercy and the grace of God.

I read of a humorous cartoon in a New Yorker magazine that showed an exasperated father saying to his prodigal son: 'Son, this is the fourth time we've killed the fatted calf - when are you going to get your act together?'. We feel that we can come back to God all the time - praise God, we can, there is a wideness in God's mercy - but if there is insincerity we will not be forgiven! If we do not glorify God for His name's sake
by obeying Him, even by sincere confession, God's word teaches that we must glorify Him by submitting to His chastening. We'll glorify Him one way or another - Hebrews: 'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby'. In other words, if you don't bear fruit by faithfulness - living your life for His name's sake - you'll be chastened for His name's sake, and you'll bear fruit.

That's what happened Israel. Think about this: where does God take them? They're in Babylon, hundreds of years after they've been delivered from Egypt, where does He take them? He takes them back to Egypt, do you know what He's saying? 'I delivered you hundreds of years from Egypt's bondage, and do you know something? Where are you today? Where are you? I might as well have never taken you out of Egypt, for you're still in bondage!'. The lesson is that sin always deprives us of God's blessing.

Now quickly, the fourth point is: where it will all end, this road of rebellion. Praise the Lord it will finish in new Israel - now we don't have time to go into everything about this, and we will be going into it in more detail in the final chapters of this book. But God tells them in verses 33 to 44: 'Go on, serve your idols now, Israel. Keep on doing what you're doing, but one day you will turn to me! I'm never going to let you permanently be like the Gentiles, serving wood and gods of stone, but there's a day coming that I will re-gather you from the peoples that I have scattered you to. I will set you in judgement before me, I will give you righteousness, I will purge your sins, I will take all the rebellious people away from you, I will bring you back to the land'. Thank God that God has not finished with Israel! Thank God that there are still promises, here they are - and we're seeing them week after week - that have still never been fulfilled toward Israel. Some day soon God will be honoured in Israel! Don't try and tell me that that has happened before, because it has never happened - and it's certainly not happening today.

There is an unbelieving people in Israel today, and I think perhaps this is the start of God gathering these people into Israel. But there's a day coming when that group of men and women will be believing, when God will be honoured - and not only will they simply return to Israel in their planes and in their droves, but they will turn to Israel's God again! There is hope, isn't it wonderful? Looking through the dark history of Israel's past, and you apply it to yourself tonight, looking at your dark past - there's hope! God may chasten us, but it's always that He would restore us - there's always hope! Oh, please do something for me, see when you go home - we haven't time to look at it - oh, but over ten times in verses 33 to 44 God says: 'I will bring you out, I will plead with you face to face, I will cause you to pass under the rod, I will bring you unto the bond of the covenant, I will purge you, I will bring them forth out of the country' - I will! I will! I will! God will! Statements of assurance that God is working for us - hallelujah! - even in our sin God works for us. Why? For His name's sake.

How could you sum up the message tonight in this passage? Indeed, how could we sum up the whole history of Israel? I want to do that in the words of our Saviour, listen, Matthew 6 and 24: 'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon'.

Let me finish with this story. On one occasion a 20 year-old bachelor boy called William Machesney (sp?), who was only 5 foot 2 [inches tall], he weighed just under 8 stone - but apparently he made up for his lack of size in his cheeriness. They nicknamed him 'Smiling Bill'. He was the son of a Free Methodist minister, and he was going to spend his first term in missionary service in the Congo. He was based in the Congo at the time when there was a great rebellion and a bloody civil war. He found himself in the WEC headquarters - the Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade station that had been surrounded by some of these rebels. Bill's commitment to the Lord had been expressed in a poem that he wrote shortly before embarking to the Congo to serve the Lord, and it was published in the WEC Newsletter. It was entitled: 'My Choice', please listen to this in the light of what the Lord has said - we cannot serve two masters - in the light of what Ezekiel says - we cannot have divided loyalties.
'I want my breakfast served at eight,  
With ham and eggs upon the plate. 
A well-broiled steak I'll eat at one,  
And dine again when day is done.

I want an ultramodern home,  
And in each room a telephone. 
Some carpets, too, upon the floors,  
And pretty drapes to grace the doors.

A cozy place of lovely things,  
Like easy chairs with inner springs. 
Then I'll get a small TV,  
Of course I'll be careful what I see!

I want my wardrobe, too, to be  
Of neatest, finest quality. 
With latest style in suit and vest -  
Why should not Christians have the best?

But then the Master I can hear,  
In no uncertain voice so clear. 
'I bid you come and follow Me,  
The lowly Man of Galilee'.

'Birds of the air have made their nest,  
And foxes in their holes find rest -  
But I can offer you no bed,  
Nor place have I to lay My head'.

In shame I hung my head and cried,  
How can I spurn the Crucified?  
Could I forget the way He went,  
The sleepless nights in prayer He spent?

For 40 days without a bite,  
Alone He fasted day and night. 
Despised, rejected, on He went,  
And did not stop till the veil He rent.

A Man of sorrows and of grief,  
No earthly friend to bring relief. 
Smitten of God, the prophet said,  
Mocked, beaten, bruised, His blood ran red.

If He be God and died for me,  
No sacrifice too great can be  
For me a mortal man to make -  
I'll do it all for Jesus’ sake.

Yes, I will tread the path He trod,  
No other way will please my God.  
So henceforth this my choice shall be:  
My choice for all eternity'.
What was his choice? John's words: 'Little children keep yourselves from idols'.

Let's bow our heads, and let's just take a moment in the closing moments of our gathering. I hope you didn't sing that last line of the closing hymn if you didn't mean it! 'I now give all to Thee' - oh, this is serious. You know, this is the call of the Saviour, this is the call: 'Take up your cross and follow me'. We were hearing yesterday about millions who have never heard, and all they need is someone to give them a cup of water in Jesus' name. They don't need millions of pounds, but how shall they hear without a preacher. Don't be divided, but give your all to Christ - whatever that means: going to the mission field, being an evangelist or a pastor, doing a small work in this assembly. Whatever it may be in the backgrounds it's for God - and if it's from a heart seeking all of Him, He will bless it. Whatever you do, remember you cannot serve two masters.

Father, we pray that we will all, from our hearts, devote ourselves entirely to the Lord Jesus. We think of three men tonight in Vietnam who, because they have done just this, it's costing them at this very moment. We pray that You will keep Your hand upon them, and we pray that we would all learn to make our choice for Jesus' sake, Amen.
**Ezekiel - Chapter 14**

"No Man For The Hour"

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I want you to turn to Ezekiel chapter 22, Ezekiel 22. Now I did ask you - we finished last week at chapter 20 and verse 44, and therefore we're starting our study at verse 45 of chapter 20; we're going right through those end verses of chapter 20, right through chapter 21, and right through chapter 22. Now we haven't time to read all those chapters tonight, and I only want to read one verse with you of the word of God, and then we will go systematically through these chapters as we outline these themes and these facts that we need to know. The one verse I want us to really home in on is chapter 22 and verse 30. Now, these are the words of God: "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none".

James Gilmore of Mongolia said these words, listen to them very carefully: 'Where is now the Lord God of Elijah?', he echoed the words of Eliasah, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?'. But James Gilmore answers that question by saying: 'He is waiting for Elijah to call on Him'. Where is the Lord God of Elijah? He's waiting on Elijah to call on Him. The question today is not: 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?', for the Lord God of Elijah is in the place that He has always been, and we have seen a great vision of Him in chapter 1 of this book. He is upon His throne, He is sovereign, He is working throughout all the occurrences that we see in the world, historically in Palestine of this age and in the world today, His great wheels of time and sovereignty are moving. The question is not: 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?', rather the question is: 'Where are the Elijahs of God?'. God is there, but God needs men and women to call upon Him.

In verse 30 of chapter 22 that we have just read together, you find these words, God said: 'I sought for a man' - I sought for a man! In James 5 and 17 we read these words of the great apostle: 'Elijah was a man'. God said: 'I sought for a man', and God says that down all the epochs of time and history, and in the church today He says that: 'I seek a man'. James replied, for the age of Elijah, that Elijah was that man. He tells us we know that he was a man of like passions as we are - he's just the same as you or I, the normal five-eight Christian, if you like, today. He wasn't anything special to look at, he maybe wasn't anything special to listen to, he was a man of like passions like we are. He was subject to depression, he even ran away on one occasion from the evil heathen Queen Jezebel. But we need to ask the question: Elijah was a man like you and like I, but what was the difference? Is the difference that we are not men of prayer like Elijah? Is the difference that we are not men and women of faith as Elijah was? If you look at Elijah's life you find that Elijah lived with God! He thought about the nation's sin like God, he spoke against sin like God, he lived and he moved and he had his being in God. One writer says: 'He was all passion in his prayers and passionate in his denunciation of evil in the land. He had no smooth preaching, passion fired his preaching and his words

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were on the hearts of men as molten metal were on their flesh’. This one man praying, Elijah, was a majority with God. God sought for a man, and he found it in Elijah.

A. W. Tozer writes these words, listen: 'Until self-effacing men return again to spiritual leadership we may expect a progressive deterioration in the quality of popular Christianity year after year, till we reach the point that we have grieved the Holy Spirit, He withdraws like the Shekinah glory from the temple'. Have you got that? There can come a time within the church of Jesus Christ, and I think prophetically Tozer says this, that just like the temple in the book of Ezekiel, the Shekinah glory can be removed because of the sin of the people. All through Israel's history, and in fact in history now, God looks for men and women who will be men and women of prayer, men and women of godliness, holiness, dignity, principle, righteousness.

In between your Old and New Testament you don't have any books, but you have a period of time of 400 or so years after the book of Malachi was written until the book of Matthew was begun where there was absolute silence - not a word from God was spoken! But what an army of priests could not do, and an army of so-called prophets, over 400 years between your Old and New Testament, one man sent from God did. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. It's amazing, isn't it? Four hundred years of a Jewish religious system, 400 years of slaying animals, 400 years of obeying the law - all of it pointless! But when God's man came on the scene, then God spoke! John the Baptist, what a man! A God-fashioned man, a God-filled man, a God-fired man, and a man who did in six months what all the religious leaders in Palestine couldn't do in 400 years.

Of all the great characters of Scripture, God's men for the hour were made just the way that John the Baptist was made. Where did he come from? He came from out of the wilderness. Nobody had heard of John the Baptist before! All of a sudden one day this strange looking man, austere man, rough looking man, comes out of the desert and starts to preach: 'Repent!'. If you go into the Old Testament, the type of John the Baptist is Elijah. Elijah comes on the scene of scriptural history just like that, he comes out of the blue. You don't hear anything about him, all of a sudden he just appears, but don't you think that God just put His hand upon him there and then - no, he was in the school of silence preparing before God for that moment. In that school of silence there, God's burden in the heart of God's man was being perfected, God's burden was becoming his burden, God's loathing for sin was becoming his, God's passion for holiness and righteousness was becoming his passion - and it was beginning to burn in their hearts. Every patriarch, every prophet that you read, went through this until the burning in their heart was so great that it exploded onto the canvas of time, they couldn't hold it in any longer!

Elijah and John the Baptist came out of the dark canvas of depravity of their age to be a light unto the glorious gospel of God, and to prepare the way of the Lord. What does God want today? I'll tell you what He wants: He wants men and women, young people, to be men and women of God, to prepare the way of the Lord. Imagine this man preparing the way for the Christ! That's what God wants you to do, whether it be preparing the way of the Lord for His Spirit to come in a mighty awakening, whether it be preparing the way of the Lord for His coming that when He comes He does find - at least in you, and perhaps in your fellowship - a remnant of believing, faithful people on the earth when He comes. The Lord still looks for such men and women, but the tragedy of this passage that we have read together tonight is this: in Ezekiel's day the eyes of the Lord ran to and fro throughout the whole earth, but look at verse 30 'I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none' - no man for the hour.

Because of that God tells them of the coming judgement, that's your first point on your study sheet: 'God's signs of soon coming invasion'. In verse 2 of chapter 21 Ezekiel is addressed as 'son of man', and we have seen him addressed as that right throughout the book. Daniel was also addressed in this way, and we noted that these two apocalyptic books in the Old Testament have this title 'son of man'. The Lord Jesus takes it
upon Himself, indeed it seems to be His favourite title for Himself within the Gospels in the New Testament. It is an eschatological title, in other words a title concerning the end times, but in this specific context this title speaks of a man who was after God's heart. It speaks of a man who was standing for God among the heathen people of his day in the great religious and political apostasy. This is a great paradox that I want you to see, because in chapter 22 and verse 30 God says: 'I looked and I couldn't find a man', and you would do well to say: 'Well, what about Ezekiel? Was he not a man that God could use? Was he not a man, actually, that God was speaking through?'. Yes, he was! But what had happened was that God's prophet, who was once pleading on the behalf of the people, had now been taken by God and had been called upon to set his face against the people. He was no longer being an intercessor, in other words standing between God and men pleading for man's cause, now he's standing between God and man pleading for God's cause! He's now declaring the judgements that God will bring upon the nation, and because of that Ezekiel couldn't be the man that God was looking for.

So Ezekiel, God's Spirit through him, depicts the tragedy of the hour that these people were now living in. He uses again prophetic pictures. Now we finished off at verse 44 of chapter 20 last week, because that's really where the chapter should finish, and I've told you before that in our Authorised Version - or indeed any version of the Bible, the Scriptures translated into English - the chapter and verse divisions are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, men did that after the books of the Bible were written. There are times that they make these divisions excellently, and there are other times where they're not made very well at all. So your chapter 21, if you like, should start at verse 45 - and we have there the first prophetic picture of judgement. What is it? In verses 45 to 49 there is a vision of a forest fire. If you look down it you can see very clearly the idea behind it. Now, before you read it let me tell you this: we have encountered, right throughout this book, the image of fire and the image of a sword. Do you remember that? Right throughout: the fire and the sword. We also saw, in the early chapters of this book, that when you go back to the book of Genesis you find that God's Holy Spirit is repeating a lot of imagery that you find in the book of Genesis.

Let me refresh your memory. You go into the garden of Eden, man and woman have fallen, God casts Adam and Eve out of the garden of paradise, and what does God set in front of the gate of the garden of Eden? He sets a cherubim with a sword of fire, speaking of the judgement of God, a sword of fire. It speaks of His judgement, but it also speaks of His mercy, so that they wouldn't eat of the Tree of Life and live forever in their sinfulness. Here again we have the imagery of fire and sword. If you look at verse 46: 'Son of man, set thy face toward the south, and drop thy word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field; And say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein'. A prophecy against the South, if you know the area of Israel it is the Negev, the southern desert - and in fact, specifically, it's speaking of the southern kingdom which is the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Judah. All God is saying is: 'There's going to be a devouring fire, a fatal sword that's going to come down. It's coming from the north down to the south, it is the Babylonians again coming by the hand of God, and it's going to devour your whole city until there's nothing left!'. What a picture: a forest fire.

Then, to bring home this truth and metaphor again, He uses a second picture in chapter 21 and verses 1 to 17: a drawn sword. Now Jeremiah remember, who was Ezekiel's counterpart, in chapter 51 of his prophecy he calls Babylon: 'God's battle axe'. But now Ezekiel, using the military language, calls Babylon: 'God's sword' - and more than a dozen times right throughout chapter 21 you find this reference to the nation of Babylon. In verses 1 to 7 the picture is of God pulling His sword out of the sheath and out of the scabbard. It shows in verses 8 to 17 God sharpening it, God cleaning it, God preparing it for the use of judgement. Then in verses 18 to 27 you see God points that sword toward Jerusalem, and then in verses 28 to 32 God points it again at the nation of Ammon. The Ammonites you see, if you look at the history, had united with Judah against the Babylonians. They tried to help Judah to overthrow the Babylonians. What God is saying here is that they escaped judgement for a little time, but eventually judgement will come to them - Ammon - too.
Now what is God saying? Simply, as He did in the picture of a forest fire, He's now saying in the picture of a drawn sword ready to slay: 'I am absolutely determined to judge you'. Ezekiel is speaking of God's determination - the sword is prepared to slaughter, and as the passage says, it will satisfy the fury and the wrath of Jehovah. Now I think you can see that this is a very dark hour that we are being allowed by the Spirit to glimpse into tonight. Can you imagine the reaction of God's prophet as the Spirit inspires him to say all of these things? What do you think a prophet's reaction ought to be? If you look at verses 6 and 7, God says: 'Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Why are you sighing? That you shall answer, For the tidings; because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water: behold, it cometh, and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord GOD'. God commanded His prophet, this isn't just of himself - God actually said: 'You have got to groan about this, you must grieve over this nation and what is going to come upon the people. And, Ezekiel, when the people ask you what you're doing and why you're doing this, tell them it is because of the terrible wrath that is to come! Tell them, because this is certain! Tell them it's going to happen, and you know it's going to happen! God has told you it's going to happen, and you're broken at the prospect of it all'.

In verse 6 and 7 we find him sighing, then in verse 12 God says: 'Cry and howl, son of man: for it shall be upon my people, it shall be upon all the princes of Israel: terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people: smite therefore upon thy thigh'. Can you see him wailing? Can you see him crying? Can you see him with no breath or voice left, sighing and slapping his thigh? This was to warn the people of what was to come, it was to show them the fearfulness of the coming of the judgement of the Lord, it was to show them that the wrath of God was abiding upon them, it was to show them that the day of the fierceness and the wrath of the winepress trodding of God was coming to them! God's prophet, God's man, was moved!

Turn with me to 2 Peter for a moment, 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 10 - and look at the similarities between this and Ezekiel: 'The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you'. Verse 17: 'Therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen'.

OK, you want to be technical with me and say: 'Well, that message in Ezekiel is for Israel' - well, who is that message for? It's for you! What's your reaction to it? Come on, in a world that is black - and I don't need to take time, your news programmes have already painted the blackness of the situation in our land this very night - the coming of the Lord is drawing nigh. You or I can't say when it's going to be, or when it's going to happen, but we know tonight - now - that it is sooner than it has ever been before in all of history. The question is this: how do you feel about it? To put it bluntly: does it make a button of difference to your life?

Verse 10 and Ezekiel chapter 21, if you turn back to it, in the rhetorical question that God asks of the people He talks about this sword and says: 'It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth?'. Do you see that? Shall we then make mirth? Do you know what God is saying? God's message of judgement was being declared by Ezekiel the prophet, the people were beginning
to see - as we saw last week in chapter 20, the elders of the people came and asked the question, they were realising that this great judgement was going to come - but even though they had this theological, sound knowledge, even though the earthly events all around them were pointing to the coming of the Lord's judgement, they were making mirth! The Lord is asking the question: 'Seeing these things shall be dissolved, what kind of a person ought you to be?'. Should you be making a joke out of your life? Should you be making a joke out of God's testimony, and God's word, and God's assemblies, and God's work? Men - and it astounds me, even God's people - have a tendency to make light of the great need that there is today in the world, and even the pitiful state of the church, whenever you cry aloud from the watchtower about what is coming into the church, about the great declension and apostasy - men laugh! Men of God, so-called! Ach, shall we make mirth? Shall we? When things are so bad?

When I was in America not so long ago one of those great preachers, many of his books line the bookshelves, he was asked at that conference: 'You don't tell as many jokes as you used to, you're not as humorous in your preaching any more'. His reply to that was this: 'Yes, because the more and more I study God's word, and the nearer I get to God, the eternal truths become more real to me - and I just cannot' - if I can put it in the words of Ezekiel: 'I can't make mirth'. Can't make fun of it! Oh, there's nothing wrong with a bit of humour, it can be used very effectively and ought to be used - but, my friend, when you really feel the spiritual temperature of Christ's church in this 21st century, if you really feel it you'll not be laughing! At a time like this, as Solomon said, it's better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting.

Do you know what the need of the hour is? They need of the hour is for groaners, for grievers, for wailers to God and for God. The church is coming down with graduates more than it ever has, but what it needs is groaners! It needs no more good preachers, we're coming down with good preachers - we need groaners! We don't need general managers, we need grievers, wailers,criers! As old Isaiah said: 'There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of God', there's none. The signs of God's judgement in the world today, do they not stir you up? Do they not make you think, like the Psalmist thought in Psalm 119:136: 'Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law'? Does it not make you weep? Does it not make you mourn? Does it not make you grieve? Jeremiah could say: 'My head is become as a river of waters because of all that is going on in the world around'. Will we be men and women for the hour, who will stand in the gap like God's prophet, or will we just watch as the world goes to hell? I can never get Leonard Ravenhill's poem out of my heart, listen:

'Could a mariner sit idle if he heard the drowning cry?
Could a doctor sit in comfort and just let his patients die?
Could a fireman sit idle, let men burn and give no hand?
Can you sit at ease in Zion with the world around you damned?'

A forest fire, a drawn sword, and then thirdly in chapter 21 and verses 18 to 32, a fork in the road. This is another picture that Ezekiel is giving the people, verses 18 through 24 Ezekiel is told to draw a map. He's to draw a picture of a road, and along that road he's to portray the King of Babylon walking along it. The King of Babylon is seen walking down from Babylon to the land of Judah, down in the South. He's walking down to devour it. Ezekiel is told not just to draw a road, but also to draw a signpost at the fork of the road. One of the signs points to Jerusalem, and the other sign points to Rabbath which was the capital of Ammon. What God is saying is: 'Which city shall I judge?'. Ammon is helping Judah to try and defeat the Babylonians, you remember the Babylonians were being used by God, and they were fighting against God and trying to defeat them - but Ammon was helping them. God is saying: 'Who will I judge first? Will I judge My own people, Jerusalem, or will I judge their counterparts and their cohorts, Ammon?'. Do you know what the prophet says?: 'God says: I will judge Jerusalem first' - first!

In verse 21 we read: 'The king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way', at the fork of the road, 'at the head of the two ways, and he used divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in
the liver'. Now, that looks very complicated, but what he was doing was he was using occultic measures to divine the future, and indeed to divine how to be guided and who to invade first. The first thing he does is he marks arrows. If you like, he puts the name 'Ammon' on one, and he puts the name 'Jerusalem' on another - it's like casting lots - and he picks one out, and whoever's name is on it is the one he'll attack first. The second way of divining the future, he consults his household gods. He goes to all the gods he can and asks them all the guidance he can. Then thirdly he looks at a liver - and people even do this today, I'm led to believe - looking at an animal's liver, and somehow looking at it they discern the future and discern what to do. All those three things told him to go to Jerusalem first.

Now, as an aside, let me say this: this is amazing to me. Our God, and you'd think we would have learnt by now through this book, where He keeps saying to His people: 'That they might know that I am the Lord, that I am the Lord, that I am the sovereign God', He is using an unbelieving King to do His work. Not only is He using an unbelieving King, but our God can even go through these pagan methods and make them come up with the decisions that He wants! Now don't push that too far and say that God authorises these things, because that's a lot of nonsense. But I'll tell you this: God can do what He likes, He can do what He likes.

Go to Jerusalem first. Imagine, imagine this: God's people did not obey what they knew, the revealed will of God, yet the pagan nation of Babylon obeyed God and they didn't even know they were doing it! What a paradox. In verses 25 to 27 He brings it home, and He speaks of Zedekiah. He's the profaned, wicked prince that is talked about in verse 25. He says in verse 26, if you look at it: 'Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him'. You highlight that now - Zedekiah is going to be deposed, his kingship will be overthrown, overthrown, overthrown. He will be the last of the kings of the Davidic line, until He comes whose right it is! You stand up tonight and tell me of a King who has come in the Davidic line, a King who has reigned over the whole united nation - not a one! But I can turn you to Luke's gospel and chapter 1, where we read of our Lord Jesus Christ: 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David'. What about that? It's His right! Don't you take it off Him by your warped theology! It's His right and He'll have it!

In verses 28 to 32 the Ammonites, God says, will be the next to be attacked by the King of Babylon and they will utterly be destroyed. You know, as I look at all this - I know it's complicated history, and I'm not saying I understand it all - but do you know what I do understand and rejoice in? The history, and indeed our current events in our world this very night, are full of instances of God overturning human governments and leaders until Christ comes whose right it is to reign and rule. Hallelujah! He reigns!

But we still can't get away from this great problem that God has. Do you think God has a problem? Yes, He has a problem here: He can't find a man. Your second point specifies it by saying: 'God searches for a man of intercession'. What a dark horizon, what a scene that is bursting into the history of God's people at this moment. God furthers the case of the great need for godly men with the sad lack of it in the nation - there's a need of it, but there are none here to fill the gap! He outlines for them in chapter 22, first of all in verses 1 to 16, a menu and a register if you like of the people's unrighteousness. There is the image of a court here, a court of law. We don't have time to read it, but if you go home you'll read all the list of the most awful sins that you can imagine that God's people were committing. God is being depicted in the prophet as the prosecuting lawyer, bringing all the sins of the people, outlining them all, and convicting them all of it. He is indicting Judah for her sins and proving that the leaders, right down to the common people alike, were guilty of breaking God's law. A catalogue of the sins of Jerusalem.

God says: 'For these sins', verses 15 and 16, 'I will scatter them to all the nations and the countries of this world' - and for 2000 years, mark this well, 2000 years His people Israel have been scattered all over the world! I hope you believe the Bible. A menu of unrighteousness, and for it they have been dispersed.
Secondly, He outlines it again as a melting pot of dross in verses 17 to 31, this pot. They're boiling the metal in the pot in order that the dross is taken away, and you're left with the metal - isn't that the idea of purification? But what God is saying here is: 'The more I boil, all I get is dross, I don't get any pure metal from My people'. God gives them an image of a furnace, Jerusalem would become like a furnace of fire as the army of Babylon encamps around it - but there's no metal in the city, there's nobody left, everything's dross - He can't find anything good in His own people because they've been so cheapened by their register of sin!

Then He brings in verses 23 to 27 an image of a jungle, and He depicts the prophets like lions, and the priests and princes like wolves. He says that these lions of prophets and wolves of princes are all fighting to get what they can from the people of God, they're wanting to devour the people - they're not making a difference between holy and unclean. All classes, all types of people were guilty: religious, civic leaders, kings and princes alike - all of them were filthy, and not a righteous man could be found among them! He couldn't find a reformer, He couldn't find in intercessor, He couldn't find a representative to stand for Him. Instead of shepherding the people, these false prophets were like fierce ravening wolves. They devoured the people, they give them false visions, they were prophets - like men-pleasing preachers today - who sought to make the people comfortable in their sins, and whitewashing over their sins with false visions, and divining lies in the name of the Lord!

In verses 28 to 31 He gives a third image of a wall, and He says that with their false visions and their messages the prophets have whitewashed the nation's sins, and covered over all its guilt. Then He talks about a gap in that wall that needs to be filled, and that's your third image. In our text, chapter 22 and verse 30: 'I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none'. God is looking for people in His nation who will not only build strong walls, but who will become strong walls by standing in the gap in the hour of danger. Cast your mind back to Genesis, perhaps only 10 righteous men were able to be found in the city of Sodom, and that was enough for God not to judge it - only 10. But God couldn't find one in His own city of Jerusalem! It's amazing, isn't it? That's why, in chapter 16, Jerusalem was called the new Sodom. There wasn't even a righteous Lot, not even one God could pull out of the fire!

Now can I, before I bring a challenge to you and finish, can I bring to you a great blessing to every child of God in this place? Listen to this: 'I cannot find a man to fill the gap', but hallelujah, we can say here at this side of Calvary: 'There is one man, one mediator between God and men - the man Christ Jesus' - hallelujah! What has He done? You see that register of sins? He, in the court of law of God, took it on Himself. He went into the melting pot of God's wrath and fire, He went under the sword of God's war:

'Jehovah bade His sword awake,
Oh Christ, it woke 'gainst Thee!

What a Saviour! Do you know something? Don't have only half a gospel, for He says: 'Take up your cross and follow Me'. You see, we are to stand and intercede as He is interceding now. We are to intercede in this world as a kingdom of priests for our God and King. In the history of Israel God always looked for a man like this to stand in the gap, for gap-people to stand in the breach and ward off the judgement of God. You have Moses and Phinehas who interceded for the people, you have Joseph who was arisen in the nation for the people to save them, you have Samuel, you have the judges all through that book who were raised up - even Gideon - to save the nation from judgement. You have Daniel, you have John the Baptist that we have mentioned, you have modern-day men of God and mediators and intercessors.

John Knox, in his final two days of life here on earth, in his great physical discomfort, informed his friends that he had spent the last two days battling on behalf of the church, and he ended his days doing the work of an intercessor. What a man!
'Oh, for the floods on a thirsty land,  
Oh, for a mighty revival.  
But - Oh, for a sanctified fearless band,  
Ready to hail its arrival'.

Can I give God's word to you in this Laodicean, lukewarm age that's neither hot nor cold: 'Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man or woman of you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him and I will sup with him and he with me'. He's only looking for you, my friend, just one.

Jeremiah Calvin Lanphier of New York was that one man on the 23rd September 1859, after pleading with God that he would know what to do in the awful background of that nation and that city he lived in of New York, he was led to begin a prayer meeting in New York. The meeting was to last for an hour, and for the first half-hour the meeting he was on his own. Then one person came to him after the half-hour, and then another, until eventually five men were gathered for prayer. The following week the number grew to 20, the following to 40. The meeting was so good that they decided to have it on a daily basis, and after a few weeks the number had grown to 100 - and by the 23rd of October, a month later, Lanphier called upon the newspaper editors of the town to notice what was happening in the city of New York. After three months the numbers had reached four figures, and after six months there were 25 different prayer meetings held right throughout the city of New York. Do you know something? That was the beginning of revival in America where two million souls were added to the church. Why? It all began by the prayer intercession of one man - are you willing to be that man? Are you willing to be that woman for this hour?

Let's bow our heads, and if you want to be a man or a woman for this hour, you must be a man or a woman of prayer. It's hard because nobody sees you up at the front when you pray, nobody gives you a pat on the back, but the Lord says: 'If you pray to me in secret, I will reward you openly'. Will you take up a ministry - maybe you can't speak, maybe you can't sing, maybe you can do nothing, but I tell you: you can pray, for you have the Spirit of God in your soul. Will you pray, my friend, that God may be glorified in this nation and in this church in a way that He has never been before?

Father, it is Thy glory we seek - of course, there's always a wee bit of ourselves in it, and we pray that You'll purge out that old dross like You did with Israel. But, oh, that You would find metal, oh that You would find gold and silver and precious stones in our life, that on that great judgement day we'll endure the fire and that we will have fruit that will remain. Make us a people of prayer, we say with the disciples: 'Lord, teach us to pray', and we say as a church: 'Lord, make this a house of prayer'. Amen.
Ezekiel - Chapter 15

"Double Trouble - Two Harlot Sisters"

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Ezekiel 23

1. The Story Of Oholah (verses 1-10)
2. The Story Of Oholibah (verses 11-21)
3. The Judgement Of Two Cities (verses 22-49)

Now let me welcome you to the Bible Reading here in the Iron Hall this evening, it's great to welcome you all and to see you all gathered out - such a good number - this evening. Thank you for coming, and we trust that you're blessed through the word of God tonight as we study it together. Ezekiel chapter 23, and I hope you have read the passage before you came - there are some 49 verses in this chapter, we're not going to take time to read all of them, but what we will do to begin with is read from verses 1 to 19. Please do follow it carefully.

Verse 1: "The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother: And they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed, and there they bruised the teats of their virginity. And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus were their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah. And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours, Which were clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses. Thus she committed her whoredoms with them, with all them that were the chosen men of Assyria, and with all on whom she doted: with all their idols she defiled herself. Neither left she her whoredoms brought from Egypt: for in her youth they lay with her, and they bruised the breasts of her virginity, and poured their whoredom upon her. Wherefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted. These discovered her nakedness: they took both one way, And that she increased her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt".

If you cast your mind back not so long ago to one of our studies, we looked in chapter 16 to a very similar passage. We saw that that passage was very shocking in its imagery, and if that wasn't bad enough the imagery that we have tonight is even more shocking. You remember when we studied chapter 16 that C. H. Spurgeon, the great preacher, said that this passage of Scripture could hardly be read in public. Well, this
chapter 23, one of the reasons why I have stopped reading it is because it could get very embarrassing if we read the rest of the passage! It can scarcely be read in public, due to decorum and politeness. It is a shocking passage.

A husband reputedly was cured of infidelity on one occasion by two psychiatrists in a hospital in London. What they did was, they put him into a dark room and they showed him alternative pictures - one of his wife, and then of his mistress. They did this for 30 minutes at a time for six days, right through the week. Whenever his mistress' picture appeared he received 70 volts of a shock to his wrist, and when his wife appeared a tape recording was played telling him of the harm he was doing to her. These two psychiatrists declare that he was cured of his infidelity - 70 volts of a shock through the wrist, and being told for 30 minutes, six days a week, what his wife was going through.

The purpose of this passage of Scripture - the Holy Spirit of God is doing exactly the same thing, for in the shocking imagery that we have God is wanting to put even more than 70 volts through the wrist of His people Israel, Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Samaria. He is wanting to shock them, He is wanting them to be shocked out of their complacency, out of their backsliding, and out of their sin. So He tells them this very lewd and perverted story.

The story begins with two sisters living in the land of Egypt. The passage tells us in verse 2 that they were born of the same mother. What that is really telling us is that they came from the same origin, and because they came from the same origin they were of the same nature. The passage tells us that there in Egypt, as young women, they had already adopted the practices and the casual ways of the life of prostitution. The amazing thing about the first four verses of this chapter is that, despite their unworthy sinfulness and their abominations, God took them to be His wives. If you look at verse 4 you see this wonderful statement: 'They became mine'. When this individual man married these two sisters, the allegory goes that the family then moved to another land away from the sinful associations and temptations of youth for these two young girls.

But as we read down this story we find that even though they had been separated from the associations of their sins of youth, the behaviour of the sisters had been so formed within their childhood that in their new homes, in their new locations, they continued to act with the same reckless sexual immorality as they did in their youth. So we are introduced to Aholah. It says that Aholah continued to take lovers, she continued after marriage to be unfaithful to her husband. It outlines how she fancied young warriors of Assyria, and she doted upon them, she lusted, she spent so much time towards them that her husband despaired and actually handed her over to the Assyrians so that they may do as they liked with her. We read that she then finally discovered the true violence of her so-called lovers. We read that they slew her, and the death of Aholah became a byword, the passage says, among women. In other words, that perverted life that she lived was told to young girls all through Samaria: 'Don't follow that road children! Look what happened Aholah!' - she became a byword and a metaphor for what could happen if you follow such a life of immorality.

Then we are introduced to her sister Aholibah. If we thought that things couldn't get worse, Aholibah is described as greatly worse - the reason being that she knew her fate, she knew what the fate of her sister had been, she knew that her sister had been made a spectacle, a byword among the people, yet she persisted in following the same lifestyle. She even sometimes went after the Assyrians - the same people that slew her sister! She didn't only go after the Assyrians, she went after the Babylonians until she got such a perverted nature and lifestyle that again her husband turned from her in disgust. In verse 18 we read that, look at it: 'So she discovered her whoredoms, and discovered her nakedness: then my mind was alienated from her, like as my mind was alienated from her sister'. But even that didn't stop her. This is a shocking story. Indeed, if you weren't reading it tonight, you would be surprised even to think perhaps that it's in the word of God.

Let's look first of all at the story of Aholah - and you may see the difference in your Authorised Version, 'Aholah' begins with 'A', but on this sheet it's 'Oholah' - but it doesn't really matter, as long as you can say it
that's the only thing that matters. The story of Aholah in verses 1 to 10, and really what this is - again Ezekiel is using an allegory, a metaphor, a story, or a parable. Really this is a tale of two cities. In verses 1 to 4 you have Aholah, and we find out that Aholah is defined as the city of Samaria. Aholibah, her sister, is defined as the city of Jerusalem. Aholah is spoken of as the older sister - now really Jerusalem is older than Samaria, Jerusalem is older by approximately 300 years. The reason why Samaria, Aholah, is said to be the older sister is because Samaria dies first - Aholah dies first in the story.

Now it's important that we dig deep into this metaphor, because everything in it means something. The name 'Aholah' that represents Samaria, it means in the Hebrew 'her tent'. It represents Samaria, the Northern Kingdom, you remember that Israel was split into two - there was the Northern Kingdom where there were the ten tribes of Israel, and then the Southern Kingdom where there were the two tribes of Judah. So Aholah is speaking of the Northern Kingdom, the ten tribes. The name means simply 'her tent', which means this: God's presence was always described as a tent right from the days of Exodus in the tabernacle, but Aholah means 'her tent'. In other words, Samaria, the Northern Kingdom, the ten tribes, had devised their own religion, they had devised their own tent. They have set up their own centre of worship, but what God is saying is: 'It's her tent, it's not my tent. It's her way, it's her religion, it's her faith'.

We read in Old Testament history that King Jeroboam put two golden calves - he put one golden calf in Bethel, and one in Samaria. He tried to stop the people going from the north down to Jerusalem to worship in the south. He wanted people to worship where they were in Samaria, he wanted a new religion, he wanted to propose his own way to God - 'Her tent'. We see an allusion to that in the diversion of the Samaritan woman when the Lord Jesus speaks to her in John chapter 4 verse 20. You remember she throws in a red herring, and she says to the Lord: 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship'. You see, the Samaritans and the Jews worshipped in different places - that is why she is called Aholah, 'her tent', it is a different way.

So, we read, Aholah played the harlot. She played the harlot to handsome and macho horsemen of Assyria, and therefore because of that God abandoned her to her lovers and they uncovered her nakedness. They slew her with the sword - and we know, recorded in history, that in the year 722BC Samaria fell to Assyria. That's the story of Aholah.

Then we come in verses 11 to 21 to the story of Aholibah. Now, if Aholah means 'her tent', Aholibah means 'my tent is in her'. So if the Northern Kingdom followed their own way, and set up their own religion, and put two calves to follow their own god, God was saying Aholibah, the Southern Kingdom representing Judah and specifically the city of Jerusalem: 'My tent is in her'. The Samaritans have devised their own religion, but God dwells in Judah. Now, there are two reasons for that, and this is fundamental. The first, and we have seen it already in our studies, the reason why God has been sticking thus far to Judah and Jerusalem is because God made a promise to David - and when God makes a promise God never breaks it. The second reason is because the temple was found in Jerusalem, Jerusalem was God's chosen place to dwell, it was God's chosen place that He should be worshipped in. So you see this: the Northern Kingdom is Aholah, 'her tent'; the Southern Kingdom is Aholibah, 'my tent is in her'.

Now there could have come a little bit of pride to Aholibah, couldn't there? 'In the Southern Kingdom we have the promises of David, we have the monarchy, we have the temple, we are the royal city'. I believe that as Ezekiel was telling this parable - don't forget Ezekiel's listeners were Judeans, they were from the Southern Kingdom, they had been carried away from Jerusalem into Babylon, so they were from the South, they were the people 'Aholibah', the people who God's tent was in - I'm sure that those Judeans must have really appreciated prophecy against Samaria. They would have been really warming their hands, and thinking: 'You give it to them Ezekiel! That Kingdom up in the north, their own way to God, but we have the true way to God'. You see ever since the death of Solomon, you remember David united the two kingdoms,
but when Solomon died there had been a dirty civil war between the Northern and Southern Kingdom. That existed, that friction between the two states, and I can almost picture the people of the Southern Kingdom as Ezekiel is prophesying against Aholah nodding their head and saying: 'Aye, that's right. Amen! You're right Ezekiel! Make sure God gives them everything that's coming their way'. Nodding with solemn, pious approval as Ezekiel denounces the other Kingdom.

It was very easy for the prophets of the Southern Kingdom, and the people of the Southern Kingdom, to think that God was judging those golden calves in the north - and God did judge their false idolatry in the north. We've seen already, 722BC, God did let her Assyrian lovers come into the Northern Kingdom, sack it all and take them all captive. God let that happen! The thing that these Judeans missed was that God was going to judge the Southern Kingdom too! The reason God is judging the Southern Kingdom is because you have my tent, but you are inhabiting my tent with absolute dead orthodoxy! They were nodding their heads in absolute orthodox fundamentalism. They nodded in appreciation of the judgement that was being called upon their Northern sister, but they didn't realise that they in the eyes of God were actually worse! That's the awful thing about this passage, because God says Aholibah was even worse than Aholah, the South Kingdom was worse than the North. The only thing that was stemming the judgement of God was His promise to David.

Now imagine this, and we don't need to apply this a million miles away, do we? What we are talking about here is having the truth, but not living in it. God is saying that having the truth and not living in it is worse than not having the truth at all! Paul put it: 'It is a form of godliness, denying the power thereof'. It is having a name that you live, but you are dead. Now let's ask ourselves: do we do this? Do we do what these Judeans were doing? When there's a sermon preached on the shortcomings of other religious systems, or other denominations, or other theological persuasions are highlighted and condemned and denounced, or even the sins of others - when we hear an application and we twig, we know who that preacher is talking about, we nod our heads, we clap our hands, we shout 'Amen' - but the shock for these people was when Ezekiel started to preach to them!

This comes home to me so, so closely, because it speaks of the depravity of all human beings - even redeemed, regenerated human beings. Because what we do when we hear the word of God - if you're like me, I hope, you do this - you seek to avoid the application of the word to your own heart. 'Give it to the church of Rome! Hammer the Jehovah's Witnesses! Slate the charismatics!', but when it comes home we will do absolutely everything to avoid it - and you find when the Evangelical preacher starts to preach against the pet sins of the people, God's people, they start to air their protests: 'This man is too fanatical, this man is too judgemental'. Really what they were saying is: 'Hammer everybody else, and tell us that we have it made'. Do you know what God said? That attitude of Aholibah was worse than the sins of Aholah. Look at verse 11 so that I can prove that to you: 'When her sister Aholibah saw this, she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than her sister, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in her whoredoms'.

She was willing to do absolutely anything to be free from Babylon. Now let me cast your mind back a few studies, because we learnt, remember the eagle that was flying - remember that eagle that represented Babylon? That eagle was both representing Babylon and representing God, remember we saw that? It seemed to be a kind of a contradiction, but what the metaphor was saying was: Babylon is an instrument, but God's hand is behind the instrument. We were finding out that Babylon was actually being used of God to discipline His own people! We learnt, therefore, that it was God's will that the Judeans would not fight against Babylon - He didn't want them making any agreements with Egypt, remember, He wanted them to go into captivity, He wanted them to suffer this because it was His will. But they were wanting to do anything but be in captivity to Babylon!

You see, what that really was is: they were willing to do anything, denounce anything, write off anything, than do the will of God in their own lives themselves. I believe that the sins of God's people are still cutting
the life source of the church today. You may not agree with me, but I believe that the Spirit of God is grieved and quenched in the church. We have the truth, but the question is: do we have the life? We have the letter, but do we have the Spirit? The letter brings death, the Spirit brings life. Are we in a form of godliness - I'm not saying are we saved, I'm not saying have we received the Spirit at conversion, because you know that I believe all that - I am asking: are you alive? That could be defined in this question: what experiences of God have you had lately?

She went further than her sister in her idolatrous harlotry and immorality. As you read down this passage you find that she lusted after the Assyrians just as Israel had done, she didn't learn from her sister's mistakes. In verse 12 and 13 we read that again: 'She doted', she lusted, 'on the images of the men'. Pornography written on the walls, she even lusted after them! She sent that those men that were portrayed on the walls would come to her, would commit immorality with her. She sent messengers to them inviting them to her land. Even after her marriage it says she recalled her youthful sins in the land of Egypt, and she multiplied her harlotry and gave herself over to the Babylonians to commit terrible immorality, the word of God says. The point of all this is: this is where God's tent was! That's the point! God had judged the North, and they were in false religion; and He hadn't yet judged the South, and they were with God's truth yet they were worse than all the rest put together!

What they did in God's temple grieved Him greatly. Look at verse 36: 'The LORD said moreover unto me; Son of man, wilt thou judge Aholah and Aholibah? Yea, declare unto them their abomination', verse 39, 'For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house'. Do you see what this is saying? They killed their children, their own children! They killed them! They took them to the temple of God, Jehovah Almighty, and there in the temple they gave a burnt offering to God in God's temple! It's terrible, isn't it?

Would you turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6, what does Paul say? Verse 19: 'What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's'. Now, that comes home. God judge Samaria in 722BC, and He permitted the Assyrians to take them captive, but Judah didn't profit from that lesson. Judah persisted in her sin, in fact she increased and multiplied her own sin and God had to judge her. Why? Because judgement begins in the house of the Lord! Now there's a great warning in this for us - and I know that we're in a different dispensation, I know that we have partaken of grace, and I will come to that later on in this study - but we must not miss the spiritual principles laid down by God. We must be careful that we never ever say, like the Southern Kingdom: 'That'll never happen to me! I'm one of God's children, I can get away with sin!'. That is the scenario that Paul has in his hypothetical question in the book of Romans: 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? We're forgiven, we're God's people, God's tent is on us!'. God waits for us to repent, that's true, and every time we repent - praise God - the grace of God is greater than our sin, but we must not as God's people try God's patience! For in the end God will punish us! He will make us to learn afresh that He is the Lord - that was the purpose of His punishing Israel, and you can see it again in verse 49 of this chapter, but right throughout the whole book He says over and over again: 'Ye shall know that I am the Lord'.

What does God want from us? Does God want: 'Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me'? Is that what God wants? Does God want a signed decision card? Does He want a date written at the front of your Bible that you can turn to every time you sin and remind yourself that you really are saved? Of course God wants decisions for Christ, but I'll tell you what God wants decisions for Christ for: He wants single-hearted men and women utterly and absolutely devoted to Him - devoted, His bride, chaste, unadulterated, holy, purely for Him!

Second Corinthians bears it out again, turn with me to 2 Corinthians 11 and verse 1: 'Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for
I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ'. What is the simplicity that is in Christ? I wonder perhaps is it what was spoken to the church at Ephesus: 'You have left your first love. We don't have time to look at it, but James 4 and verses 1 to 10 bears it out as well - and what God is saying here is: 'I don't want a divided heart'. The purpose of saving you is not so that you'll be bound for glory and you'll have a testimony to the grace of God that you can share with other sinners - that's all in the package, but what God wants: God seeketh worshippers to worship Him in spirit and in truth! The way to worship God in spirit and in truth is what Paul said when he said: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, which is your acceptable worship'. It's not extra, it's not for the missionary, it's not for the evangelist, it's not for the gospel preacher, the pastor, this full surrender - it is for the believer, and it's what's expected of you, it's not doing a favour for God.

God views our sin as a husband views his wife's infidelity - with both sorrow and anger mixed together. You remember the Jewish nation was married, wedded to Jehovah at Mount Sinai. They were His bride, and God is seeing their idolatry here as infidelity to Him. Please don't miss this, go home and read this passage - it is awful! The shocking nature of it is purposed to penetrate the complacency of God's people with regard to their sin - God is wanting to shock us, to make us realise what our sin means!

I was looking at this, and praying over it today, and thinking: what is God revealing here? I'll tell you five things God is revealing to us through this passage. One: He is revealing that our sin is always more serious to God than it is to us. If someone described your sin or your backsliding as being a whore, you'd say: 'You're exaggerating, that's hyperbole, that's pushing it to extremes'. Let me tell you: that is the way God illustrates it here, and you can see the graphic detail of it - because our sin is more serious to God, because God is more holy than us! God's view of our sin.

Secondly: our sin judges us in itself. When I talk about our sins being judged, I'm not talking about a believer going to hell, for a believer will never be in hell. I'm not even talking about the Judgement Seat of Christ, although we will be judged there and we will suffer loss. But the sins themselves judge us! We get the recompense and the fruit of our sin, the consequences of our sin is actually found in the fruit of the sin itself.

Thirdly: the judgement of Israel is similar to the judgement of the church today. The church and Israel are not the same, but the spiritual principles can be applied to us today - why? Because remember, the glory departed, and the glory was departing because of the sins of God's people. Whether you want to call them sins of commission, things that you do; or sins of omission, things that you do not do - and I think perhaps the second, the latter, is more the case - the things that the church is not doing today, and the glory has departed.

Fourthly: God's prophet must confront sin in God's people. He must. He did. And fifthly: God's people must die for their sin. In verse 46 to 49 we find that these two were told to be dragged out, the one that was living in fact, and to be stoned - for that was the laws penalty for adultery and prostitution. That speaks to me that God does not wink or wipe His eye at our sin. We are to mortify our sin. Now, let me ask you: do you see the lengths that God goes to in this awful imagery in order to waken up His slumbering people to the fact that the glory has gone, the Spirit is grieved, there is sin in the church? Do you see how far He goes? Really what Ezekiel is saying, if you read this passage and if you think this story is crude, what way to you think God sees your life? That's what Ezekiel says!

So, those are the two stories, but they speak of the judgement of two cities in verses 22 to the end. Because of the sin of Aholah and Aholibah God would destroy them. He already destroyed Aholah by the Assyrians, He will destroy Aholibah by her Babylonian lovers - she's currently in captivity, but Babylon would come
and wreck the city of Jerusalem and take more away. Those desirable young men that she lusted after and doted after would be the ones who would treat her hatefully. Why has all this come upon her? Why has she been judged? I'll tell you why: because she tried to find satisfaction in the fleshly world apart from God, and now her sins must be judged. If only she had drunk of God's living waters, she would never thirst again - but that's why we find her continually lusting, lusting, lusting...

Aholibah was guilty of the sins of her sister before her: adultery, literal adultery, spiritual adultery, murder, offering her young as human sacrifices, the desecration of the temple - for she offered those sacrifices in the temple. She broke the Sabbath because she did it on the Sabbath, she mixed idolatry with the worship of God in so many ways. She committed spiritual adultery with foreign nations through pacts. Righteous men of other nations - God describes them as righteous men! - would come and repay the sisters for their lewdness, that they well-deserved, and they would be destroyed. Listen please, for there is a law here that applies to everybody: we reap what we sow. We get what we want, God doesn't make us robots, we get what we want - and they wanted lovers rather than God, so God granted them their wish.

When you go to Psalm 106 you read this about them in the wilderness, the children of Israel: 'They lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert'. They asked quails of God, they wanted meat, they got tired of the heavenly food. God gave them their request, but He sent leanness into their souls! He gave them their fleshly desire, but He sent them spiritual famine! Isn't that what we're getting in the materialistic world today? In Numbers 11 we read of that same incident, God said: 'Ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat...even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?'. Do you see it? Aholah and Aholibah returned to their ways of prostitution before marriage in Egypt. The answer is this: what you sow, you will reap. You serve sin, and you will become a slave to sin - and the awful irony is this, that men and women and even believers, and I've done it myself, when you choose to sin you think you're choosing freedom! You think that God is too narrow for that split second, you maybe know that He's not, but for that second you're deluded as Eve was. In striving for liberty in sin, we find poverty and bondage.

Oh, what ministry we received yesterday morning - and it is so apt and so needed in these days - to know that the Christian, the believer ought to have a mindset that is ruthlessly opposed to sin! Do you know that the devil is not worried about the people in the world? He's not worried about the people in the pub, he's got them! But he has you as a battlefield, where the Spirit lusts against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit. The puritan said, and he said well: 'Kill sin before it kills you'.

What was the cause? The cause of all sin and all backsliding in verse 35, look at it: 'Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms'. Why? 'Thou hast forgotten me'. What does it say in Psalm 106, where the quails came out of their nostrils, where there was leanness sent into their souls? 'They forgot God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt'.

Have you forgotten God? Do you know something? You can be a pastor, you can be an elder, you can be a church member, you can be a leader in the church of Christ, and be in the meeting every week after week, and you can forget God. Unfaithfulness was their sin, fourteen times we find the word 'prostitute', five times the word 'adultery'. What we have is an illustration to us today: 'For this cause shall man leave his father and mother, shall cleave to his wife, shall be joined, they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery', Paul says, 'but I speak concerning Christ and the church'. What is our faithfulness like to Christ? I'm not asking what it is to our denomination, or to our theological eschatological persuasion of the second coming, or of Calvinism or Armenianism, I'm asking: what is your faithfulness to Christ? If you were faithful to Him, all that would fall into place.
Do you wander? Do you know what the problem with the church today is? - and the problem with me, I'm not standing up waving my finger. Christ doesn't satisfy us any more. The devil, the world, and the church is trying to eliminate the concept of sin. I hope that you realise the mentality and the plan behind this. Even in our sexual language, one Christian counsellor wrote this: 'We don't commit adultery any more, we have affairs. Adultery sounds harsh and ugly and destructive, but an affair sounds kind of gentle and nice and almost acceptable'. I've said this before, but I think it's tremendous, John Wesley said these words - and if ever there are words for today it is these: 'Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth'. We need men and women afraid of sin and who desire God!

We need men like Latimer who was burned at the stake by the church of Rome, but before that - I don't know whether you know this - he became Bishop of Worcester in the reign of Henry VIII, and you know how many wives Henry VIII had! It was the custom for each of the bishops to make a presentation to the King on New Year's Day. Latimer went with the rest of his brethren, the rest of the bishops, and they brought the usual offering which was a bag of gold. But instead of a purse of gold Latimer brought a New Testament to the King, and in the New Testament he had one of the pages bent over doubled down to this passage: 'Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge'. A man like John the Baptist, a man that is not afraid of anything but sin.

My friends, listen: the reason why in our society today we no longer have sins, is because if we no longer have sins we no longer have sinners. If we no longer have sinners, we no longer need Christ Jesus who came into the world to save sinners. There's not one speck of hope in this passage, not one, but the baffling thing about all of this to me - although a great many of these principles apply to the church of Jesus Christ - what blows my mind and what rejoices my soul is this: yes, God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, as Paul the apostle says. That is inevitable, that is expected, but the amazing thing about this is: 'Know ye not, yes, that unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revellers, nor extortioners, shall enter the kingdom of God'. We are no different than the Jews or the Samaritans, but the difference - hallelujah - is this: 'Such were some of you, but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God'. What a difference!

In verse 49 we read: 'They shall recompense your lewdness upon you, and ye shall bear the sins of your idols: and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD'. A penalty had to be paid for their sin, and a penalty had to be paid for our sin. If I am to wear a crown of glory, someone had to wear a crown of thorns. If I was to wear a robe of righteousness, someone had to be stripped naked and mocked with a purple robe. If the wrath of God was not to fall on me, it must fall on another. God's holy eyes searched heaven and earth, and there was only one - and, praise God, that One was willing! There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

There's no hope in this passage, but I'm glad today that I look at it post-Calvary, aren't you? For there is now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus, our death is swallowed up in His victory. What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus our Lord! Isn't He? Are you glad that He saved you? Amen!

Father, we thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ who is a nail in a sure place for us. We thank Thee for the blessed assurance, but yet Lord from that we are also realising tonight that our sinfulness - even after conversion - is not something to be taken lightly. We can only take it lightly if we take the nails, and the thorns, and the back like a ploughed field, lightly - for it cost Thee everything. We pray, our Father, that once
and for all as Thy people, that we will leave our sin, that we will take off the unfruitful clothing and garments of filthiness and unrighteousness, and we will put on the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.
Ezekiel 24, and I trust that you did read this passage before you came this evening. Now, if it's not your custom to come on a Monday night to the Iron Hall, we have been going through a series in the book of Ezekiel. If you've come and this is your first night, or your second night, or maybe your third, you may be a little lost in the train of thought right from the beginning of the book - but don't let that disturb you, because I'm sure that the Lord will have something for you tonight if you have come with an open heart, listening to His voice.

Let's begin at verse 1 of chapter 24: "Again in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this same day: the king of Babylon set himself against Jerusalem this same day. And utter a parable unto the rebellious house, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Set on a pot, set it on, and also pour water into it: Gather the pieces thereof into it, even every good piece, the thigh, and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones. Take the choice of the flock, and burn also the bones under it, and make it boil well, and let them seethe the bones of it therein. Wherefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose scum is therein, and whose scum is not gone out of it! Bring it out piece by piece; let no lot fall upon it. For her blood is in the midst of her; she set it upon the top of a rock; she poured it not upon the ground, to cover it with dust; That it might cause fury to come up to take vengeance; I have set her blood upon the top of a rock, that it should not be covered. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe to the bloody city! I will even make the pile for fire great. Heap on wood, kindle the fire, consume the flesh, and spice it well, and let the bones be burned. Then set it empty upon the coals thereof, that the brass of it may be hot, and may burn, and that the filthiness of it may be molten in it, that the scum of it may be consumed. She hath wearied herself with lies, and her great scum went not forth out of her: her scum shall be in the fire. In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee.

The LORD have spoken it: it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord GOD. Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. And your tires", or your turbans, "shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another. Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am
'When The Cost Comes Home' is the title of our message this evening. For 23 chapters now in this book Ezekiel has been proclaiming the wrath of God upon God's people, and upon God's city Jerusalem. Twenty-three chapters, and now finally in chapter 24 the sword of judgement actually descends. God told Ezekiel the prophet to take a pen and a paper and to carefully note the date when this is happening. God wanted God's prophet to note the date that judgement was coming upon His people, the event, the coming of God's word in fulfilment - he was to record it, he was to show the people in a day to come to prove to them that God's word had come true, this was the date that God fulfilled His word in all your hearing and in all your eyes.

We have preached for thousands of years, as the church of Jesus Christ, the coming of the Lord Jesus. There is a date when the Lord will come again. I don't know that date, you don't know the date - you might think you do - there's no preacher upon the earth tonight, no matter what he says, who knows that date - but yet there is a date. There is a date, and there will be a day when that date will be recorded for all the world to see: that on such-and-such a date the Lord Jesus Christ came back. Like Noah's day, men still mock. Men mocked in the antediluvian day, before the flood they said: 'Where is the promise of this flood's coming? When is it coming? We haven't seen the like of this ever before, when is this great apocalypse going to come upon the earth?'. They said it to Ezekiel: 'No, it's not going to come! Jerusalem is not going to be destroyed, it's not going to be burnt down, but an army will come and will take us out of captivity in Babylon and bring us back to Jerusalem and set up our kingdom again. Where is the promise of this wrath to come that you speak of?'.

As Peter says, men are still saying: 'Where is the promise of His coming?'. For 2000 years now we have been preaching the advent, the second advent, of the Lord Jesus - when He will burst the clouds; when He will come to take His church home to be with Himself; when He will eventually come after seven years of tribulation and put His feet on the Mount of Olives, and come to the earth as the Judge and as the King of kings and Lord of lords - but still they say: 'Where is the promise of His coming?'. Peter's answer, our answer, the Spirit's answer is: 'God is not slack concerning His promise'. There is a date, there is a day, there is an hour when it will happen - Peter says it will come as a thief in the night.

The wrath to come is an awful thing, and if you've ever meditated upon it - and I'm sure, as you've been going through this book with me you've had a little bit of a glimpse of what it will be like. It is the inevitable way that impenitent sinners must be judged. If men and women reject the Lord Jesus, if men and women shun His gospel and count His blood as an unclean thing, it's the only thing that can happen to sinners - that in the end they are judged! It is the coming of the Lord, it is spoken of as the wrath to come, and as believers and as the church of Jesus Christ today it ought to be the dominant thing in our mind! It ought to be the reality of our thinking: the Lord is coming! The Lord is coming soon! Wrath is coming, and we must be ready, and we must try to get the world around us ready!

Ezekiel was the watchman of his day, you remember that illustration that we had in weeks gone by. He was to warn the people, he was to warn them to flee from the wrath to come. We are the watchmen of today, now. We are the ones who are to proclaim that the time is short! We are to communicate God's prophetic message of the gospel, we are to get it out there, we are to tell it to others and to warn them! If that is the case it is imperative that we communicate the message effectively. People may not believe - and they are not believing, as they did not in the day of Noah, as they didn't in the day of Ezekiel, as they didn't in the day of Peter - but that is not the question. We must nevertheless - whether they believe it or not, whether it is a
savour of life, or a savour of death and damnation - we must make sure that we are communicating the message effectively, and that the barrier to them trusting Christ is not our communicating of it.

I read a book recently called 'The Gospel Blimp'. The thought of the author was that, he depicts this drama of an individual who is a Christian and wants his next-door neighbour to be converted. As he sits out in the patio on a summer evening he can hear them drinking and telling dirty jokes, he can see the smoke rising from their table. He tries to think of all the ingenious ways that he possibly can of converting them. So, one night in bed, he says to his wife: 'I've had an idea. I'm going to buy an airship'. He gets an airship, and he builds it up and puts all the helium in it, and he launches it. He goes over, with a couple of friends, over the neighbourhood in which he lives and he gets these little gospel bombs as he calls them - little packages of gospel tracts - and he drops them down into his neighbour's garden! They think it's quite effective, so they form a 'Gospel Blimp Organisation'. Then they buy uniforms for one another, they appoint a leader, they get a strategy, and they see how many people as possible they can reach with these gospel bombs. I hope you can see that the author has a satire of the way that we as the church try to spread the gospel often in absolutely ineffective ways, and some of the most impersonal ways imaginable - it is his next-door neighbour!

The greatness of Ezekiel's message was the personal nature of all of his prophetic ministry. His signs, his acts, his parables, if you like he was the message - Ezekiel was the message. It wasn't just the voice of one prophet, strange man, crying in the wilderness: 'The coming of the Lord draweth nigh', but Ezekiel's life, his personality, the things he did, the way he lived, actually screamed it - that the wrath of God was coming! I want us to see tonight how he communicated this message.

The first sign that we have here in this passage, verses 1-14, is the parable of a boiling pot. Now, this parable marks the turning point in all of the prophecies up to now. All of the prophecies and signs and acts were all warnings, but now in verse 1 the fulfilment of God's prophecies begins. Verse 1 we have: 'In the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying', the very day - and this is the very day that the 18 month siege of Jerusalem began. The 15th of January 588BC, and in 2 Kings 25 verse 1 we know that this was the date when Nebuchadnezzar and all his army from Babylon went into Jerusalem and God's word was fulfilled.

You remember that this was the second siege in 12 years. Ezekiel had been taken, in the first siege, over to Babylon, and he was prophesying in that concentration camp in Babylon about this siege - and they all laughed at him, they mocked him, they contradicted him, there were false prophets rose up against him and said: 'Peace, peace', when there was no peace. But Ezekiel can write down the date when God's word was fulfilled! Now, remember that Ezekiel is in Babylon, and Ezekiel is having revealed to himself by God these events that are taking place. God is revealing to His prophet. Now this causes a great problem for liberal theologians, one of them I read said this: 'This verse forces on us in the clearest fashion the dilemma that either Ezekiel was a deliberate deceiver, or he was possessed of some kind of second sight'. He was either a liar, or he was some kind of mystic - but they cannot even conceive of the possibility that this was God's man in God's place with God's message, and it was! And here is the proof! He reveals secrets to His servants, the prophets.

In verse 2 we find the King of Babylon set himself against Jerusalem, he set himself against Jerusalem. What a vivid illustration this is - I don't know whether you've ever stood over a saucepan, and perhaps you've went away to do something else and left it on the cooker, and its contents have been allowed to boil dry, and the result is there's a great thick black smoke and a ruined saucepan. Well, that's the picture that you have in this passage. In verses 3 to 5 the prophet is told to take a saucepan, or a cauldron. He is told to put into the cauldron choice cuts of lamb, lamb cutlet, chop them up and put them in with the bones. That is a picture - the lamb - of God's flock. The cauldron is Jerusalem, the lamb being put in is God's people, and Ezekiel is
told to boil the pot - and that is the heat of the siege that Jerusalem is going to come under on this very date. They were going to be the fuel for God’s fire, and as the fire of judgement grew hotter the Bible says that as they were boiled done, only a scum appeared at the top of this boiling pot. Scum appeared, ‘the lewdness’, it says, ‘of their idolatry’ - and then absolutely everything in the pot was destroyed!

Now what is the parable saying? It’s saying this: if you put lamb cutlets into boiling water and boil it, you should smell a lovely smell, a lovely aroma, and that should be a lovely taste for your meal. But the opposite was true: all that came forth was a scum, a dirt, a filth - speaking that from God’s people there was this fruit of filth! God was saying: 'My people are useless for Me. They have become castaways, they have become disqualified for service'. God says in verse 6: ‘Woe to the bloody city!’. Now, you need to think about this - Jerusalem, what is it described as? The holy city! And God is speaking of it as the bloody city, bloody with corruption, bloody with guilt! In verses 7 and 8 God says that her blood would be put on top of a rock, and it would be shown for all to see - a symbol of their sin would be uncovered. Their sin, they were not ashamed of it, Jerusalem's sin was open, so God would judge her openly before all the world.

The law of God said that whenever an animal’s blood was shed that it was to be covered over with dust, and if it was not covered over with dust it would evoke the wrath and the judgement of God. So what God is doing here is He is uncovering the blood of their sinfulness and their corruption, why? So that His own wrath would be evoked and would be brought upon them. Remember that the blood of Abel cried out to God from the ground? The blood of all Jerusalem's innocent victims of that bloody city cried out to God for justice, and after God had boiled that pot do you know what He did? He emptied everything out of the pot, verses 11 and 12, set the pot empty, and He took the pot with nothing in it and He heated it again, trying to get the grime and the scum and the filth out of the pot - another attempt to purge the people! What the prophet is saying is: 'I'm trying thoroughly to judge you, I'm really trying to get this dirt out of My people', and He's doing it by destroying the pot - in other words, destroying the city, destroying the temple with all the residue and all the people in it!

When we look at Leviticus chapter 14 in the law we find that that was exactly the thing that was done to the leprous house. What I mean by that is this: whenever leprosy was found in a house in the promised land, the people had to get out of the house, but before doing so they had to look at any bricks where there was a residue of the leprosy upon it. If there was any they were to take those bricks out and do away with them in an unclean place. If the leprosy was through the walls they were to knock the walls down, in fact if it was through the whole building they were to take the whole building down, put it in an unclean place. What God is saying here is: 'There is leprosy' - and leprosy is a type of sin - 'There is leprosy in My house, in My temple, in My city, among My people, and I will purge it out!’. But all His efforts to remove the defilement in God's people proved useless up till now.

So we have the greatest sign that is in Ezekiel's life, the sign of a bereaved prophet in verses 15 to 27. I want you to look at this carefully. Ezekiel's prophecy was not delivered from the safety of an armchair, or from the sanctuary of a pulpit like the one I stand in this evening, but during the ministry of Ezekiel he has paid a price many many times. If you cast your mind back with me, he acted out so many signs and so many sermons. In chapter 12 alone we see Ezekiel digging through a wall, and showing all the people, digging with his bare hands through brick and mortar, and then stepping through that wall; we see him sitting down at a table to eat a meal of famine - awful food - but he is shaking as he eats it, he is told to shake to show the trembling of the judgement that God was going to bring upon His people. He's told to eat rotten husks, rotten famine food, to portray to the people that famine is going to come upon the land; he's told to lie on one side for days upon end, and then turn on the other side and lie on it. Continually, right throughout Ezekiel's ministry, it's costing him, he's paying a great price! But none of them was as costly as this...

This was when the cost came home. I want you to see tonight that the sword that was about to strike Jerusalem, that great boiling and destruction that was about to come upon the people, it struck the prophet
first! Look at verse 16: 'Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes', the delight of your eyes. His wife! God was actually going to take his wife away! We read that with one blow God took away the prophet's delight of his eyes, his only beloved, his dear wife, suddenly like a plague. Ezekiel was told in the morning that his wife would die, and that very evening just as he was told his wife died - and he was expected to go out and preach it to the people. This is remarkable, and I want you to enter into the spirit of these words tonight, I want you to try and grasp and imagine in your mind what this would have been like. Can you imagine God's prophet this day, the date that you have before you, getting on his face before God as was his custom early in the morning before the sun rose? Can you imagine him bowing before God, and the Holy Spirit of God coming upon the prophet, and getting this word from the Lord? Can you imagine the heartbreak when he got this revelation? Put yourself in his shoes! Losing your spouse, and losing your spouse at the hand of God for a preaching illustration to a rebellious and hardheaded, stiff-necked people!

The amazing thing to me about this is that there are no recorded protestations from this man. He doesn't cry to God and argue with God; he didn't run away from God like Jonah; he didn't weep before God like Jeremiah; he didn't in despair, like Elijah, run underneath a juniper tree and get depressed, and say: 'You're not asking anybody else to do the like of this, why should I do it?' Can you imagine him getting up to preach before the people, and predicting before them the death of his own wife? I was wondering about this today, and I was wondering did he talk to her about it? Did he tell her? I think he probably didn't. Can you imagine how he looked at her right throughout that day? Thinking about what was going to happen to her, I wonder did he treat her in an unusual tender way right throughout that day? I wonder what his last words were to his beloved? But the amazing thing to me about this great prophet is: if it was you or me, we would be suspending all of our activities, but this man of God went out and preached the word of God!

Can you imagine him coming in that evening after delivering God's message, God heartbreaking, heartrending message to them - and coming in that evening to know that that very night his wife would die? Before the morning she would be gone, and to top it all God says: 'Now, when you appear before the people again you're not to have even one whimper of sorrow. You're not allowed to mourn'. The traditional ways, in verse 17, of public mourning by lamentation, by tears, by crying in the street, by wearing dishevelled clothing, by taking your turban off in horror, by ripping your garments, by eating special mourning food - you're not allowed to do it Ezekiel, all you can do is grown quietly in private, mourn in privacy and in isolation. That meant that he would be deprived of the sympathy, the succour, and the solidarity of the community - no-one would know what God's prophet was going through! Outwardly, Ezekiel, you're to behave as if nothing had ever happened!

Did he question God? I don't know, we don't have any record that he did. I wonder did he wish that he was Jeremiah who had just been told not to marry? That would have spared him the grief of growing up with this beloved, this delight of his eyes, and then losing her, and then not even being able to express the grief of that loss! Can you imagine what a message this was to the people? In verses 19 to 24 the people come back at him and they say: 'What is the meaning of this strange behaviour?'. Maybe they had seen that this woman was the delight of his eyes, they knew that he loved her, and they could not understand that just like clockwork, as usual, he came out and delivered his message. Not one sign of mourning and sorrow!

What does this mean? Ezekiel told them calmly and collectedly and coolly: 'This means that the delight of your eyes will be taken away in a blow too. Jerusalem, the delight of your eyes; the temple, the delight of your eyes; the monarchy - all of it will be wiped away in one split second with God's hand. It will be buried, the temple will be destroyed and desecrated by heathens. Your sons and your daughters will be killed and will be scattered, and you will not mourn!'. Now, Ezekiel tells the people: 'If you want to mourn, God wants you to mourn for your sin!' - but it was too late now. They did not seek the Lord when He was to be found. They didn't call upon Him while He was near. God tells him in verses 25 to 27 that when the city falls fugitive, one man will come and one man will tell Ezekiel a message and give him power to speak. Imagine
this: Ezekiel's wife dies, Ezekiel is told not to mourn, when the city falls under siege Ezekiel is not allowed to speak - in fact he is made dumb, he's not allowed to say anything from God to the people, why? Because it's too late! They no longer needed any preaching, do you know why? Because the judgement had come.

It amazes me that even in personal grief Ezekiel was still God's prophet. Do you know something? That is the struggle of cost, the struggle of the cost of being called of God. You see, this is the difference between a prophet and a pretender. When the cost comes home, when there's something more than just a message, but your whole life has to become that message! Can I say to you tonight that the life that you live down here on earth will be the greatest sermon that you will ever preach! D.L. Moody said: 'It is a great deal better to live a holy life than to talk about it. Lighthouses do not ring bells and fire cannons to call attention to their shining, they just shine'. I remember reading recently C.H. Spurgeon on the life of George Mueller, and the preaching of George Mueller - and some of you may have heard me say this in private. Spurgeon said of George Mueller's preaching that it was so simplistic, in fact it was so simple that it was like a talk to the little children. He says there was nothing special about it whatsoever, but yet although it was simplistic he said it was the greatest preaching that he had ever heard - the reason being: George Mueller was in it! What did he mean by that? He said: 'I mean the life of George Mueller was behind it!' - a life of godliness, a life of faith, a life of holiness, a life of sacrifice. It could be seen shining through his message!

E.M. Bounds said: 'It takes 20 years to make a sermon, because it takes 20 years to make a man'. The making of the gospel, my friends, the making of the preaching of it to a dying, lost world, is the making of men and women of God, men and women of holiness who will go with that gospel, who will tell it and whose lives will shine through it. Now listen, don't get me wrong tonight and think I'm talking about public preachers, that is not what I'm talking about - I'm talking about all preachers of the Gospel, and that is all who have received the great commission: 'Go ye into all the world and preach', and that is you! All of you are sermons, all of you have a message!

You know, as any human being would read this story, I think one of the questions that would come to your heart is this: is it worth it? Now let's be honest here tonight: was it worth it for Ezekiel? To suffer all that he did, and then in the end to lose the delight of his eyes, was it worth it? I think Ezekiel would have had a problem fitting into church life today, where we give to the Lord of that which costs us nothing. Famous lines today are: 'OK, I'll do my best for God, but when it starts to affect my home or it starts to affect my personal life, well then I'll draw the line'. My friends, this was when the cost came home, this is when the cost was great - was it worth it? Well, you can only judge whether it was worth it or not, depending on which world you are living for - whether you are gathering treasures down here to enjoy now, or whether you're gathering them up in glory where moth and rust doth not corrupt, for your reward in heaven and for all eternity. That's how you will know if it is worth it!

I'll tell you this much: Ezekiel's experience puts to death the false teaching of health and wealth, this gospel that charismatic churches are preaching that tells you you should be rich, you should be clever, you should be successful in business. 'God loves you, God wants you to have a Rolls-Royce, He wants you to have a mansion on a hilltop, in fact He wants you to have everything and anything that you want' - we castigate those ideas, and perhaps personally we laugh at them, but can I ask ourselves this evening: what are our ideas about life? Do we measure God's blessing by good health? Do we measure God's blessing by the standard of living that we have, a successful job, or even a good spouse? Do we think to ourselves, if we do not have those things, that something has gone wrong in our Christian lives, that God hasn't given us these blessings? Can I say this, and let this sink into you if you're suffering tonight, if you're going through anguish and pain and parting: God never in His word promises us an easy ride! Nowhere!

People stand beside sorrow and pain and trial and disaster, and they say: 'Why couldn't God have done something to prevent that? Why couldn't God have stepped in?'. My friend, don't think of it like that: God
EZEKIEL  
Pastor David Legge

has a purpose in these things, that's why God does not prevent them - God's hand is in them! It's alright saying that, but it's a bitter pill and cup to swallow - but Ezekiel had to swallow it. Ezekiel had to resign himself that God was working in his life, that God was doing this for a purpose. Perhaps he asked in his heart: 'God, why do You have to do this so far, why do You have to go to such an extent? Can I not just do another drama or another sign act? Can I not draw another picture?'. God said: 'No', He had a purpose. Like Job, who was brought to the point where he said to a mocking wife: 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips'.

Listen, in all of this message, in the cauldron pot and the boiling of Jerusalem, in the death of Ezekiel's wife, there is a point that you must see tonight and it's this: the greatness of these sufferings displays the magnitude of the problem. God's not going overboard, God's not going too far with His servant, He is wanting to communicate the magnitude of the problem of their sin! Friends tonight, God does not ask us to go through or to put up with anything for His glory that He is not prepared to do Himself! 'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, they took, and by wicked hands they crucified and they slew'. Men meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

My friends, listen tonight: what is your part? What do you do when God comes into your life, when He breaks in? Do you know what you do? As Peter says, you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, like a little child you resign yourself that God's will is perfect to them that love Him. This is when the cost comes home, let me leave three things with you tonight. There was a cost for God, never forget that! When there is pain, when there is sorrow, when there is sickness, when Ezekiel loses his wife, remember: He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all! There was a cost for God, shall there not be a cost for us? There is a cost to our loved ones. The Lord Jesus said: 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple'.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 7 for a moment, 1 Corinthians 7, and remember the coming of the Lord draws nigh. Verse 29: 'But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away'. We are the prophets of God, we are the messenger of God, the coming of the Lord draws nigh and there is a cost to us, there is a cost to our families, there is a cost to our livelihood! That great hall of faith in Hebrews 11 says this: 'Women received their dead raised to life again: but others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection'. Some women received their husbands alive again, but there were other women and their husbands said 'No', they were tortured, they died, why? For a better reward in heaven!

There's a cost to God, there's a cost to our loved ones, and there's a cost to ourselves. If you turn to 2 Corinthians we see Paul commenting on that in chapter 4, 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 7. Friend, if you're suffering tonight read these words and implement them to the glory of God: 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For which we live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you'. What is he saying? We are earthen vessels, we're like clay pots that are cracked and broken - why is it broken? Why do we bear in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus? So that the life of Christ may shine out of these earthen, broken, weary, tired vessels! If that is to happen it will cost you.

Paul said: 'Ye are our epistle written in our hearts' - you're the Gospel! - 'known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but
with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart'. Listen, there's no such a thing in the New Testament as a nominal Christian, there's no such a thing as a detached professional preacher of the Gospel. The Christian is not so much to preach the Gospel as to be the Gospel! Are we living the Gospel? There is a missionary film entitled 'At Play in the Fields of the Lord'. It depicts in South America a father burying his dead child who died of Black Water Fever. As the rain beats down on the television screen, you can hear the cry of that missionary father crying in protestation to God: 'I didn't give you permission!'. If we are His, and we say that we have given all over to His control, does He need our permission?

Oh, the centuries are filled with the blood of martyrs who gave permission - as if it was needed - but they give their lives totally to God. Like even Luther, and he put it in these words in his great hymn: 'A Mighty Fortress':

'And though they take my life,
Goods, honour, children, wife,
Yet is their profit small:
These things shall vanish all;
The City of God remaineth'.

The old puritan said: 'Crosses and losses are to be expected'. Oh, believers tonight, let us never forget that our Saviour hung on a cross, and God never showed Him an ounce of mercy but He poured all His Almighty wrath upon Him. Without pity His all-consuming fire, the all-consuming wrath of God against sin, was combusted on Jesus Christ. That fatal dark hour, thousands of years later from Ezekiel's dark night, was a greater turning point in the history of Jerusalem than ever was in any siege. The delight of the disciple's eyes was taken away. Mary ran into the garden weeping: 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him'. Such darkness, such hell, such anguish, such torment - was it worth it? Oh, hallelujah, it was worth it! For through His darkness the light of the glorious Gospel has shone unto us, and the wrath of God upon Jerusalem has brought to us: what was judgement on Christ has become our salvation for all eternity. If that is the case, can God ask of me something that is too expensive? Can God ask of me something too taxing, or too inconvenient, or too costly? He is Lord, and if we are His suffering servants, we are to suffer before the world - why? 'That they might know that I am the Lord'.

A man owned an island that was populated with slaves, and he refused those slaves the privilege of the preaching of the Gospel. He didn't allow any preacher of the Gospel to come to the island, and if there was a shipwreck and there were missionaries on board they were held in a hut until they could get them away. No Gospel, no converts. On one occasion two Moravian young men decided that they would sell themselves as slaves to this man, and with the money that they received for selling themselves they payed their fare to go to the island. Their families tried to get them to turn back, to persuade them to stop - they pleaded with tears and crying. As their boat left into the ocean, one of those young men could be heard to shout: 'May the slain Lamb receive the reward of the sacrifice'. May the slain Lamb receive the reward of the sacrifice...and they were never seen again - that is when the cost comes home.

Our Father, we would pray: 'Make me a captive Lord, and then I shall be free. Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be. I sink in life's alarm when by myself I stand, imprison me within Thine arms, and strong shall be my hand'. Lord, we are Thy servants, and we pray that we will be faithful in these days to live the life of Christ before men, and to choose the narrow way that leads unto life, that the slain Lamb should receive the reward of the sacrifice. Amen.
You will see from your study sheet that we will be studying right through chapters 25 to 32. Now let me just say this: as I've been going through the book of Ezekiel, it has been difficult. It has been difficult for me in the study, for there has been a lot of digging, and it has been hard to understand at times - his parables and his signs, and all the things that he has been doing and telling us. I assume that it has been the same for you at times. I hope I have tried to make it as simple as possible. We could question whether there is profit in studying a book such as this, and I have heard murmurings around the church that perhaps it is not profitable. Well, I would remind you of what Paul said to Timothy, that all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. But I was pleasantly reassured today that God has been in this study, and you will see this from what we will do this evening.

This study was started I think, if I can remember, maybe a year ago or just under a year ago. We could not, and certainly I could not, have foreseen the circumstances that our world is in at this very moment in time - but it is amazing to me that the studies that we are going into this week, and in the subsequent weeks, correlate with the events that are taking place in our world today. I believe that that is truly of the Lord.

We're not having a reading, because we will be looking through the individual verses and picking some of them out of the chapters. So I want you to listen carefully, and do bear with me - it will be worth it in the end. We're looking this evening at God's judgement of the Gentile world. If you've not been in our studies up until now, let me share with you that we have been looking specifically at the nation of Israel, specifically of Judah, which is the Southern Kingdom here [on the map] - you see the orange and the green (and that's not any significance to the nation in which we are living here - it would be the other way around!). The Southern Kingdom here of Judah is where Jerusalem is. You remember that while David reigned there was a United Kingdom - in other words the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah were united together. But then the kingdoms were broken apart, the Northern Kingdom, Israel up at the top, and Judah at the bottom. Well the specific prophecies that we have been looking at have been directed to the Southern Kingdom. Jerusalem is the capital of that kingdom, and most of the prophecies have been directed toward it.

So, the people of God have been instructed, and God has told them - you've seen it in Ezekiel's signs and parables - that God's people would be judged for their sin. God's judgement would come, He would not relent, He would not repent. Yes, there would be a remnant of God's people who would survive, restoration would come to Israel, the glory that had departed because of their sin would one day return - but nevertheless, God's judgement had to come. God had to judge His own people's sin.
In the last study we looked at how Ezekiel's dear wife died. God told him: 'I will take away the delight of your eyes', and that was speaking to the people, that He would take away the delight of Judah's eyes which was the city of Jerusalem - specifically the temple. That very night that Ezekiel prophesied about his wife dying, his wife died - and just subsequently after that the nation was sacked on the very date that the prophecy was given, Jerusalem was taken and many were taken captive into the land of Babylon. At that point you will remember that Ezekiel was told: 'You are no longer to say anything to Judah, you're to shut up, you're not to prophesy. I'm going to make you dumb'. Because of that, from chapter 25 through to chapter 32 that we'll be looking at tonight, God has nothing to say to Judah. Ezekiel says nothing to his people, but rather Ezekiel turns in his prophecies written for us in this book - probably not spoken, I'm not sure - but he turns to the Gentile nations, not to Judah or Israel, but to the Gentile nations and he prophesies what God is going to do with them. We will see in the weeks that lie ahead how, in chapter 33 on to the end, he turns back to Israel again.

We're looking specifically at what God has to say concerning His judgement to the Gentile world. As I was thinking about this, thinking of how God hitherto has been speaking to His own people and judging His own people, and now He's turning to the Gentile world and He's going to speak of judgement to them - 1 Peter 4 and verse 17 came very forcibly to my mind. Peter says: 'For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?'

If God judges His own people, Old Testament people, as we have seen - and He hasn't held back in any of His wrath - what will it be like for the nations around Israel, and the nations of this great planet when God judges them?

If these passages of scripture, chapters 25 through to 32, have anything to say to us in our world today, it is this: God always judges a nation's sin. Always! He judges a nation's sin against Himself, and He also judges a nation's sin against His own people Israel. It happened in the Gentile world then, as we're going to see this evening, and it will happen to this Gentile world - and I believe in a not too distant day, very soon in our future, this world will see Gentile judgement, if it is not seeing it already. A day of reckoning will come, God will come to judge the Gentile peoples, and it cannot be long - it cannot be long until judgement falls. It cannot be long in our own nation, we love it so much, but it cannot be long because the cup of iniquity is filling more and more - I think it must be overflowing, and crying out to God, like the blood of Abel, for avenging for God's righteous and holy name!

The affairs in the Middle East, I believe, testify that judgement is coming soon. I don't know about you, and I have to be sensitive in what I say here this evening, but after the atrocity on September the 11th I have been astounded with the arrogance of some of the Gentile nations. Some of the statements that they make; some of the power that they seem to wield in the world, and think they can wield without any question; the hordes of riches that they have to themselves; and the apparent pride that they seem to emanate in their politics internationally. We see our own Prime Minister and other leaders of other nations in the world, running around the world committing - I believe - political adultery with nations around the world whose human rights records, religious records, political records, and war records are absolutely abysmal! Yet all of the world still forsakes Israel. Ariel Sharon said recently to his own people: 'You must know that we are on our own'. It amazes me that the nations without God behave themselves as if they were gods. You've heard these words said: 'We will be the determiners of our own destiny'.

The times of the Gentiles is a specific epoch in the history of scripture. Now, let me explain this for folk that are newly saved, or folk that are young in the faith. The Jewish people, Israel, were the centre of God's plan - always in the Old Testament they were His people, they would shine out His glory to the world around. But they were disobedient to God's law and they didn't follow Him and they didn't obey Him, and God brought in the time of Gentile dominance within the world. In other words, the Jewish race and Israel would no longer be the dominant nation, but Gentile races would rise up in empires. We see this in our book, when Israel
comes under the Babylonian empire itself. The time of the Gentiles begins in this very book, it begins with the Babylonian exile when the Israelites are taken from Jerusalem into exile in Babylon. It starts here in this book, and it has run right through to this very day in which we're standing - 2500 years.

Even at the end of this book, when the Israelites are brought back in the sixth and fifth century BC, back from Babylon into their own land and back into Jerusalem, they are still ruled by Gentile overlords - there are still Gentiles over them. Then we find from that moment on, when they come home from exile, they are ruled by Persians, then we find they are ruled by Alexander the Great, then Egypt comes and rules them, and then Syria rules them. In the Gospels, the life of the Lord Jesus, we find that the Jewish people in Jerusalem are under Roman rule until 70AD. We even find in 135AD that they try another revolt against the Roman Empire, and it is at that point that the Jewish people - and it's prophesied in this book, that we will see later on in the book - they are scattered right throughout the nations of the world, and they have been for 2000 years. When the Jews were scattered all around the world, around the world they were also being ruled by Gentile nations. In fact, the Jewish people are unique in this respect: that they have almost been ruled by every nation upon the face of the earth! Wherever the wandering Jew went he found himself under Gentile dominion. Even way back in Ezekiel's day, God pronounced judgement on those Gentile nations. It came in Ezekiel's day, and the prophetic teaching - I believe - of this book is that it will come in a day that is coming very near, I believe. 'Then' - then! - 'they will know that the Most High God ruleth in the kingdom of men'.

So, we look tonight at the specific nations that God mentions in this book and in these chapters, and I believe that you will see a pattern emerging. The first that we find in chapter 25 verses 1 to 7 is the nation of Ammon. If you look up at this map, I know that you can't make everything out but I hope that you have a working knowledge somehow of the nation of Israel, you know that Jerusalem is round about here - just there - Ammon is this area here. It is a nation, which means it's an ethnic people - not specifically the land, but the people of Ammon, they resided just there. In verses 1 to 7 it tells us about this nation that is just east of Jordan and north of Moab. Now, what I want you to note tonight is the origin of this nation that God pronounces judgement upon - for you to know that we need to turn to Genesis chapter 19. Genesis chapter 19 and verse 38, we'll read from verse 35 which tells us the story of Lot and his daughters: '[His daughters] made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father'.

So this nation, Ammon, derives itself in origin from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his youngest daughter. You can see right away how the judgement of God would be coming upon that nation. As we go through the Old Testament we find that Ammon displayed hostility toward Judah in every opportunity that they could. You can see it in 2 Samuel 10, Amos chapter 1. We find in Ezekiel that Ammon as a nation joined with the Babylonians against Judah about 600BC - 2 Kings chapter 24 tells us that. So while these people were being taken into captivity their neighbours, Ammon, decided to get the boot in while they could, and they helped the Babylonians.

Now, the chief sin that God was judging this people for was not was not specifically their parenthood way back in Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughter, it wasn't even what they did when the people were going into captivity, but their chief sin was their devilish glee that they openly displayed over the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. When the Babylonians came in, wiped out the temple, what did these people do? They laughed while the people were being taken into slavery, while the people - men, women and children - were being slaughtered, the Ammon people stood back and laughed! In fact in Lamentations 2 and verse 15 we have their words prophetically, they said: 'All that pass by clap their hands at thee', Jerusalem, 'they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?'. They laughed at Jerusalem's calamity!
That is what many nations in the world do today, that is many nation's opinion of the nation of Israel as it sits in our world at this moment. Even God's spiritual people, the church, that is what the world thinks of us - they're laughing up their sleeve at us! Religion at large is laughed at today, except Christianity is seen in a special light of humour, it is seen as absolutely beyond the pale and fanatical - especially if you believe the word of God and you're a Bible-believing Christian. Because of this God would, He says in this passage, allow various Bedouin tribes from the desert to overrun the land of Ammon, to come in and destroy it. The capital city, Rabbath, which is right here, that's in modern day Jordan - the city of Amman that you hear about in the news, that's that city. God said that He would destroy it, He would turn it into a pasture for camels - and if you look right across that whole land, that is the desert of Arabia. It is desert today! Why? Because God judged it.

Then we have judgement against Moab in verses 8 through to 11 of chapter 25. Now if you're still in Genesis 19, you will see from verse 37 that 'the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day'. In other words, the oldest daughter of Lot who committed incest with him also had a son, and his name was Moab and he was the father of the Moabites. If you look up at the map, there was Ammon and Moab was just below. Their main sin was in disregarding Judah's God, Jehovah. What I mean by that is this: they just looked at Jehovah as an ordinary God. 'He's just like one of the other gods, like Baal or Ashteroth - or Allah or Buddha, if you like, today. They just set Him in a cabinet equal to all the other gods and deities all around the world. God is a jealous God! They believed He was a national tribe God, and that is what our world is doing today. 'Oh, Jehovah, He's the same as Allah'. I am absolutely astounded and appalled to hear some Christian missionary organisations telling Christians that Allah is just another name for God! Allah is not God! Yahweh is God! My friends, we have to be jealous for the name of our God because God is jealous. He does not adhere to a syncretistic religion, where there is a scotch broth of everything put in and there comes out this relative truth that 'You just believe what you can and you'll get there in the end'. God judged it! The same desert tribes that would overrun Ammon would be the ones who would come and occupy Moab and all the Moabite cities - that was God's judgement upon Moab.

So, Ammon is judged, Moab is judged, and then that brings us to Edom in chapter 25 and verses 12 through to 14, and also chapter 35 verses 1 to 15. Don't move away from Genesis just yet, because this nation Edom stems from Esau - you know Jacob and Esau. Esau was the twin brother of Jacob, and in Genesis 25 - if you turn to chapter 25 - and verse 22 you find that in the womb of Rebecca the two twin children struggled together within her. She said to God: 'If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger'.

So, Edom is the son of Esau. He is a nation, a separate nation to the nation of Judah. But God told them that because of their common ancestry, because they came from the one womb, they were not to fight one another. As Israel was on route to the promised land, to Canaan, they were told not to fight Edom as they were going there. Edom settled the territory - there we were in Ammon, there we are at Moab, and there is Edom right at the very bottom just at the tail of Judah. They settled in that land south of Moab just beside the Dead Sea, just under the tip - you can't see it, but the Gulf of Aqaba is just down there. They settled there, do you know where that is? If you have a modern map, I was trying to get one for tonight but I couldn't, but if you have a modern map that area down there - there's a border there - and that country there is Saudi Arabia, and that nation there is the nation of Jordan, remember I said that that is Amman that you hear about in Jordan? Well, there's Jordan and there's Saudi Arabia, please remember that for a few moments later.

In spite of their common heritage, in other words they were from the same womb, Edom was considered as the arch enemy of Israel - the top enemy right throughout the whole of Scripture. What were their sins? If
you look at chapter 35 of Ezekiel quickly, chapter 35 and verse 15: 'As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, O mount Seir, and all Idumea', that's simply another name for Edom, 'Idumea even all of it: and they shall know that I am the LORD'. Again, like the last two nations, they laughed at the calamity of Judah's falling, they laughed at the temple being destroyed. In fact, verse 5 of chapter 35 tells us more: 'Because thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity, in the time that their iniquity had an end'. Not only did they laugh at the fall of the temple, but they themselves helped to butcher helpless Jews during the Babylonian invasion!

Then, if you look at verse 10: 'Because thou hast said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it; whereas the LORD was there'. This was their greatest sin of all, listen: they wanted to occupy Judah, they wanted to occupy the promised land, and the reason for that is that they wanted to push Jehovah out of Judah! Now, listen to me: you will see a pattern here tonight. We're only halfway through these seven nations, but do you see it beginning to take form? Ammon, Moab, Edom, Phillistia, Phoenicia, you've got all these nations and you've got Egypt down here - it's like a circle right around Israel, a circle of all these nations. These nations down here - if you go from the Dead Sea, right along here to the Persian Gulf where all the great vessels are at this very moment, all of that area is Muslim, all of that area is Arab - the descendants. Still the Arabs are the prime enemy of Israel, is that not right? They want to drive Yahweh, Jehovah, out of the land! In fact, they want to drive Israel out of the land!

I read a story today about 1939. A Viennese Jew entered a travel agent and asked the question: 'I want to buy a steamship ticket'. 'Where to?', the clerk asked. 'Well, let me look at your globe please', and every time the Jew suggested a country the clerk raised an objection, and said: 'Well, this one requires a visa, this one isn't admitting any more Jews, the waiting list for this one is 10 years'. Finally the Jew looked up and said: 'Pardon me, do you have another globe?'. That is the way the Jewish people feel even in the world today. It's hardly surprising. We witnessed in 1990 Saddam Hussein's assault on Israel by Scud missiles, but I wonder did you know that Saddam Hussein's uncle was the main influence on his life in his early years? His uncle was awarded the mayorship of Baghdad, but before he got that he published a booklet called - listen to this: 'Three Whom God Should Not Have Created - Persians, Jews, and Flies' - you wonder where his anti-Semitism comes from.

In fact, Saddam Hussein likes to trace his family tree back to the prophet Mohammed but, even above the prophet Mohammed, Saddam's favourite hero of all is King Nebuchadnezzar! In fact, at a road crossing at Hammurabi Museum in Iraq there is a big cut-out that shows Nebuchadnezzar II, Babylonia's mightiest King - and do you know what he's doing? He's handing a flower to a big cut-out of Saddam Hussein! Now, Nebuchadnezzar's empire stretched from the Dead Sea right to the Gulf of Persia that I was talking about, right across all of that Arabian Desert. He conquered the regions - modern day nations such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Saddam Hussein once remarked these words, listen: 'What is most important to me about Nebuchadnezzar is the link between the Arab's abilities and the liberation of Palestine. Whenever I remember Nebuchadnezzar I like to remind the Arabs, Iraqis in particular, of their historical responsibilities'. Link those two things: the liberation of Palestine and their historical responsibilities - he looks back to Nebuchadnezzar as his blueprint, as his role model for going into Israel, and putting the Jews out of it and taking the Jewish God away!

He needs to be watched! In the same way as he is hating the Jews, and he is around the same area on the map, God would judge his predecessors way back in Edom. God would punish them, He would allow other nations to fill the land, and it says in chapter 35 and verse 8, if you look at it, that God would allow dead bodies of Edomites to litter around the valleys, around the rivers, and around the mountains. That nation would become a barren nation.
Here we go, we're going round a circle - Ammon, Moab, Edom, and now we're coming to Philistia, just along the West Coast there where the Philistines lived. In chapter 25, if you go back to 25, verses 15 to 17 you find it there. Now, if Edom topped God's enemy list, Philistia came a very close second. The hostile nation of the Philistines is mentioned right throughout the Old Testament, you will know that. They were a thorn in the flesh of the Jew more than any other nation. They constantly harassed God people and oppressed them, right to the reign of King David - and King David sorted them out in the end. But because of their long-standing hatred and persecution of the Jewish people, God was going to execute awful vengeance upon them. You see that in verse 17 of chapter 25: 'I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them'.

Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, and then Tyre. Now, Tyre is in Phoenicia which is this yellow bit here - that's Tyre there, and that's Sidon there. So, the Lord prophesies about Tyre in chapter 26 this time, verse 1 to chapter 28 and verse 19 - two whole chapters. What is the history of Tyre? Let me go quickly through it. It's the ancient history of the Phoenicians. In Ezekiel's day it was the greatest commercial centre in the whole of the Old Testament. The word 'Tyre' means 'rock', and it was the centre of the Mediterranean world - it was the New York, if you like, of the Ancient Near East. Ezekiel tells us in verse 13 of chapter 26 that they were music lovers, Isaiah tells us that as well. They exerted great influence over the whole world, and even over David and Solomon - and we find King Hiram helped David and Solomon build the temple. So much riches, so much political and religious influence in those days.

Now, what were the sins of Tyre? Again, verse 2: 'Son of man, because that Tyrus hath said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the people: she is turned unto me: I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste'. Again, they laughed, they rejoiced at the downfall of the Jewish people. Now, do you know why they did that? Because with the downfall of Judah their trade route was clear. They could bring their caravans down from Tyre right through to Africa and all the known world, and with Judah's demise not only was the route cleared but they had no longer to pay any 'interstate tax' - they could go through free of charge.

The ruler at this time was Ithobaal II, and we find that in chapter 28 he boasted himself to be a God. He says: 'I shall be a God!' - chapter 28 and verse 2: 'Say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God. With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: By thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches'.

Now the history of Tyre is a man, a King of Tyre and a nation of Tyre that, because of their riches, because of their political influence, they were filled up with pride and they thought they were God! That was the fruit of their downfall. You can go right throughout the Old Testament, you can look at King Sennacherib, you can look at Nebuchadnezzar made to eat from the ground, you can see Herod even in the New Testament in the book of Acts - and men that were lifted up with pride, God brought them down. Let me say tonight that the nations of our world need to beware! I don't care whether they're the United States, or Great Britain, or any of the nations of Europe - they must beware of inflated self-sufficiency and pride!

Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians and chapter 2. Paul the apostle is speaking prophetically of the antichrist, the one who will come and present himself to Israel as Messiah. It says of him: 'He opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God'. This is the characteristic of future antichrist, to set himself up as God in pride and self-sufficiency. For that reason God would punish Tyre, and God tells us in chapters 26 through to 28 that the various nations will come up against Tyre like ocean waves and destroy it. Let me tell you this: Tyre is that city there, but Tyre was two cities. There was a little island off the sea that was also called Tyre - they were both specifically called Tyre. There's this picture of the nation and the island being overridden by the waves of God's judgement - it would come upon them!
Now listen, do you see when Ezekiel prophesied this? Two hundred and twenty-five years had to pass and there was no fulfilment of this prophecy, but as we look into our history books tonight we look at the year 322 BC, and we see Alexander the Great. Do you know what he did? He arrived at the scene of this island city, he destroyed Tyre on the shore - do you know what the Bible says he did? He built a land bridge leading from the shore out to the island of Tyre with the coastline of the nation of Tyre. He got all the debris of the destroyed city and buildings and homes, and he threw it into the sea, and he climbed over that debris onto the little island and he destroyed the island there.

Let me read to you chapter 26 and verses 3 to 5: 'Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD: and it shall become a spoil to the nations'. God scraped the coastline clean! Some years ago Edward Robinson, an archaeologist, do you know what he discovered underneath the water between Tyre on the shore and Tyre on the island? He discovered 40 or 50 marble columns beneath the water along the shore of ancient Tyre. After that seven month siege all that debris was there, and Alexander the Great walked across it to the little island and destroyed it! From that point, even today, that coastal area of Tyre has been used by local fishermen to spread their nets! What did the Lord say? 'It shall be a place for the spreading of nets'.

Ezekiel stated that the city would never again be inhabited, never be rebuilt. Do you know what there is today near Tyre? I don't know whether you've ever heard of it, but there's the Rose Lane Water Springs where there's 10,000 gallons of fresh pure water daily, but even that hasn't attracted people to break God's prophecy - there's nobody living in it. The amazing thing about this passage in chapter 26 is that Ezekiel says that the entire known Western world will lament and wail the destruction of Tyre. They will cry, it says in verse 18, 'the isles tremble in the day of thy fall; yea, the isles that are in the sea shall be troubled at thy departure'. All their trade has gone, and some scholars have reason to believe that the British Isles, even way back then, was involved in trade with Tyre - and they were crying! In Revelation chapter 18 we are told that during the tribulation period - seven years of judgement that will come upon this earth for this earth's sin, for the spirit of Babylon that is in this world - that the whole Western world will wail at the fall of Babylon: 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen!'.

We will look next week at the sinister force which is the devil behind Tyre, we don't have time to look at it tonight. So, we've looked at Tyre, now we go up the map to Sidon. Twenty miles north of Tyre, it was founded - you find in Genesis 10:15 - by Canaan's firstborn. It was the headquarters of Baalism, Baalite idolatry. You know Jezebel, who was a fanatic after Baal, she was a Sidonian - she came from there. In addition to Sidon that was the centre of Baal worship, it was also the centre of Ashteroth worship, and Tammuz worship - and God sent an epidemic of disease and an army to destroy her, and in 351 BC we have the records of history that at that time the city was put to the torch by the Persians because of disease that was in her.

Then we have Egypt, finishing the circle - Ammon, Moab, Edom, Phoenicia which is Sidon, Tyre, Philistia the Philistines, and down here at the top North-East of Africa you have the nation of Egypt. She was judged at this particular time by Nebuchadnezzar, because Egypt's sin like that of the other nations was pride. Chapter 29 verse 3, they were puffed up with it. In fact, you remember, that it was Egypt that convinced King Zedekiah at the time to make a pact with them against Babylon. They were trying to get the fleshly way out of being taken captive, because of that God Himself would judge them. God would conquer them.

Now, the prophecy is that Egypt one day would be restored to its wealth, but it would never ever have the glory that it had in the ancient times. It would remain a minor kingdom. Now this is remarkable, this is all
prophetic, because you look at the nation of Egypt tonight - look at the glory she once had in the pyramids, in the engineering, in Tutankhamen's tomb and all the riches that were found in it, and look at it today! And we say: 'God's word standeth sure'. Her future punishment is found in chapter 30, for Egypt will be punished in a future day. I know the name Nebuchadnezzar appears in chapter 30 and verse 10, there's another phrase that appears and it is in verse 3, this statement: 'The day of the Lord'. Now almost every time you find the statement 'the day of the Lord' in scripture it refers to that seven years tribulation period, after the rapture of the church, when this old world will be judged by God for seven years. During that tribulation period Ezekiel says that the nation of Egypt will be judged again. According to Daniel chapter 11, we don't have time to look at it, specifically verses 41 and 42 God says through Daniel that Egypt will indeed be destroyed during the tribulation, and at that time again - she's experienced it in her past, she's experiencing it in our present at this moment, the gold has grown dim, and she will experience in the future - she will be judged of God.

My friend, look, I know all this is difficult to understand - but surely you understand this much: God's word stands sure! It's amazing, isn't it? It's not amazing at all...the tragic end of Egypt is found in chapter 32 and verses 20 and 21: 'They shall fall in the midst of them that are slain by the sword: she is delivered to the sword: draw her and all her multitudes. The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell' - a picture of Egypt falling into the depths of hell with all the other nations - 'they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword'.

Let me bring this all together in the moments that remain. There is this circle of Gentile nations around God's people. In 1948 the nation of Israel that we know today was given independence and the people were back in the land. Since that 1948 date there have been five wars that the nation of Israel has been involved in. In 1948 was the War of Independence - do you know who was against them in the War of Independence? Listen carefully: Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. As soon as Israel had declared its independence, it had roughly a half a million people in the nation of Israel at that time, and it was surrounded by 40 million Arab people! They were determined to drive the Jews out of their land, and as far they could, into the sea if they possibly were allowed to do it. That's the first war, 1948, then you come to 1956 - the Suez Crisis, where Israel wasn't allowed down the Suez Canal. Again Egypt was the culprit - Egypt again! In 1967 you have the Six Day War - who was involved in that? Egypt, Syria, Jordan! In 1973 the Yom Kippur War, who was involved? Egypt, Syria assisted by Iraq, Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia! The last war was Israel against Lebanon - but from 70 AD when they were put out of the land until 1969, listen to this, Palestine has been ruled by 40 different nations! Today it's under Israeli control by the will of God, and since their independence in 1948 they have fought five wars - and against all the odds they've won every one of them!

My friends, you listen to me tonight: some day soon, at the end of the seven-year tribulation, at the very end of the battle of Armageddon, that little nation at the very bottom there will be surrounded in exactly the same places of Ammon, Moab, Edom, right around. The Arab nations and all the nations of the world will surround her and come against her. I want you to turn with me, as we close our meeting, to Zechariah chapter 14, God says through His prophet: 'Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south'.

I read today, you know Holiday Inn? They've opened one in Belfast near the BBC, they tried some years ago to build a Holiday Inn on the Mount of Olives. They sent their engineers up to that mountain, and they had to
call the whole thing off, do you know why? There is a fault line running right down the middle of the Mount of Olives, and some day it's going to split in two. Joel said that one of these days in the valley of Jehoshaphat, near Jerusalem, Messiah will finally destroy the world's armies and the Gentile nations. The battlefield - you think about this in your mind - the battlefield will stretch from Meggido, which is up here, right down to the very bottom of the tip of Edom. The whole of the nation, 200 miles long and a hundred miles wide! The battle smoke of war will extend right down to the south of the Dead Sea, over the Gulf of Aqaba, into the very fort of Elat that some of you have been at and sunbathed in - there will be a dark cloud of war! Why? Can you please picture this scene? The Lord Jesus climbs the Mount of Olives, He cries tears from His heart, and says: 'Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Oh Jerusalem, how often would I have brought thee to my self as a hen gathers her chickens, but ye would not. Because of that your house is left unto you desolate until you say, 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'. On that day the nations of the world will surround, but their Saviour - hallelujah - will come and deliver them and the nations of the world will be judged. Let me say publicly tonight, not that anybody will listen to me - it doesn't matter - but our nations and our leaders need to pay attention that God's word says that there is a terrible day coming of the wrath of the Lord, and whether they like it or not God's word stands forever and Christ is coming! Surely it cannot be long! Even so, come Lord Jesus.

Let's bow our heads. I don't know if there's anybody here that's not saved, but do you know something? You'd need to be blind if you can't see that the stage for all this is being set. It may not come to pass right away, but for all history the devil has been pushing this, surrounding Jerusalem - until one time God will let him do it for His own divine purposes, and this may be the time. Your question is: are you ready if the Lord should come? Believer, the hour is at hand, the day is short, the night is far spent, let us put off the unfruitful works of unrighteousness and put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, we thank Thee that Jesus is coming, He's coming again - and we thank Thee that we're going and we'll not be around for all of this. We thank Thee that even though we cannot see it, we have from Thy word been told all that will befall this world. We pray that upon it we would go out and win the lost while there is time and, Lord, that we will live godly lives. Seeing these things shall be dissolved, what manner of men and women ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Help us Lord, that we will be found ready when You come, Amen.
Ezekiel chapter 28. Now, we're not going back in time - we studied last week chapters 25 through to 32. We took quite a large chunk and we looked at God's judgement of the Gentile nations, specifically the nations that were surrounding His own land, Israel. We saw how apt that was, and contemporary, in our particular situation - it wasn't specifically prophetic, or as a prophecy, but we can see the parallels that there are today, and indeed the parallels there are in prophecy - particularly in Zechariah chapter 14 where, in a day yet to come, all the nations of this world will gather round Israel, and we can see the stage beginning to be set even this very evening as we speak.

We're going back a little to chapter 28. You remember that chapter 28 was a prophecy against the Prince of Tyre. Tyre was the major city in the Mediterranean world, the major city of trade, and God pronounced judgement upon it because it laughed at Israel and Jerusalem at the fall of the temple and the siege of the Babylonians. We're going back on our ground that we've already covered, simply because there's a greater significance in chapter 28 of the book of Ezekiel. We see that within this chapter there's not only judgement upon the Prince of Tyre, but God speaks by His Holy Spirit concerning Lucifer, and that's why we have the title tonight: 'Lucifer's Life Story'.

Let's read chapter 28 together: "The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyre, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel". Just pause for a moment - it's very interesting that Daniel, who was a contemporary of Ezekiel in this particular time, had a reputation already with Ezekiel and with the people that were in captivity. What is even more significant is, when we see the spiritual significance of this chapter, we see that Daniel is known by the forces and principalities of evil, he is known in hell. What a man of God Daniel was!

Verse 3: "Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: By thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of
God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas. Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God? But thou shalt be a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee. Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD.

Now these are the verses that we're particularly concentrating on tonight: "Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying", you see the distinction, it's another word from the Lord - there's something different here. "Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus", verses 1 to 10 was the Prince of Tyrus, now it's the King of Tyrus, "and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more".

I don't need to tell you that Lucifer is alive and well in our 21st century world. I think that is self-evident by the fruit of his spirit that we see round about day by day. The world, indeed, as the scripture teaches, lieth in the lap of the wicked one. In our particular generation today we can look around and we perceive, rightly, that there is a revival in evil. We see Satan worship at an all-time high - I'm told that it's the fastest growing religion in the United States, and I suspect it's the same here in the United Kingdom. We see Spiritism, never off our televisions, clairvoyants, horoscopes, fortunetellers - it's in our magazines, our periodicals and our newspapers. Witchcraft - recently, when I was in America, I went to one of the biggest bookshops there were, and I went to the religious section looking for Christian books - hoping, in so-called Christian American, that I would find some - and most of the books that were there were on Spiritism. Witchcraft, astrology - you name it, there is a revival in the arts, the black arts of darkness.

It's ironic - I think it's more than ironic, I think it's providential - that we're looking at this subject tonight, in the light of the fact that the film 'Harry Potter' was released on Friday evening past. You may wonder why I'm referring to Harry Potter - surely it's an innocent story, it's an innocent novel for children? Well, if you even look at Harry Potter and look at the hype that is around about it at the moment, I think even that would put a question mark on it. The fact of the matter is, in our society today, whether it's through Harry Potter, or through horoscopes, or through Satanism, or Paganism revived: the Devil wants everything in society to be under his control, and he will stop at absolutely nothing. He is ingenious in his methods and in his organisational skills.

I want to say tonight, publicly, that Harry Potter is an evil book. Be under no illusion about it. You don't have to go into it too much - and we'll not have time this evening to go into it - save to say that the author herself, J. K. Rowling, researched into occult, into paganism, into spiritualism, in order to be as authentic as she possibly could in the book. She incorporated these things into this book, so that they could be believed. If
you looked at this woman's life history, J. K. Rowling, you find out that as a student she studied Mythology at Exeter University in England. The philosophies that she found in paganism, neo-paganism, and Satanism of the past centuries, she has incorporated into the story of Harry Potter. Now, the reason I'm telling you this is to warn you about this book, and to warn your children about it - but more than that: I want you to see the ingenuity of the devil, the cleverness of how he brings a society round under his control and under his influence.

Do you know that the publicity of this particular book has brought together three of the biggest companies in the world? Maybe you don't know that Coca-Cola are sponsoring this book. Mattel that makes most of the toys that you see advertised on the television screen with regards to films, that relate to films, they are also a co-advertiser of Harry Potter. Then you have WB - Warner Brothers - they're looking after the film side of it. So this is not just a Christmas fad and faze that we are going through, it's not like the Teletubbies, that after a few months or a year this will be off our screens. Three of the largest companies in the world have committed themselves to continue to bombard us with Harry Potter memorabilia and advertising. One hundred million of these books have been sold already - in 200 countries and over 40 languages. You've seen it on the news, that children all over our world are devouring these books - some of them are 700 pages long! Now in the computer age that we are living in, that is nothing short of supernatural - in my opinion - how you can get children today, who wouldn't read a comic, to read a 700 page long book! It's nothing short of magic.

This book has now been recommended to schools in the United States, and they have recommended that it be read by the teacher audibly. The reason why it can be recommended in schools in America is because Scholastic, the organisation that publishes this book in America, is the biggest seller of educational books to all schools in the United States, and has been for over 80 years. It is using its influence to get this book into the schools. It's ironic, isn't it, that you aren't allowed to pray in a school in America? You aren't allowed a Bible-based message in any shape or form, or lesson, in a school in the United States - but children are allowed to be taught witchcraft through this book.

I was horrified recently to find out that from the Harry Potter website, you can be linked to other websites that teach you occultic practices, spells, divination, and all manner of evil. I was further horrified to find out that the Pagan Federation of America has now appointed a youth officer - why? They claim it themselves: 'Because of the flood of enquiries since Harry Potter was published'. Children, boys and girls, contacting the Pagan Federation, being led to it from this book. 'Oh, but it's innocent. It's just fantasy'. 'Lucifer' means 'Light Bearer', 'The Brilliant One', 'The Shining One', and he still today has the capacity of charming people as an angel of light. The point why I am raising this tonight is that Satan has a plan for the ages, just as God has a plan for the ages, Satan has a plan - and I believe in our society, at this moment, Satan more than ever is concentrating on our children! I believe that he is pushing, in our generation more than ever, again for an explosion of godlessness onto the stage of history that this world has never witnessed, or never will witness again.

The problem is: people, and sadly God's people too, are ignorant of his devices. As Hosea the prophet said hundreds of years ago: 'My people are destroyed through lack of knowledge'. Satan is numbing the church to his devices around, so much so that professing Christians have now written books recommending Harry Potter to young Christian boys and girls! We are numb to his activities in the church, we have been numb to his activities in our home life, in education, in social pleasure, and more than ever my friends it is necessary for the church of Jesus Christ to get back to basics. The philosophical question that is bandied about the halls of universities through every age are these three: 'Where we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going?'. I want us to ask those three questions of Lucifer tonight, and the answers I believe are found in Ezekiel 28.
The purpose of this study this evening is that we would know our enemy. We need to know him if we're going to fight him, we need to know him. To do that we need to trace his origins, and not only go to his beginning, we need to follow his life story right to his end. Satan is described in the Scriptures as a thief, a murderer, a liar - in fact our Lord described him as the Father of lies. Can I say this this evening: he doesn't like his cover being blown! He likes to appear as a little childish story. I can testify to that personally. When I was in Portadown Baptist one Sunday evening I had planned, I believe being led by God, to preach on Genesis chapter 3 on the Serpent*, and how the Serpent controls people's lives. No-one knew I was preaching on the subject, it hadn't been advertised in the paper or even in the church. I came down to the church early that evening for the prayer meeting before the Gospel meeting, only to find that right across the car park satanic symbols had been graffitied right across the ground. There was a large board left in the middle of the car park with Satanic hexes and blasphemous statements and cartoons of Satan that would have sent a shiver up your spine. No-one knew - but he knew!

*Satan has a plan for the ages, but what he doesn't want us to know is that he is hastening to a judgement and a doom. He is going to get his just desserts. Scholars, some of them, say - and some Christians say: 'Surely Ezekiel 28 is simply about the King of Tyre, are you not reading into it a little bit?'. First of all, some of those liberal scholars don't even believe in a personal Devil - you have to understand that, and be careful of the books that you are reading. They don't believe in a person called the Devil - it's an evil influence in society, it's immorality, but it's not a person. Yes, verses 1 through to 6 speak of the Prince of Tyre. It speaks of his pride, it speaks of his wisdom and his wealth, and God says to him: 'Though you think you're a god, you're only a man'. So He's definitely talking about a man when He speaks of the Prince of Tyre. Then in verses 7 to 10 He speaks of the judgement and destruction of the Babylonians, and indeed the Prince of Tyre. So what we see in verses 1 to 10 definitely is King Ithobaal II of Tyre - there's no doubt about that.

But I hope you have seen that there is a transition in this text, you cannot ignore it, and you see from verses 11 on to verse 19 that the author, the prophet, moves now beyond an earthly scene and he talks not now about the Prince of Tyre, but about the King of Tyre. It seems, you will see it clearer as we go through this study, that the King of Tyre is the spirit influence that animates the Prince of Tyre. Indeed, the fearful thing about this text is that it is Satan himself - the real force of wickedness behind the Prince of Tyre. If you think this is far-fetched I would draw your attention right back to the Garden of Eden in chapter 3 of Genesis verses 14 and 15, where it was the first occasion that God addressed the Devil through another person, the Serpent. God spoke to the Devil through the Serpent. I take you to the New Testament, and go to Matthew's gospel chapter 16 verse 23 and you see there that Peter, who had just confessed that Christ would be the Rock, and the statement that he had made that He was the Son of God would be the Rock on which the church was built, and in the next breath the Lord is turning around cursing Peter - not cursing Peter, but the spirit behind Peter, because the spirit behind Peter was trying to dissuade Him from going to the cross. The Lord addressed Satan through Peter: 'Thou savourest the things that are of man, and not of God, Get thee behind me, Satan'.

So, it is not unusual for God to address Satan through another person, He has done it already in the Scriptures and we see that He is doing it here again. Let us look at this passage tonight and judge whether this appears to be a description of a mere human prince or a spirit operating behind him. I believe, if you look carefully, you will see first of all - as it says on your study sheet - his beginning. It speaks of this person of this spiritual being in verse 12, God says: 'Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty'. Now, let's look for a moment at this person. God says that he is full of wisdom, he is perfect in beauty. In verse 15, if you look at it, it says: 'Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created'. So he is all-wise, he is perfect in beauty, and he is absolutely morally blameless. You're not going to try and tell me that this is the Prince of Tyre that is full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty, and morally perfect, and God's
going to judge him in the next few verses? No man has ever been described like this, at least no man born in sin and shapen in iniquity - for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. This cannot be a mere Prince or King!

If you look at verse 13, God says: 'Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God'. Some people have said: 'Ah, that's Adam them! Adam was in Eden, the garden of God'. If you read on in this verse it says: 'Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created'. Was Adam arrayed in jewels from the tip of his head to the tip of his toe? Of course he wasn't! This isn't speaking of Adam, this is speaking of something greater. This spirit being is described as being bejewelled with every stone fitted in beautiful settings of finest gold, and the only time you find these jewels mentioned again in scripture is in the book of Revelation, where the saints of God who stand in the glories of God and worship God are covered in these same jewels! This great angelic leader, this spirit being, is covered in the same - a mass of brilliant colour. I was trying to imagine this today in the study - from the tip of his toe, jewels and diamonds sparkling; and you look at him, a technicolour of absolute brilliance!

One thing that we know about gems and diamonds and precious stones is that they have no light of their own. If you take a diamond into a dark room you will see nothing. But they reflect another's light, and this is speaking spiritually of this creature - he is one who reflects another light. His beginning was, and I say it to you tonight, to reflect the very Light of the universe - the Light of God. It may have been that in the beginning, before his fall, he was given charge over creation - I don't know, the word of God doesn't tell us. One thing is for sure: when was the Prince of Tyre in Eden? He was never in Eden!

Verse 13 says 'the workmanship of his tabrets and his pipes' - and that's musical language, that's a musical instrument. Musical instruments were originally created, I hope you know, to be a means of praising and worshipping God. But what God is saying here is that Lucifer had no need of musical instruments, for - if you like - he had a built in organ to praise God, he had his own pipes and his tabrets. The prophet is saying that Lucifer, because of this beauty, he was a musical instrument. He himself was an instrument of praise and glory to God. He didn't look for someone to play the organ, he was not just singing a doxology, he was a doxology to God! That would lead us to believe that this Lucifer was in charge of praise in heaven. You can see the picture beginning to be painted of his person.

Then we see further, in verse 14, his privileges. He is described: 'Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth...thou wast upon God's holy mountain'. Now let me say this: in the Old Testament Scriptures there were only three types of people who were anointed. There was the prophet, the priest, and the King. Certainly God would never have referred to the King of Tyre as being anointed, there was nothing holy about that man! But this spirit being is described as being the guardian cherub, the anointed cherub. Now a cherub, and we've learnt this in our studies, is an awesome angelic being whose purpose is to protect God's holiness. You remember when there was the fall in the Garden of Eden, and man sinned, there was a cherubim stood before the gate of the Garden with a fiery sword to make sure that they didn't get in and eat of the Tree of Life and live forever in their sin. He was guarding the glory and indeed the holiness of God, they vindicate God's righteousness, they protect and defend God's mercy - and indeed they execute God's government within the word of God.

I'd like to cast your mind back to the book of Exodus, where the children of Israel were told to build an Ark - not Noah's Ark, but the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was to sit in the Holy of Holies, and Moses was told by God in Exodus 25 and verse 20 that God's glory, the Shekinah that we've already looked at in this book, it would dwell and His presence would hover between the cherubim on the top of the Ark. I hope you're seeing the picture. In Exodus 25 the presence of God hovers above the cherubim, and here we have this vision of
this cherub who is called 'The Cherub That Covereth', 'The Cherub That Guardeth'. This is a fearful thing, a fearful being that's symbolic of the holy presence of God, of God's inapproachability. It's amazing! Do you know what this means? I believe this means that in eternity past, before earth existed when there was the angelic creation, this individual spirit being - Lucifer - had the responsibility to hover over and guard the very throne and presence of Almighty God. He covered God's presence!

If you look at verse 15 that would prove that to us I think: 'Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise' - and at the end of verse 16 - 'O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire' - Hebrews says our God is a consuming fire. It means that Lucifer was in the very presence of God walking over the fiery coals of God's presence, hovering over, protecting the presence and holiness and righteousness of God. He was anointed in this place of great authority, and the amazing thing to me is this: he probably had unrestricted access to the glorious presence of God.

If you look back at Ezekiel chapter 1, it will remind you of the awesome character of these cherubim. We saw a graphic picture of them in verse 10 of this chapter, where it says: 'The likeness of their faces', they had four faces, 'the face of a man, the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle'. They bore the likeness of a lion, a calf, an eagle, and a man - and you remember looking at how those four faces reflected the absolute completeness of the nature of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, prophetically how Matthew in his gospel presents our Lord Jesus as a King like a lion, the King of the jungle. Mark's gospel presents Him as the Servant King, the calf like the ox, the serving animal of the field. Luke's gospel presents Christ as the perfect man in His humanity and in His humility, and that's the face of the man again in the cherubim. Then the face of an eagle, that speaks of the skies, speaking of His divinity.

Please see the significance of this: apparently Lucifer was created, among other purposes, but one purpose was to demonstrate the earthly work of Christ as pictured in the four Gospels - the glory of Christ's humanity, deity, servitude and kingship! Imagine that. I think you would agree with me that all of this taken together is just a little bit too impressive for the Prince of Tyre - do you not think? That is his beginning, his person, his privileges, and then we look at his downfall where it all went wrong, and its cause. The cause of his downfall is found in verse 17, where God says: 'Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty'. This is the first sin, and the self-creation of the first sinner in all of the universe. The people say: 'Why did God create the Devil?', God didn't create the Devil, God created a perfect, moral, spiritual, glorious being! The Devil created the Devil when he sinned, and when his heart was inflated with pride.

We can see this in a parallel passage, if you turn to Isaiah chapter 14 which is the other Old Testament passage of Scripture that gives us a look into the life story of Lucifer. Isaiah 14 and verse 12, God says again: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north' - look how many 'I wills' there are in verse 13 and now in 14 - 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit'. In 1 Timothy 3 and verse 6 Paul the apostle was instructing the church that when they appointing elders they were to beware of not appointing a novice, that's one who is perhaps newly saved or immature in their faith, or perhaps a young man that has not matured yet. When he was instructing the church he plucks an example out of the history in the beginning of Lucifer's life story, and he says it's not to be a novice: 'lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil'. He's citing the sin of the Devil: he was lifted up with pride, he fell into condemnation.

Pride is a deadly enough sin to destroy the most powerful, wise, holy and awesome being that has ever been created - how much more do we need to make sure that we are not walking independently of the Lord in self-
righteousness, self-sufficiency and pride? We must make sure, as God's people, that we are dependent upon
God, that everything is handed into the hands of God. What we need to face is the question: are we living in
Satan's sin of self-dependence, or are we puffed up with self-importance? We need to remember that we are
only sinners saved by grace, and whatsoever we have received we have received from the hand of God and
there is nothing in ourselves!

Its cause was pride, then its consequences - it's alluded to in Ezekiel, and in the final verses 16 to 19, how
God would put fire into his bosom and make a fire come out of him. The Lord Jesus himself, proving His
pre-incarnate state, as the Word of God, the Son of God in eternity past, said: 'I beheld Satan, as lightning,
fall from heaven'. The consequences of Satan's pride was that he was cast out of heaven, and the further
consequences where that he went into the Garden in the person of the Serpent and he tempted Eve and
tempted Adam, and then - by their sin - sin came upon all men, and death came by sin. We are in the mess
tonight that we are, because of Lucifer, and because of our forefather's sin. What consequences!

That is his downfall, and then we come thirdly to his present activity. What is he doing now? That's his past,
his beginning, his downfall. Well, I've split it into two: his present activity geographically and practically.
Geographically simply means his realm, the realm in which he moves. Geographically he moves in the realm
of the earth, and especially in the realm of the air - that is the scene of his tireless activity. Paul tells us in
Ephesians 2 and 2: 'Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the
prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience'. He's described as
the 'Prince of the power of the air'. After creation, as we've looked, he entered into the serpent - beautiful
creature that it was - he beguiled Eve in the Garden by his subtlety, and he secured the downfall of Adam
and indeed the downfall of the whole human race through Adam. Adam was made the manager of God's
creation on earth, but Adam through his sin handed over the management and the jurisdiction to the Devil.
Because of that this world system is the Devil's realm, this present world that we live in is organised upon
Satan's principles, it is the bride that he tried to present to Christ in Matthew 4 in his temptation - a horrible
bride, an adulterous generation of a bride, but it was all he had to offer!

He is the prince of this system, he's described in 2 Corinthians as the god of this world, and as the prince of
the power of the air he is the head over all principalities and powers, all of the demonic kingdom and realm -
he is the chief captain! Do I need to say to you tonight, as God's people, that just because of this we need to
be separate from the world? Is that not plain enough? If this is the Devil's realm and the Devil's system? Is
that not why James said to that church: 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of
the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God'. Are we
flirting, are we courting with the world? We cannot, as God's people!

That's his activity geographically, his realm. Then there is his activity practically, and I call this his remit -
what he does in this world. I've narrowed it down to two things, apart from all that we have already
mentioned. There is execution and there is accusation. Execution, because to him - under God now, God
permitted this - was committed the powers upon earth of death. Satan was given by God, or allowed to have I
should say, by God the powers of death - and you can see that, if you don't believe me, from Hebrews 2:14.
When Christ died and rose again he took away from Satan the power of death that he had. Execution, and
then there is accusation, because although Satan was cast out of heaven, Satan still has access to heaven.
Satan still has access into the presence of God, you can see that from Job chapter 1 - but he is called, in
Revelation, the accuser of the brethren. He is the one who comes before God and sees your sins and accuses
you of your sins in the presence of God. He has been permitted by God, for a short season, a power allowing
him to sift or to test believers to make them stronger.

That is, practically, his remit. I want us in the closing moments of our meeting to look at the end of Lucifer's
life story. We look at first of all, his final destiny in the Saviour's victory. We've gone very quickly over
Lucifer's life story and his history from the beginning, to what he is doing now, and you could categorise it all and put the title over it all: 'Satan against the saints'. He is warring against God, and warring against God's people right throughout time. But my friends, I want you to see that there is another agenda in history, there is another plan and that is God's plan - and that is the plan that will prevail! In Genesis chapter 3 we see that plan being given birth, in verse 15 God said: 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel'. God promised, right in the beginning, a Saviour. That Saviour came, praise His name, and in Matthew's gospel we see His temptation, and He was the first man ever - now you listen to this carefully - who had nothing in Him to be attracted to the temptation of the Devil. Don't you think He could have fallen! There was nothing of the prince of darkness in Him! He defeated him, then He died, and in dying death He slew. Then He rose, and in rising He brought captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Before He rose He gave a glimpse of His present ministry when He told Peter: 'Peter, Satan hath desired to sift thee like wheat, but be of good cheer: I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not'.

Oh, praise God tonight, we have an Advocate - if any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous! 'He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning; but for this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil'. We overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the power of our testimony. Oh, isn't it wonderful that in the Saviour's victory the Devil's destiny is sealed!

Finally, his destiny is also sealed in scripture's prophecy. I believe at this moment in time, as Satan has done in the past, he is trying to finally defeat the forces of God in the universe. He is trying to wreck the kingdom of God. All through time he has tried to do this through men, right back to Adam in the very beginning in the Garden, through to Cain who slew Abel, through to Nimrod who was a mighty hunter in the sight of God and an abomination to God, through the Pharaohs of Egypt, through the Herods - one in particular who tried to wipe out the line of Messiah. It was Satan's plan to get rid of God's seed! All those attempts failed, he has tried it through present day kings and leaders, and also in the past - to take the field, to conquer good and bring godlessness to reign on the earth. Down through time that's what he's been trying to do, to set the stage for a showdown between God and the forces of evil - and one day, and I believe very, very soon, God will allow him to take the stage. The church and the Holy Spirit's influence in the church will depart through the rapture, and the Devil and the Devil's man will take the stage. God will allow it! Do you know why God will allow it? So that there is a showdown, so that there is a grand finale, and so that He can finally put to an end the kingdom of Satan and set up the kingdom of God on the earth.

You don't need to look far tonight to see that the spirit of antichrist is already working as we speak. Very soon Satan will personify that spirit of antichrist in his man of sin. It's amazing, the parallels, isn't it? Just look at the King of Tyrus, a ruler controlled by the Devil, and there is a ruler coming to this world who too opposeth, exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Sure, we today can look ourselves at leaders and kings in our world, and we can even now perceive the promptings of Satan in their actions and in their politics. We despair at times, don't we? We ask the question: 'Why is there such unrighteousness in society? Why is there such injustice in the legal system, and corruption in the government?'. I'll tell you why: because the men that rule this world are only puppets in the hand of principalities, and powers, and minions of Satan.

If you looked at Daniel 10, we don't have time, but you see the man of God, Daniel, upon his knees in prayer for three full weeks - and then Gabriel, the angel of God, comes to him and brings the answer. But Gabriel tells him: 'You know, your prayer was answered the first day you were on your knees, but the Prince of Persia, the Kingdom of Persia, withstood the angel of the Lord'. Later on Daniel had to wrestle again with the Prince of Grecia - is there a better commentary to what we studied in the book of Ephesians not so long ago, chapter 6: 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the
rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' - that's why we're to put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil, those who work through wicked spirits in the heavenlies, the world rulers of this darkness - and it's already working!

One day soon Satan's anointed will come forth! Hallelujah, we'll not be here. The sad thing about it all is that some of our loved ones will. After seven years of tribulation where antichrist will be manifested, and the great tribulation of God's wrath will pour upon this earth in all of its ferocity, there will be the battle of Armageddon - and that battle of Armageddon will be the battle between the seed of the Serpent, antichrist, and the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ! Hallelujah, then the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming, that antichrist!

I've got to do it, we can't go home without looking at Revelation 19. If you want to go home you can - Revelation 19 verse 17, and let this rejoice your heart my friend, this is his destiny: 'I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army', that's the Lord Jesus, 'And the beast', the antichrist, 'was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone' - hallelujah!

Verse 1 of chapter 20 says again: 'I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season'. Listen: at that moment, then shall the end be of this world system - finished! There will usher in a thousand year reign of Christ on the earth, and at the end of those thousand years there will be a final ditch effort of the Devil to overthrow God. And when the thousand years were passed, verse 10 of chapter 20: 'The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever'.

Do you want to hear something? 'Then they shall know that I am the Lord'. Do you remember the two demons in the two possessed people of the Gadarenes, where the Lord spoke to them, do you remember what they said? They cried out saying: 'What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God? Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?'. Satan, your time is almost up! Glory to God! His doom is sealed, his last chapter is written, and the word of God has blown his cover! My friends, forsake the world tonight for it's for the fire, and turn to the cause of Christ and the cross!

Lord Jesus, we worship Thee as the King of kings and Lord of lords - the Victor, the Captain of our salvation, but the soon coming Deliverer of Israel and of this world. We bless Thee that Thou wilt reign, Satan will be bound - and, Lord, sin will no longer reign in mortal bodies, in our mortal bodies at least. There is a day coming when a new heaven and a new earth will be ushered in, and we will be with Christ. We can say, down here, that will be far better. Amen.
Ezekiel chapter 33, we're looking tonight at chapters 33 and 34. We're not going to take time to read these passages, because we'll be going through them and we'll be highlighting specific verses, and I'm hoping and assuming that you've read them before you came here this evening - because that will help you. We're looking at the subject 'Watchmen and Shepherds'.

Now, as we enter into chapter 33 of this great prophecy, we come upon the last major division of Ezekiel's prophecy. You will have noted with me that the first division was when the glory of God departed, and we've been looking at various things such as the judgement of God upon Jerusalem, upon the whole nation of Israel. Two weeks ago from chapter 25 through to 32 we looked at God's judgement of the Gentile nations, and that was a section and a division of itself - Ezekiel was told be silent, and God indeed silenced him and made him dumb for seven years - but he did prophesy to the Gentile nations around Israel that were persecuting them and have been a thorn in their flesh right throughout their history.

But now we come to the last division of this book, from chapter 33 right to the end of chapter 48. This division speaks of the glory of God again, His glory that is one day going to return to the nation of Israel. His temple that has been destroyed in our book, and has been destroyed also in 70AD after the Lord Jesus Christ prophesied that it would be destroyed, one day a temple will be raised in Jerusalem and God's glory - His Shekinah - will again be caused to dwell there. It speaks specifically of the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that's what we will be looking at in the weeks - God willing - that lie ahead of us in these studies.

Chapter 32 concluded the predictions concerning the nations around Israel. We looked in-depth at how these nations were actually related to Israel in blood, we looked back to how they were related to Lot - the nations of Moab, Ammon and Edom. We looked right round the whole of the little nation of Israel and saw how those nations that God was judging in Ezekiel's day are still a thorn in the flesh to Israel in our present day. So we leave those condemnatory statements of God's prophet to the Gentile nations. Those prophecies that we studied, they were given before the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. But now we come to the second part, chapter 33 on, and these contain prophecies that are given after the fall of Jerusalem. So, up until now - come with me - we've been looking at the judgement of Jerusalem, the judgement of Israel. On the very date that Ezekiel pronounced that his own wife would die, the delight of his eyes would be taken away, the delight of Israel's eyes - Jerusalem and the temple - was taken away also, on that very date. Then he prophesies about the Gentile nations, all those prophecies were before the destruction of Jerusalem, but now we're coming to prophecies after God's judgement has fallen upon His people.

Now He begins again to speak of Jerusalem and to speak concerning Israel, but His message is different now. Up to chapter 25 God was only speaking of destruction, judgement upon Jerusalem and Israel, and it was destroyed exactly as He predicted - God's word, we saw, was fulfilled in every jot and tittle. But now from chapter 33 on, God is causing us to look to the future, God wants Israel to look to a future coming day
of a millennial kingdom when the glory of the Lord will be seen again right throughout the whole earth. From now on He is speaking to his people in captivity. He is telling them in this concentration camp by the River Chebar, to live in expectancy of a day that is yet to come - a day that is future.

You will remember from our studies of God's judgement upon His own people that the future for them was bleak. The future was very dark, and we spent some dark dismal nights looking through dark chapters in Ezekiel where there wasn't one glimmer of hope. But now God is coming with a message of hope, He's asking them to be expectant of a better day in the future. He sees hope for the children of Israel! We are not Israel, and we need to be very careful in our reading of the word of God - especially the Old Testament - that we do not confuse Israel with the church of Jesus Christ. But in a similar way we, as God's people today, have a similar hope - for we have the hope of the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we as God's people are meant to be expecting that: His glorious appearing! It too rests upon the word of God and what He has said will take place in the future.

There are two pictures right throughout chapter 33 and chapter 34 that we're going to look at. There is the metaphor and the picture of a watchman, then in chapter 34 there is the picture of a shepherd - a false shepherd, and a true shepherd. Both of them are pictures of prophets and leaders within the nation of Israel, people who God has chosen within His people to lead the people spiritually, civically and nationally. God gives these two pictures to show the way that they should carry out this God-given elected role. Right at the outset, as we come to these two metaphors, I want us to ask ourselves this evening: what is our model for ministry in the New Testament Church? Today in the contemporary church of Jesus Christ, what do we use as models for our ministry?

I know that today many are using books on church growth that are supposedly written by experts on church growth, who tell us how we can get people on the pews, how we can pack as many people into the building as possible - all the schemes and imaginations that you can imagine. It basically goes that you need to be a manager rather than a minister of Jesus Christ, you need to be a professional organiser rather than a prayerful agoniser. We reject any scheme that is not found in the word of God, but what we have tonight is a scheme - two metaphors, two pictures that can tell us how we ought to base and model our ministry in the church today. Some model their ministry on a spiritual giant of the past, and we all have our favourites, we all have men and authors that we look up to - but that is not the pattern that we have in scripture. It is not even present preachers that we try to model ourselves on, and if I can teach you anything tonight it would be this: the sum of all spiritual things is the Lord Jesus Christ!

We've been looking through the Sermon on the Mount, and we looked at the Lord's Prayer or the Disciple's Prayer yesterday, and I was emphasising to you that even when we come to prayer, what do we use as a method for prayer? We must always go back to the Master and see what the Master did, see what the Master said. If we are disciples of His, and followers of His, He is our model, He is the sum of all spiritual things! I believe tonight we will see from all the pictures in these passages that they are fulfilled perfectly and literally in our Lord Jesus Christ. We are only to imitate men as far as they imitate the Lord Himself! Here we see a model for all Christian service. Now, don't switch off because I'm talking to pastors or elders or preachers or missionaries, I am not! I am talking about all Christian service, and that means all Christians.

So let's look at them this evening. The first is this picture of the watchman, and your first point reads 'The Watchman's Service Extended' - chapter 33. The reason why you have that title 'The Watchman's Service Extended' is because Ezekiel, in chapter 33, is recommissioned for his prophetic work. You remember, going back a few chapters to the beginning of the book, that a watchman's duty was a man who was sitting at a vantage point over the city, he could see if any enemies were coming, he was on lookout for the city and for its people, and he was there to warn and to sound the alarm if the enemy was coming. Now here in chapter 33 Ezekiel is recommissioned, his commission is renewed. He is commended by God that he has done,
hitherto, a great job - he has heard the 'Well done, thou good and faithful watchman' - and now he is being recommissioned for the same job that he had in the past. He was to warn them again: to repent, to follow God's law, to follow the true and living God! If he warned them, God was telling him again, that he would not be guilty - their blood would be off his hands. Their blood would be on his hands if he didn't warn them, but if he warns them their blood is off his hands, and it's the people's problem - it's their responsibility after the responsibility of the watchman is discharged.

What God is doing in chapter 33 for Ezekiel is: He is reminding him of his call as a prophet, as a watchman. I want you to note very carefully, because we have read a very similar passage to this in chapter 3 of Ezekiel, we've read a similar passage in chapter 18, and now we come a third time to where God is saying exactly the same thing to Ezekiel in chapter 33 - and that is the principle of third mention, please note that. When God says something to each of us once, that's very important - of course it is, we have to obey God when He says anything. When God says something twice, we need to sit up and listen. But when God says something three times, we can be absolutely assured of the essential nature of what God is wanting to teach us, and it is so important that we listen to God!

Why did God do this three times for Ezekiel? Because He was recommissioning him. You know, I believe with all my heart that there are some of us here tonight and we need to be recommissioned by God. We need to be recalled by God, we have forgotten when we first believed! We can say like the hymnwriter: 'Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw Lord?'. We've lost the zeal! We've lost the thrill, the love, the enthusiasm of the Lord in our life! We've become complacent! Calvary rolls off our back, it doesn't touch us any more! Our eyes are dry, our hearts are cold and hard - and could it be that we need to be recommissioned by God? Do you know what God was reminding Ezekiel of from this passage about a watchman? He was reminding him that He still wanted men to live, that's what He was saying in this passage: 'I'm not willing that any should perish'. He's telling Ezekiel: 'It's still My will that men are not destroyed by their sin, but I want them to be forgiven from their sin'. Look at verse 11 of the chapter, God says: 'Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?'. God wants them to know!

Now listen, this passage has nothing to do with salvation - the salvation that we know. This passage is in the legal dispensation, and it's talking about men and women obeying the law of God, the ten commandments, the first five books in the Bible - that is the old economy and dispensation, that was what men and women did to show their obedience to God. Today it is to obey the Gospel, in those days it was to obey the law. Now, men and women were still saved by grace, but they were required to obey the law. God was telling them: 'Obey the law! Obey My will and you will live!'. But there is a principle, I believe - and scripture bears it out, it runs right into the New Testament - and it is the principle of responsibility. You are responsible for your own sin, you are responsible for your own disposition before God in the realm of salvation, but more than that: you are responsible as a Christian to take the Gospel to other people, and if you do not their blood is on your hands! I know there will be those who will say: 'Oh no, you're confusing, this is the legal dispensation - we're now in grace and that does not apply'. Well, I would remind you of Paul in Acts chapter 20 and verse 26 when he said: 'I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men'. He had preached the Gospel, he was pure from their blood, his hands were clean - and there we see that principle of responsibility in the New Testament.

Verse 22 says: 'Now the hand of the LORD was upon me in the evening, afore he that was escaped came; and had opened my mouth, until he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb'. You remember it was prophesied in chapter 32 that whenever Jerusalem fell there would be a messenger would come from Jerusalem to Ezekiel, and when he arrived at Ezekiel to tell him that it was all done Ezekiel would get his speech back, and he would be able to prophecy. Well, here it happens and Ezekiel's mouth is opened! The silence was over, and we know that seven years has passed - seven years in
silence, not allowed to say a word to the people of God! But now he's being recommissioned by God to go to
those people who had offended him and to preach God's promise to the nation. Now let me say this: Ezekiel's
silence was God-ordained, our silence is not. God commands us to put the trumpet to our mouths and to warn
them! Do we need to be recommissioned? Do we need to be called again? Do we need to remember the
reason why we were saved? To be responsible watchmen before God for people's souls! This passage bears
out that if we will not be watchmen we will damage our own souls, and we will damage the souls of those
that we need to warn when we do not fulfil God's commission. Have we forgotten?

Come on, let's be honest tonight! Let's cut through all the facade! When was the last time you spoke to a soul
about Christ? When was the last time you had a burden to pray for a man or a woman that you were speaking
to? When was last time you led a soul to Christ? Don't tell me that's a gift!

'Tis all my business here below
To cry, Behold the Lamb!
Preach Him to all and cry in death:
Behold, behold the Lamb!

Have we forgotten? God speaks to preachers in this passage, and you know we're all preachers - preachers of
the Gospel, we're to take it and gossip it around. But specifically it really is a powerful message to any of
you brothers who do take up the word of God and preach publicly, for as Ezekiel is being spoken to by God
you would nearly think it was a man talking to his friend because God is so honest with him, He's so clear,
He's so up-front. He reminds Ezekiel that the people who he's ministering to, oh they admire him, they think
he's wonderful, they think his messages are tremendous - but God has to put His arm around him, if you like,
and take him into a quiet room and set him down and say: 'Now Ezekiel, they're appreciating your ministry,
but secretly they're reviling you! Secretly they're speaking against you and they've no intention of obeying
the word that you're proclaiming!'.

Look at verse 30: 'Son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the
doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear
what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD'. 'Come, let's hear what the word is today that comes
from Jehovah!' - they were titillated by it, interested - 'What's going to happen in the future? What's going to
happen next?'. Is that why you're here tonight? Well, can I ask you: in the light of what you learn, have you
any intention at all, whatsoever, of obeying the commands of the word of God? They had no intention of
obeying God's words, and with their mouths they showed much love, much appreciation to the minister of
God's word - but their hearts, God says, were set on covetousness.

God says to Ezekiel in verse 32: 'Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant
voice, and can play well on an instrument'. Do you see what God's saying? 'You're like one singing a lovely
song with a pleasant voice. You're like somebody playing on an instrument, you're just entertainment for
them! You tickle their ears, you tell them something they want to hear! They're intrigued by your words, but
it's all just entertainment!'. They delighted in the eloquence and the forceful way he preached, but they didn't
take anything seriously that fell from his lips. Now listen, I wonder are we dangerously near to this today in
conservative evangelicalism? Where we come to church to hear some new thing, to get our ears tickled, to
find out what's going to happen in the future from God's crystal ball? But the question that God asks by His
Spirit is: are we going to obey God's word, or is it just entertainment? 'We don't watch TV on Sunday
night, we just come to church instead and sing the songs and listen to the preacher'.

But when judgement fell God declared, He said this: 'Then they'll know that a prophet was among them'.
These aren't fairy stories, this is God's truth! It's going to happen, God's word is going to come to pass - but
when people realised it, sadly, it was too late for them, and it will one day be too late for those who have
listened to the word of God for the wrong reasons and in the wrong motivation and have not lived the holy life that God required of them! How do we listen to the word of God? How do you listen to it week after week? Have you become a sermon taster, or a preacher examiner? Do you go home, or do you sit in a little crowd or in a corner, and say: 'Well, what did you think of him this morning? Did that pass your approval this evening'?? Now, don't get me wrong: it is our duty and our responsibility to search the Scriptures to see whether these things be so, but in the name of God and for Christ's sake: if it is the word of God, obey it! Don't discuss it! Obey it!

James tells us that we can be like a man who looks in a mirror at himself, and walks away and forgets what he looks like. We need to pray that we will receive with meekness the engrafted word of God, that we will obey it, that we will not be hearers of the word alone but doers of the same. Old Isaiah saw it well when he said: 'Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men'. Do you know what He's saying? 'They've removed their hearts from me, and do you see the fear that they have, the fear of God that they pride themselves in? It's only taught to them of men'. They're taught it at Sunday School and by the Pastor and by their Daily Reading notes, but it's not of God. It's not through a deep intimate relationship, face-to-face with God, that they've grown to love Him, that they've grown to fear Him, they only fear Him out of the commandments of men. The Lord takes up that theme in Matthew 15 and says: 'This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men'.

That is the job of the watchman, the watchman is responsible for the message - but we, as watchmen, responsible to carry out the word of God. You, as listeners to the word of God, are responsible to obey it! Could it be tonight - listen, this isn't part of a fancy wee sermon, this is a question from my heart to yours - could it be that you need to be reconstituted?

Then we have chapter 34, and the second metaphor and picture: 'The False Shepherds Exposed'. If a watchman serves the people in times of danger, a shepherd cares for them day after day. We need both: we need someone to warn us about the enemy, but we also need people to tend us day by day. The shepherds here were civil and religious leaders in Israel, people who were raised up and expected to lead the people and shepherd the nation - this passage says they were expected to feed them, unite them, and protect them from their enemies. The word 'pastor' that we have today is a Latin word that simply means 'shepherd', but Israel's leaders - as we read down chapter 34 - exploited the flock in order not to feed them, but to feed themselves. They didn't unite the flock, they scattered the flock. They failed to protect the flock from danger and their enemies, and they are now shown to be liars before God - why? Because this is after the destruction of Jerusalem, and they now realised that Ezekiel was the prophet of God. These men were crying: 'Peace, peace!', when there was no peace - now Jerusalem is in dust and ashes, and God has shown that they are liars.

Oh, this is so applicable today, isn't it? Our church - and I'm talking about the church of Jesus Christ at large - it's plagued and cursed with false shepherds! Men who tell people who are lost in their sins that they're alright if they're good and church-going and moral! That they'll get to heaven - peace, peace when there is no peace! But it's going to come too late to people's realisation that they're liars! Then there are those who make God's people comfortable in a lukewarm, backslidden state. Those who are false physicians, pronouncing fitness upon the church when it's in chronic heart trouble. Then there is professionalism - now, don't confuse professionalism with excellence. We should always strive for excellence in everything that we do for the Lord, too much prevails today of: 'Ach, that'll do rightly'. Professionalism is a different thing entirely, for instead of service, professionalism is motivated by gain. It used to be in evangelicalism that we condemned the established church for being 'good living for a living', but now we are as guilty as any! We need to beware, tonight, of selfish shepherds who pamper themselves and loll in idleness and luxury without any thought for their responsibility!
That's what this passage is talking about: men who will go to any lengths to secure their own comfort, but the sheep are left scattered, confused, looking for godly leaders and finding none! These men, look at verses 2 and 3, the false shepherd feeds himself instead of the flock. He doesn't give them the word of God! When I was in Scotland recently, I was told about Gospel Halls now where they don't need to open the Bible to preach - they don't need the Bible any more. There is a famine of the word of God all across this Western world of Europe, and it will come here - if it has not already come, and I believe it has! Vernon McGee says rightly: 'These little sermonettes delivered to Christianettes by preacherettes, are not quite doing the job today'.

What is the shepherd's job? One writer says this, and I think this perfectly and brilliantly sums up what a shepherd is, and a shepherd is an elder in the assembly - listen: 'The unique combination of afflicting the comfortable, and comforting the afflicted'. Afflicting the comfortable, who are in a backslidden, lukewarm state - waking them up - but also comforting the afflicted. He confronts the fat sheep, that's what this passage talks about, he confronts the fat sheep and cares for the weak sheep. But the problem is that usually by upsetting the fat sheep, you're upsetting the people that support the church, that have sway in the church, that are influential in the extra-church society. Often the weak sheep are not comforted because it would just take too much time, and it's too demanding.

Now let's see tonight, for this is all God's word, it's all in this passage, let's see the marks of the false shepherd - and you can note these down, and this is speaking to my heart and I hope it's speaking to yours. The first thing in verse 4 we find is: they have no care for the weak, they don't tend the sick, they don't bind up the broken bones, they don't seek the lost. In other words, they are without concern, they are hardhearted cold individuals. The second thing about them we find in verse 5: the sheep are scattered by these false shepherds, they have no shepherd! Why are they scattered? Because these men aren't feeding them! I hear all the time today the philosophy, they mightn't say it outright, but the philosophy is: 'When people are not being entertained they will scatter, they leave! If you don't entertain the young people they're going to leave!' - that's not what God's word says! Look at verse 5: 'And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became food to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered' - they didn't have food themselves, they were scattered because they weren't fed, and if a man or woman doesn't get the word of God they will scatter, they will go, and they ought to go!

Thirdly in verse 5 you see: they become prey to wild animals, for the beasts of the wild feed upon them. When the sheep are scattered they are prey to beasts. Specifically to Israel here it's speaking of the Gentile nations round about her. Verse 6 tells us that there would come a day when Israel would be wandering round about the mountains of the world, and that is exactly what she's doing tonight - wandering around with no one to seek her. She has been in that condition since the dispersion, and she will be in that condition until the return of her Shepherd and Bishop, the Pastor of her soul. Then fourthly God says that these false shepherds will be punished, verse 9: 'Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them'. Three things: He says they will lose their position as shepherds, it will be removed from them; they themselves will not be fed by the Great Shepherd to feed the sheep; and thirdly they would be judged and absolutely destroyed! God says Himself: 'I am against them!'.

If you're in a position of leadership here tonight, no matter what assembly you come from, if you're an undershepherd of God's people you need to take your position seriously. Many times when I prepare to preach the word of God my mind is cast, I believe by the Spirit, to James 3 verse 1: 'My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation'. We haven't time to read it tonight, but I want to encourage you to go home and read Acts chapter 20, where it says there of Paul of his faithfulness as a
shepherd. He was so faithful in what he did for those people, going around all the cities around Ephesus preaching to them. He said that he held back nothing from them, read it when you go home!

Then thirdly, the third picture of 'The True Shepherd Expected'. False shepherds have been exposed by God, but now God tells them in the second half of chapter 34 to expect the True Shepherd. Who's He talking about? Let's not waste any time getting to it: it is the Lord who is my Shepherd. It is the Good Shepherd of John 10 who giveth His life for the sheep. It is the Great Shepherd of Hebrews chapter 13, and the Chief Shepherd of 1 Peter chapter 5 - it is the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ! Ezekiel has prophesied right throughout his book that the Lord Jesus was coming, but now he is speaking of the Lord Jesus who is coming again! I want you to bring all this together in your mind now, and realise that these prophecies here that are so applicable to us in the church of Jesus Christ today, literally they will not be fulfilled until the Lord Jesus Christ has finished all of His shepherding ministry down here on earth, and He hasn't done it yet.

One day God will seek His people Israel, and God will bring them back to their land, and the Lord Jesus Christ will be their Shepherd. Oh, if you take a casual glance down verse 11 to 29 and underline these two words: 'I will', you will see it more than 18 times, possibly 21 times - God says: 'I will, I will'. Can you imagine the comfort that that was to these people in captivity for their sin after Jerusalem had been destroyed in judgement, and God comes again after seven years silence and speaks to them 21 times: 'I will, I will, I will'?! What an assurance it was to their hearts, and what an assurance to our own. In verse 11 He says: 'I will search out the lost sheep. I'll search them out, nobody else is looking for them, but I'll look for them!' - that's how you recognise the true shepherd, they search out the sheep. Secondly, He says in verse 12: 'I will deliver them from their enemies'. In verse 13, thirdly, He says: 'I will gather them from all the nations'. Do you see the background to Luke chapter 15 verse 4 and following, the parable of the lost sheep? That shepherd going into the mountains wild and bare to get that one lost sheep - he had been committed a hundred sheep and he wasn't going to go back without a hundred!

God is not the ogre of the Old Testament that some men make Him out to be. You can go to Psalm 78, 79, 80; Isaiah 40, 49; Jeremiah 31 - and you will find God as the Shepherd of Israel, the Shepherd of His people. He's speaking now of the nation of Israel, they're in captivity now - they were in captivity in Babylon then, but they're in captivity now - because of their disobedience against God. Because Christ came unto His own and His own received him not, and they listened to false prophets who said He was not the Messiah, He was an impostor - but God is not through with them yet! He's going to bring them as a new nation into their own land where He will be a Shepherd unto them upon the mountains of Israel. It's an absolute guarantee, and let me say it's an absolute folly for anybody to take these promises to Israel and to spiritualise them to the church today. Are you trying to tell me that the nation that was scattered is not going to be the same nation that is gathered? It is clear that this is Israel who will be gathered again, and - mark - are returning to the land this very night as we speak. We're going to deal with this in more detail in chapter 37 in the weeks still to come, but let me just say that in 1949 the Israeli Prime Minister, Ben-Gurion, said that Israel's policy was this: 'Bringing all Jews to Israel', and we are still at the beginning.

He said: 'I will search out the lost sheep, I will deliver them from their enemies, I will gather them from all the nations', and thirdly He says in verse 14: 'I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel' - I'll feed them! Verse 15: 'I will give them rest in green pastures' - do you see the echo of the 23rd Psalm? 'He leadeth me beside the still waters; He maketh me to lie down on green pastures'. Would you say the land of Israel is a safe place tonight? Would you say it's dwelling in safety? This is future! Look at the plain word of God! Sixthly, He says in verse 16: 'I will put splints and bandages upon their broken limbs' - here again is the picture of the shepherd, he's a combination of toughness and tenderness. You'll not get that combination in any other individual, as far as I can see, but a shepherd: tough against the enemies of God, tough against the complacency of God's people, but tender for those who are broken hearted who need splints and bandages.
Seventhly, He says in verse 16: 'I will heal their sick'. Eighth, verse 23: 'I will establish David as the trusted shepherd', the line of David, the throne of David will rule again in the millennial kingdom. Verse 25: 'I will make an eternal covenant with them'. Tenth, verse 25 to 28: 'I will guarantee their safety, and place them in a perfect paradise'. They're not in safety tonight! They're in a barren wilderness politically, spiritually, agriculturally - and before God tonight they're cut off, but there's a day coming when He will restore them! No more will they be the prey to the heathen as they are today.

All that profess to be God's sheep God will separate. He'll separate the fat sheep from the lean. He will separate the sheep from the goats as the Lord Jesus prophesied, and He will separate them on this ground: the false sheep will be those who tread down the pasture for the other sheep, who defile the still waters for the other sheep. In other words, those of Israel who keep people back from their Messiah He will separate unto perdition! Verses 22 to 24 tell us that there is a day coming when all the works of men will be judged, but He on that day will save His flock, that remnant in Israel from their enemies and from hell. Think about this: there's a time coming - and I believe it's very soon - they're gathering back already to the land, but then they will look on Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. Then they'll have one Shepherd, Jesus Christ the Lord!

Verses 25 to the end tell us that He then will recognise His covenant people, He will become their true Shepherd. That means this: He'll be their protector so that no harm will touch them; He'll ward off evil beasts of the Gentiles, they will cease to be in the land; they will dwell in security even in the wilderness or the forest; He will order everything absolutely necessary for their welfare; they no longer will suffer in the land a lack of moisture and barrenness agriculturally, but as Hosea said and Joel said and many of the prophets said: ‘Then the former and the latter rain will be given absolutely’. If you look at verse 26, Ezekiel says that in God's due season there shall be showers of blessing. Oh, we take that and spiritualise it, and that's reasonable enough, but it's specifically and literally going to be Israel - they're going to have showers of blessing! In a coming day materially and spiritually, Israel will know blessing, all the blessings right throughout the Old Testament and the New that they haven't had yet - they're going to get them! The yoke of their enemies will be broken, they will be delivered from Gentile oppressors that they have suffered for too long, and they will dwell securely in their own land, and God will say to them what He says at the end of verse 31, look: 'I am your God, saith the Lord'. It's wonderful, isn't it?

Today, for us, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. He cares for His own, He sends showers of blessing - and we, today, in prayer are looking for God's spiritual showers of blessing on a dry land. Verses 26 and 29 tell us that wherever those showers of blessing come God makes His beautiful garden, but literally we look for a day when Christ shall reign upon this earth. The ideal form of government is not socialism, communism, capitalism or any other ism - it is kingdomism, the kingdom of God and His Christ! Here's the big question: that reign begins now in the heart of the believer. One day He will reign literally on this earth, but watchman, shepherd, receiver of God's word, is He reigning tonight in your heart? Is He the Shepherd and Bishop of your soul?

Our Father, we thank Thee for the Great Shepherd of the sheep, the Shepherd of Israel, and the Shepherd of the church, the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, we thank Thee that we have a great expectation, for He is coming to take us home. Lord, we thank Thee that the word of God teaches that Israel has that great expectation, for He will come and His feet will settle on the Mount of Olives, and He will deliver them - they will be His people, and He will be their God. We pray, our Father, that we will be obedient to the word of God as we have learnt tonight. We pray that each time we hear it we will receive it and obey it. We pray that we will learn to be shepherds of one another, and love one another and guard one another and protect each other from the evil and false doctrine, and also mend the sick and help the poor and needy. Lord, really what we're asking is: before the Lord Jesus comes, we pray that we will be found faithful. Hear our prayer, for it is for His glory we ask it, Amen.
Ezekiel - Chapter 20

"The Valley Of Dry Bones"

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Ezekiel 36-37

1. The Restoration Of The Land And People (chapter 36)
2. The Resurrection Of The Nation (37:1-14)
3. The Reunification Of The Kingdoms (37:15-28)

The Bible says 'Watch and pray', and there was a wasp that landed on my hymnbook during that prayer, and I made sure that it wasn't going to fly away again! Now we're turning to Ezekiel chapters 35, 36 and 37. You wouldn't think there would be wasps about in December, but there are and for some reason they're all in the Iron Hall - so beware tonight in the Bible Reading! Now, we're not going to read these three chapters, I hope that you've read them before you've come. We want to read the first 14 verses or so of chapter 37, which is the chapter concerning the valley of dry bones, but we will be looking at chapters 35 and 36 also.

Let's begin at verse 1 of chapter 37: "The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry". Now there's two descriptions: very many and very dry. "And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD".

As we speak tonight the Jewish people, the nation of Israel, are being bombed to death in their own land. It is the attempt to bomb God's people out of the land that is their rightful inheritance. We look to world politics, and we find that its opinion is generally against the Jews and Israel in the land. Her Arab neighbours are against her, and absolutely detest her, and would push her into the sea if they had their way. I think the question that many people are asking, and certainly God's redeemed people, the church, is: is there anything in the Scriptures to help us understand these events that are taking place around us at this very moment? Questions like: will Israel remain in Palestine? Will there ever be a time when Israel will be pushed out
again, when Israel will go into captivity? Will the Palestinian people ever take over the whole nation of Israel and get the land again? Will her enemies evict her from the land? Will any nation in the world succeed in putting Israel out of Palestine? Will she ever be finally defeated? Will there be a war that will come one day when Israel will be defeated and she will lose sovereignty over her own land?

Really we could sum up all those questions in just one: what is the future of God's ancient people, Israel? Does she have a future? And if she has a future, what does God say it is? Now, believe it or not, those questions are very similar to the questions that were being asked in Ezekiel's day. Those questions, as I believe those questions today can be answered, were answered by God's prophet then, Ezekiel. Miraculously, tonight, the very answers that Ezekiel was given thousands of years ago are exactly the same answers that we can give to those questions tonight concerning our day and a day that will come, prophetically, in the future.

In chapter 35, if you look at it, we have a repetition of God's judgement upon the Gentile nations - but one in particular, Edom. You remember we looked, in chapters 25 through to 32, at God's judgement on the Gentile nations round about Israel, and we can see a parallel in the nations round about Israel today. Now none of those nations exist today ethnically, except for Egypt - and we saw that there was a future aspect to the prophetical teaching in Ezekiel concerning Egypt. But we did learn that there's a parallel, although some of those nations do not exist today, the nations round about Israel today are still a thorn in her flesh. Chapter 35 is a repetition of God's judgement on Edom again, and God directs the prophecy toward Mount Seir, which was the national mountain of the nation of Edom.

Now, if you cast your mind back you'll remember that Edom, the nation of Edom, were the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau. Jacob was blessed, Esau was not blessed - in fact, the Bible says he was hated. You remember that Esau was resentful of the blessings of Jacob, and as we go through Israelite history we find that that resentment continues right through - that jealousy and envy and pride of the Edomites against the Israelites. In fact, the whole book of Obadiah* is dedicated to that very thing, and we studied it about a year ago or so - and the tape is available from the tape room afterwards if you want to listen to the background of this - how the Edomites were filled with pride, envy, and really a perpetual hatred against the Jewish people. The reason was, right back to their father Esau, they wanted the blessing of God's people - but they wanted the blessing without the Lord, they wanted the land without the Lord, they wanted the fruit and the wealth without the Lord. They wanted, all the time, to seize the land, the promised land of God's people.

Now please note that at this moment in which we speak in Ezekiel, God's people are under divine discipline. You've seen that with me: the Shekinah glory has been removed from the temple, the people have been taken captive beside the River Chebar - where Ezekiel is at this moment - all of them have been taken into Babylon, and they're under God's discipline for their sin, because of their idolatry, their following of other gods, their political and religious pacts with other nations. They are under discipline, but please do not make the mistake of thinking that God's people are rejected! You remember we saw last week that we're coming into the last section of this book that speaks of the restoration, the revival of God's people again. In other words, the glory, the Shekinah brightness of God's presence that has now been removed from the temple, God is looking to a day telling His people when that glory will return again. They're under discipline, but they're not rejected - now, that was the thing that Edom failed to see. For because God's people were under discipline, the Edomites put the boot in - they thought they could get away with it, they didn't notice the difference.

Now, we know today in a similar sense that blindness in part has happened unto Israel. But we must be very careful that we do not make the mistake of many Bible teachers - particularly amillennialists - who see no future whatsoever for the Jewish people. That is a mistake, for Jesus Christ the Son of God prophesied, Himself, a future for those people. Paul the apostle, in the book of Romans and particularly chapter 11,
prophesied concerning the future of the Jewish people. John the apostle in the book of the Revelation, particularly in chapter 20 and following, predicts a new future for the people of Jerusalem. The minor prophets, we have looked at them in the past, and the major prophets, one of which we're looking at tonight, all of them speak of a future day for the Jews. Now, the Edomite history - as I have said - was a history of hatred the words God's people, the Jews. It goes right back to when they refused passage, when the children of Israel were being delivered out of Egypt and they had to come through the land of Edom to get to the promised land, the Edomites said: 'No, you're not coming through', and they had to go the long way round. God always held that against the Edomites. Remember now, they were brothers of the Jews, they were related by blood, but they had this hatred and this resentment.

When you go into 1 Samuel 22 you find a man called Doeg, and he was an Edomite too, and he almost succeeded in destroying the priesthood of Israel in the days of Saul - another Edomite. We find, when we looked at the book of Haggai* and Habakkuk*, we found that the Edomites were the people who rejoiced when the temple was destroyed, when the people of Jerusalem were taken captive they laughed and said: 'Aha, aha!', as the Psalmist says. They always got the boot in when God's people were down and out. Now they are taken into Babylon, and the Edomites are still ridiculing and blaspheming God and His own people. It's no different when we go into the New Testament, the history of the Edomites. If you go into the New Testament you find that their name changes to the Idumeans. You find that Herod the Great in the Nativity story, that we'll be thinking of very soon, he was an Edomite - an Idumean - by birth. He was the very one who sought to slay the infant Christ who, remember, was the rightful King of the Jews!

Now, as far as I can discern, it would appear to me that the Arabs in the land of Palestine today, at this moment, and those Arabs in the South-East of the land of Israel, are the present-day descendants of Edom. Now, let me prove that to you. I can't go into everything, but certainly from our chapters - if you look at verse 10 of chapter 35, look at two of the characteristics of these Idumeans and the Edomites. Look at verse 10, God says: 'Because thou hast said', now He's speaking to the Edomites now, 'These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it; whereas the LORD was there'. Now let me give you an understanding of this verse, we're talking about two countries - remember I had the map here, and the Northern Kingdom was the kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom was the kingdom of Judah? God is saying to Edom: 'Because you have said 'These two countries will be mine'' - what are they doing? They are wanting the land, in other words, the whole country of Israel north and south, for themselves. Does that ring any bells?

If you go to verse 2 of chapter 36 the Lord says something again concerning their claims: 'Thus saith the Lord GOD', and this is referring to all the enemies of the nation, not just Edom, 'Because the enemy hath said against you, Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession'. Not only do they want to claim the land, but they're making a boast that some sacred sites - high places, holy places to the Jews - are also theirs and in their possession. Now, go to Jerusalem tonight: the Temple Mount is in the hands of the Arabs. Go to find the tomb of David, it is in the hands of the Palestinians. Go and look for the Cave of Machpelah where Abraham was buried, where Isaac is buried, and where Jacob is buried - and at this moment as we speak, they are in the hands of Muslim Arabs. That was then, this is now, and things have not changed. In the same way we say today: it would be wrong for Israel's enemies tonight to think that God has cast them off, and thereby they can get away with what they are doing to Israel - they cannot do what they like to God's ancient people, for God has not finished with His ancient people! More than that: He is not finished with their ancient enemies either!

So then, what is God's plan for His ancient people? Well, the first thing can be found really in the totality of chapter 36, in your first pointer on your sheet. The first thing is: 'The Restoration of the Land and the People'. In verses 1 to 7 all of the nations, not just the Edomites, but all the nations against Israel who in the
past have tried to seize the land and have scorned God's people - God says: 'I am going to punish them'. If you look at verses 1 to 3: 'Also, thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel, and say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD'. It talks about their enemies scourging them, in verse 2. Verse 3: 'Therefore prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because they have made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that ye might be a possession unto the residue of the heathen, and ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people'. Now before the Babylonian captivity, and before this prophecy, the mountains of Israel were covered with forests. They were clothed with olive trees and vineyards, and little prosperous villages, and fruit and agriculture. We know that because it's immortalised in the writings of the Psalmists and the prophets, they sing of the wealth and the fruitfulness of Israel. But as we come here we see that God is saying that these mountains have become desolate, the hills have become eroded and have left empty crags and wildernesses. What we find is, in the history of Israel, during the long dispersion when the people were put out of the land for 19 centuries, when they had overlords from the Gentile nations and foreign invaders, that all of that fruitfulness, all of the forests of the mountains were denuded, and the hills and the mountains were made bare.

These carefully tended vineyards and gardens and olive groves disappeared as successive waves of invaders ravaged the soil of the Holy Land with all their wars. Finally, after the nations and the armies of the nations had fled and had no more interest in Jerusalem, then the eroding forces of nature came in helped by herds of goats and animals - and they completed the scene of absolute treeless desolation. A wilderness, and God said that that would happen. The little flourishing settlements and cities were also destroyed; there was just an absolute desert. The Negev to the south became a rocky wasteland, whilst the fertile coastland of the plain slowly but surely gave way to shifting sand dunes - no more fertility or fertile soil, but only sand. The fertile valley of Jezreel that we read about in the Old Testament, that is sung of and is famous for its vineyards and fertility in Bible times, had degenerated into a vast swampland.

That was the judgement of God, but as we look at verse 8 - if you look down at it - God says: 'But ye, O mountains of Israel', again prophesying to the mountains of Israel, 'ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people of Israel; for they are at hand to come'. These forests, these crustaceans of fruit and wheat and plentiful fertility, God is saying: 'They have gone away in judgement, the land is waste and is a desert, but one day there will be great forests there again. One day, covering the mountains of Israel will be orchards that will yield their fruit unto My people, Israel'. For almost 2000 years absolute nakedness of forests, only a few groves remaining, none of the great famous cedars of Lebanon that we read about in the Scriptures, but God says: 'There is a day coming, and I will bring forests again, I will bring fruit again, I will bring fertility to the land again'. Can I tell you tonight: it's already happened! Under the British mandate there was a great movement set on course which we know to be called the reforestation of the mountains of Israel, and there were millions - literally millions - of trees planted. God is saying: 'I am making this happen', He says it in His word, verse 9 at the end of the verse: 'I am making it happen as a preparation for My people coming back to their own land as God's people again'.

Now, you go to Palestine tonight and again once more the great sycamore trees are to be found on its mountains, again the tamarisk tree and the myrtle trees are there - they have been planted in their tens of thousands in the area that flourished only 3000 years ago - for 2000 years they have been a wasteland. Entire forests have now been re-clothed on the once barren Judean hills. I'm led to believe that during that British mandate 200 million trees were planted in the vast programme of reforestation across those mountains - pine trees planted in the mountains, planted on the sand dunes that were once at that fertile plane.

It says more than that, it's not just the forests, but if you look at verses 29 and 30 of chapter 36: 'I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen'. Not just trees and forests, but God is now talking about crops of grain and fruit that would be increased. God is saying: 'There will never be a famine in My nation again - not
because you deserve it, but because of My honour, because of My name' - and get this, people, tonight: because of God's promise! God made a promise to Abraham, and God has to keep the promise! There will be fruitful farms and orchards, and in fact it says that it will become like the Garden of Eden.

I don't know whether you know this, but Israel's farmers this very day produce three-quarters of the nation's food. They are almost self-sufficient as we speak! They have over 700 agricultural villages that have been established, and each year 75 million dollars worth of citrus fruit alone is exported around the world! Each year 83,000 tonnes of grapes go out! 126,000 tonnes of wheat, 256,000 tonnes of sugar beet, and well over one million eggs come out of Israel every year! For 2000 years she was a wasteland, and at this moment there is fruitfulness! Now you might think that this is a fulfilment of this prophecy, and it is in part - but the point of the matter is this: this is only the beginning. This is only a preparation of what we read of here, and it will only be finally completed after the great tribulation period when the Messiah comes in glory to reign upon the earth. If you think that's a massive exportation of goods, you ain't seen nothing yet! At the millennium it will be the most fruitful part of God's earth, like the Garden of Eden.

Can you see God's word being fulfilled already? In His grace God will bring the land from desolation to His delight, from desperation and dispersion to re-gathering, from defilement to cleansing, and God will remove their disgrace and bring great glory to them again and to His name. Now, let me say this: this prophecy can only be fulfilled in a millennial kingdom upon the earth, it's the only possible fulfilment! You're not going to tell me that these are spiritual promises to the church? Just as the literal prophecies of judgement against Israel - where they literally fulfilled? They were! In the same way God will literally fulfil these promises to the nation of Israel in connection with the people, and the nation, and the land - their future restoration, God says, will be literally fulfilled!

So there is their future: 'The Restoration of the Land and the People' - but God goes on in chapter 37 in the story of the valley of dry bones. He speaks now of the resurrection of the nation, not just the people or the land, but that entity which is classified as a nation. In verse 3 of chapter 37 God says, as He lets Ezekiel see this valley of very many very dry bones, He asks the question: 'Ezekiel, look at them, can these bones live?'. Really He's saying: 'What do you think, Ezekiel, do you think these bones could live?'. Now what would you think? I wonder would your answer be like Peter, when the Lord told him to cast the net on the other side, and he in his boasting and his pride because he was a fisherman was telling the Lord: 'Well, you know Lord, I'm a fisherman I know what I'm talking about'? Maybe you would look at these bones and you would say: 'Look at the bones, Lord, how can these bones live? These bones cannot live'. Note Ezekiel's answer, this shows me what a man of God he is, verse 3: 'He answered, O Lord God, Thou knowest'. In other words: 'Well, if You're asking me as I can see it, I don't think it can - but, Lord, nothing is impossible with You'.

Really we're looking at the nation of Israel this very night, and we're seeing exactly what Ezekiel saw - there is no spiritual life whatsoever in them, blindness in part has happened to them. They look at these Scriptures and they cannot see what we see, by the Spirit of God, in them. They do not see their Messiah, they don't even see the prophecies of Messiah - even in chapter 53 of Isaiah's 'gospel', if you like. They don't see it! No spiritual life, but please don't make this mistake - because in biblical interpretation and theology many people believe that Israel will never ever be restored, and what they are doing is they're sharing the hopelessness that gripped Israel at this time. Israel were saying: 'Can these bones ever live? Where is the blessedness we knew? By the rivers of Babylon we sat down, and we wept when we remembered Zion'. There are theologians in the church today who would tell us: 'We remember Zion, but Zion will be no more'. Can these bones live? Well, the Lord knows, and we know - because we have the Lord's word. It's not talking about the return from Babylon, don't get that into your head - that may have been a partial fulfilment, pointing to a greater day. I'll tell you why it's only partial: because there has never been a day yet when Israel has been indwelt by the Holy Ghost of God! That is prophesied in this chapter, chapter 36 - but there has never been a day.
So, Ezekiel sees this vision. He is commanded to prophesy over the valley filled with old, dry human bones. They're scattered everywhere, and suddenly as he prophesies he hears a rattling noise all across the valley and the bones of each body come together and are attached to one another as they once had been. After he sees this wonderful sight all of a sudden muscles and flesh are formed over the bones, and skin comes over in verse 8 to cover the bones. As we look at that sight we find that the vision is not complete, the bodies aren't finished yet because they have no breath - they're not alive. So Ezekiel is commanded in verses 9 and 10: 'Say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army'.

Now I want you to note two things here: the first word of prophecy that Ezekiel gave, he spoke the word of God and after the bones had come together, the sinew covered them and the flesh and then the skin, but it was still an inanimate body without life or breath. After the first word of God there was no spiritual life in the body. Now the Hebrew word 'ruach', for breath or wind, is the same word for spirit. It's exactly the same. It wasn't until the next time Ezekiel spoke the word of God, prophesied to the wind, that the wind came into the bodies. Now what am I saying? I'm saying this: the first prophecy speaks of restoration of a people who are spiritually dead. The bones are coming together, the sinew on the bones, the muscles, the flesh and the skin - they are coming together as a nation, you can see that, but there's no spiritual ruach, Spirit of God, in them! The second speaks of their regeneration, when the Holy Ghost of God will come and the spirit, the breath, the wind will be in the nation of Israel, and they will be resurrected spiritually, and they will know their God again.

Now look at verse 12 for a moment: 'Therefore, Ezekiel, prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel'. The Jews, he says, will be brought out of the graves of the Gentile nations where they have been scattered. That's speaking of the nation's hopelessness. You're looking at the valley of dry bones, and you think: 'There's no hope of these people ever living' - but God says: 'The graves that you're in, the death that you think prevails in Israel, I'm going to bring you out of the graves of the Gentile nations. I'm going to bring you back from your worldwide dispersion'. We haven't time to look at it, but in Deuteronomy 28 Moses prophesied that if the people did not obey the law in the land God would scatter them to the four corners of the world, and God has kept His word.

When you look at verse 62 of Deuteronomy 28 you find that God told them that there would be few in the land. It's estimated that there were six million Jews in Palestine in the time of our Lord Jesus, but it was reduced to one million in the land through deportations and dispersion - and there is God's word, Moses' word, being fulfilled. Few in the land! The accuracy of Moses' prediction is revealed in the fact that Jews have returned to their homeland, at this moment as we speak, from over 100 different nations! Indeed there's hardly a country or a nation in the world that is not represented by people, Jews, coming back to the nation. Let me say: the first word of prophecy in the vision of the valley of dry bones, I believe, has happened. It is the resurrection, politically as a nation as an entity within a geographical state of the world, of God's people - and it took place on May the 14th 1948, the day of Israel's independence when she became a modern nation. Ironically, I was finding out today, that 1948 was less than 10 years after Hitler boasted that he would build his Nazi empire on the graveyard of Israel.

Of course, you would know tonight that the nation is dead spiritually. It is a sinew, a body, the bones are together, the sinew is covering it, muscles and flesh and skin - but it's dead spiritually. But there will come a day, one day I believe soon, when our Lord Jesus Christ will return and He will speak that second word and the nation, in a day, will be saved! This is wonderful, isn't it? In verse 7 it talks about a great shaking, and after World War I there was the deliverance of Palestine - World War I really brought it about - Palestine
was delivered from Turkish rule. But that deliverance provided the shaking of the bones that we find in this valley, it resulted in the rebirth of the state of Israel and it has no equal in modern history, ever!

Verses 9 and 10 talk about when the bones came together it was like an exceeding great army, now that's speaking of a day that is yet to be. We have seen how the reforestation and the kibbutz in Israel at this moment are preparing for a great day in the millennium, so this is being prepared today. There will be an exceeding great army of people, but you look at the exceeding great army, in preparation, of Israel this very night - the ability, militarily speaking, of the nation. It was outnumbered 80 to 1 in the war of independence in 1948 - 80 to 1! In 1956 Egypt tried to reverse the humiliation of the war of independence, and Moshe Dayan in four days defeated them - and the world was amazed at the lightning speed with which the Israelis fought over the vast desert area, and against the enemy that had been equipped by the finest wares and weapons from Russia and all of Europe! In June 1967 the Arabs were defeated again in six days, and the map of our world was changed and ancient prophecies were fulfilled, and Jerusalem became an all-Jewish city after 2000 years of foreign control - God's word stands!

In verse 12 we read of how God would bring them out of the graves of the Gentiles - that's going to happen on a great scale one day, but it's happening on a great scale in preparation now. The scattered remnants of Jewish people from the far corners of the earth where they have been buried for centuries, tens of thousands, it was seen in 1948, tens of thousands of them - clad only in rags trudging across the burning Arabian desert from Yemen to Aden, their only possessions under their arm the ancient scrolls of the law that they brought from their synagogues - returning to the land that their ancestors had left 2500 years previously when Judah was taken captive that we have been reading about, and there they're returning in 1948. How far away are we from that now tonight?

Turn with me quickly, we must look at this, Isaiah 43 verse 6 - keep your finger in Ezekiel - Isaiah 43 verse 6. Bear with me now, we're thinking of the resurrection of the nation and all these people coming from the four corners of the world, God said here: 'I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth'. Now our AV reads 'to the south', which is correct - but the Hebrew word is 'taman' (sp?), and the English word for 'taman' is 'Yemen', the nation where those Jews came from who had been exiled in Babylon. It was the home of 148,000 Jews, the oldest Jewish community in the world, and they expected to be carried from Yemen to Israel by the wings of an eagle, as the children of Israel were taken from Egypt to the promised land thousands of years ago. Lo and behold, the Jewish government sent DC-4's - 130 people at a time were taken on 'eagles wings' back to Israel.

First there had been no Jew in Jerusalem, they had all been dispersed - only a handful of them in Palestine. Listen, by 1880 there was about 25,000 Jews - one way or another they got into the land. By 1914 at the beginning of World War I there were 90,000 Jews in Palestine. By 1923 there were 180,000; by 1935 - 300,000; 1937 - 430,000; 1945 - 500,000. When independence came in 1948, 650,000. After independence immigration became a flood, and the first group en masse that came into the country was 25,000 Jews who'd survived the Nazi concentration camps. Altogether 33,000 arrived during the first four months of the state of Israel in independence. On that first year of independence 204,000 came in, before three more years passed an additional 655,000 entered. By 1965 there was a total population of 2.2 million from nothing! In 1970, 3 million; 1976, 3.5 million; 1990, 4 million! Boy, did they come from the four corners!

'I will say to the north, Give them up' - every nation in the north of Europe: Czechoslovakia gave 20,000 of its surviving Jews from the war; 30,000 came from Turkey; 36,000 from Bulgaria; more than half of the Jews in Yugoslavia were imported. 'I will bring my seed from the east' - prior to independence, 87% of the Jews that were in Jerusalem and Palestine came from European countries, only about 10% from Oriental countries, but during the first year and a half of independence there was an increase of 37% of Jews from the Orient, and by 1953 it had risen to 50% of the Jews in Palestine from the east! Eight hundred Jews alone
came from Shanghai and Hong Kong. 'I will say to the north, I will say to the east, I will say to the south, Keep not back' - Jews from the Southern Arab lands. Before independence do you know how many Jews there were in the Arab lands? 900,000 Jews! Now only about 40,000, because they've all returned to the land. 'I will say to the west', God says in Isaiah. There was a virtual stampede from the west - from Egypt, from Morocco, from Tunisia, from Algeria, from Europe, from the United States of America and Latin America - thousands of Jews coming to their land. Israel spends more on immigration than on any government department apart from defence - and you can imagine that. She has the highest rate of immigration ever recorded in the world, why? Why is this? I'll tell you why: because God has said it!

During the hearing of the British Royal Commission on Palestine in 1937, David Ben-Gurion who was the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Agency for Palestine said - he answered the question 'Why?': 'The Bible is our mandate' - that's why. Israel, today, is a restored nation. She's spiritually dead, but these Scriptures will be completely fulfilled one day. It's being prepared, as we speak, for the future spiritual revival in Israel. The regeneration where God says in chapter 36 verses 24 to 29: 'I'll put a new heart in you, I'll put My Spirit in you, I'll make you a new people' - that has never ever happened before, and that is what the Lord Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about: 'Art thou a teacher in Israel and knowest not these things? Ye must be born again!

One day that second word will come, the word and the spirit that brings life, that breathed into man at creation, the word that breathed into the Apostles in inspiration, the Spirit that breathed on the disciples at the unction in the Upper Room at Pentecost for the ministry of the word of God - that sweeping spirit will come upon Israel in restoration and they will be a new nation. The restoration of the land and the people, the resurrection of the nation, and thirdly and finally: 'The Reunification of the Kingdoms'. God doesn't do things by half measures. He gets Ezekiel to do another illustration, He asks him to carve the following two words on two wooden sticks. He says: 'On the first stick you've to write 'For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions', and on the second stick you're to write 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions'.

Really these two sticks are illustrations of sceptres, of rules, of kingdoms - and they're speaking of what we saw on our map: the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom, Israel; and the Southern Kingdom, Judah. One stick has Israel on it, one stick has Judah on it. Ezekiel is told to hold both sticks together in one hand, indicating that God one day intends to unite again Palestine, which is tonight a divided kingdom. Israel has not all the land, but one day God intends to unite what the devil divided. What was divided in the days of Rehoboam, which was the beginning of their downfall, will be reunited. Not only will a dead nation receive life, but a divided kingdom will be reunited in a covenant of peace and grace. There'll be no more Ephraim and Judah, but one nation with one King and one temple - and that has never happened before! It will happen in the millennium. Boy, what a joy to know this - do you know what this is all telling us? God in Christ is reversing everything that Satan and sin has ever done! Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Do I need to say the coming of the Lord draweth nigh? Do I need to say, unconverted soul condemned in your sin, perhaps with us tonight, flee from the wrath to come? Do I need to say, believer, the night is far spent, the day is at hand, let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armour of light? I hope you would agree with me: the Lord is at hand.

Go home and watch the news, and say: 'It's all that they might know that I am the Lord'. Father, we thank Thee that as we have seen from the very outset of this great prophecy, at the very vision at the beginning, that Thou art a God who is moving in this world. Men may not perceive it, but we hope that men and women of God like Ezekiel who have been ascended by the word of God to see the revelation of God's word, that we will perceive and be able to tell the times and the seasons. Lord, no man knoweth the day, but Lord we are
very aware that God's word is standing, and before our very eyes it is being fulfilled. We pray that our loved ones will be saved, we pray that our friends will be brought into the kingdom, we pray that our church here in the Iron Hall would have a breath of that same Spirit, and that we would have the life that we need to serve in this late hour. Oh God, help us - seeing these things shall be dissolved, help us to ask ourselves tonight: what manner of people ought we to be? We thank Thee for this reassurance, and we pray that we will go with it in our hearts now, in the name of the Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.
Ezekiel 38-39

1. The Invaders' Identity
   i. Geographical Evidence
   ii. Historical Evidence
   iii. Linguistic Evidence
2. The Invaders' Allies
   i. Persia
   ii. Ethiopia
   iii. Libya
   iv. Gomer
   v. Togarmah
3. The Invaders' Intentions
4. The Invaders' Impending Doom

We're turning to Ezekiel chapter 38, Ezekiel chapter 38, and we're looking at chapter 39 also tonight - but we'll take time to read a few of the introductory verses of chapter 38. You can see some of these visuals up here on the platform - or I hope you can see some of these visuals! If you're too far back feel free to move up to the front if you want to see them, I'm sorry if you can't make them out but it's the best that I can do at the moment, and I just want to help you a little in your understanding of the word of God this evening. Now bear with me, it's a very complicated two chapters of the word of God, but God willing we'll get through it tonight and you'll be a little enlightened about the events that are beginning to take place in our world today, and events that will take place at a later date.

Verse 1 of chapter 38: "And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee. Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them. After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee. Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?"
Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes. Thus saith the Lord GOD; Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them? And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man's sword shall be against his brother. And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD”.

The theme of chapter 38 and chapter 39 is the northern invaders that will come down, as prophecy teaches in the word of God, to invade God's land of Israel. These two chapters are two of the most difficult passages of Scripture in the whole of the Bible. They are difficult, they are much debated with theologians and with prophetic scholars - but nevertheless they are two of the most important chapters in the word of God in the whole of prophetic studies, and it's important for us to take time out tonight to look at the detail held within them. Now let me just say before I begin: many, many people disagree - even pre-millennial pre-tribulation scholars that we would be, they all disagree in little intricacies within these two chapters of Scripture. But one thing is clear, and this must be made clear at the very beginning of our study this evening: as we have been going through the book of Ezekiel there are a few foundational truths that we've had to lay when we come to prophetic study.

The first thing is this: we have learnt that God has a plan for the nation of Israel. Let me say that again: God has a plan for the nation of Israel. There are some scholars that would tell us that Israel now in these chapters, chapter 38 and 39 and right up to the end of 48 at the end of this book, 'Israel' is a spiritual term signifying God's people today which is the church of Jesus Christ. Now we have learnt right throughout this book that 'Israel' has been speaking about national Israel, the judgement that God pronounced over Israel was upon national Israel and was realised upon national Israel - and that is a historical fact this evening. Now you can't move the goalposts halfway along and decide that it's no longer national Israel - it is national Israel. That is the first foundation stone that we must lay. The second thing is, not just that God has a plan for national Israel, but God has a plan also for Israel's enemies. We're going to see that in even more detail this evening, but we've seen it in recent weeks - how the enemies of Israel historically are still the enemies of Israel this very evening, and that God will judge them, He has a plan for them also - the second foundation stone. Then there is the third and the final that I want to leave with you in introduction this evening: none of these Scriptures that we are dealing with this evening have ever been fulfilled, none of them fit into any fulfilment. There are some partial fulfilsments in Ezekiel's prophecy, some have already been fulfilled and will be further fulfilled in a more literal and complete sense in another day, but these chapters do not fit into that category - none of these passages or verses have ever been fulfilled in the history of national Israel.

We believe that the Lord Jesus is coming back very soon. None of us know the day or the hour, but He is coming sooner today than He has ever done - and in these two remarkable chapters Ezekiel describes for us an invasion into Palestine by a wicked nation of the north in the latter days, in the days that are approaching
very soon. Let's look first of all at the invader's identity, the first point on your study sheet. The invader's identity is called Gog and Magog. Gog seems to be referring to the leader of this people, or this nation, Magog. So Gog is the leader and Magog is the nation and the people. Therefore the first question that raises out of these passages is: who is Magog? What is the identity of this northern nation that will come and invade Israel one day?

Now, we cannot be dogmatic about a great deal of the things that we will share together in this evening about these matters, but it would appear that we can identify this nation from the north. There are three main stepping-stones of evidence and proof that we believe we have in order to identify this nation 'Magog'. The first is geographical evidence. In three distinct places Ezekiel tells us that the invading nation will come from the north. In verse 6 of chapter 38, in verse 15, and in verse 2 of chapter 39, he tells us that this invader will be from the north. Now in the Hebrew language literally it can be translated like this: 'the uttermost part of the north'. Now what you must remember in prophetic Scriptures, and especially where the prophets - whether the major or minor prophets - are prophesying, you've got to remember that all of the geographical directions are from their standpoint. When they're talking about the north they're not standing at Portrush looking into the Atlantic Ocean! They're standing in Palestine, they're standing in Israel, and they're looking around their geographical scene as it is then.

Now, if he is taking his bearings from the homeland, a quick glance at any world map will show that there is only one place that can fulfil that prophecy of 'the uttermost part of the north', which is the literal Hebrew. Now look at this map here for a moment - I know things are very hard to see, but all I want you to see this evening is this: that little red label is Israel, the nation of Israel; that little red label is Moscow. If you go directly north to the uttermost north part above Israel, you will find Russia - and if you go any further you will find the Arctic. OK? Now, unless Ezekiel is talking about polar bears, he has to be speaking about Russia - geographically speaking. It's the only country that this possibly can be. Before we go into linguistics, people often will cry - amillennialists - saying: 'Oh, you're turning things upside-down, you're reading into things in linguistics and in the Hebrew and all sorts of things' - by this very one definition it has to be Russia. There is no other country north of Israel at the uttermost part of the globe.

That is the geographical evidence. The second part of evidence is the historical evidence. Now, if you turn with me to Genesis chapter 10 verse 2 for a moment - you remember a few weeks ago we were tracing the origins of some of the nations that are mentioned surrounding around the nation of Palestine. We're going to do that a little bit this evening - we don't have time to go into everything, but in Genesis chapter 10 and verse 1 you find the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: 'And unto them were sons born after the flood', verse 2 says, 'The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras', and it continues. You see from verse 2 that Magog, mentioned in Ezekiel, is the second son of Japheth, the son of Noah. So he is the grandson of Noah. You see Tubal and Meshech mentioned, they are the fifth and the sixth sons of Japheth.

Now there is the origin of these people, and we find that when Noah came out of the ark after the flood he, and his sons, and his sons sons, were the people who populated the earth. We are all in the lineage of Noah. Now Josephus, the first century AD historian and scholar, assures us that the descendants of Magog migrated to an area north of Palestine - historical records, he wasn't a believer, he wasn't a prophetic scholar, but he records that the descendants of Magog migrated north of Palestine. Even before Josephus wrote those words, the famous Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century BC writes that Meshech's descendants settled north of Palestine. So there you have two records: one of Josephus, and one of the famous Greek historian Herodotus. Then you have Jerome, who was an early Church Father, a prominent leader from AD 345 to AD 420, and he too declared that Magog was located north of the Caucasus Mountains - that's the Caucasian Mountains that we know in Russia. Now let me show you where they are. If you look at this, this is a similar map to this one here but it's a little bit closer in, there you have Palestine again, there you have Moscow - so
there is Russia, and Russia spans all the way over here as you can see on the other map. But those mountains that we've just spoken of go right across here, from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea. These historians - Jerome, the Church Father, is saying that Magog migrated from down here in Palestine right over these mountains, the Caucasian Mountains, and settled somewhere north of those mountains.

So, there are three historic records that tell us that the nation or the people of Magog, descended from Noah and Japheth, settled north of the Caucasian Mountains - just on that little bridge between Palestine and Asia and Russia. Josephus and other Greek writers also associate Magog with the Scythian race - the major group of the Scythian race lived also, it's recorded, in the vicinity of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea just around these mountains, in fact above those mountains. You see, it's all coming together, and they all seem to be agreeing. So it appears then, and we're concluding now tonight, that the land of Magog was located near the Black Sea, near the Caspian Sea, over the Caucasian Mountains, north of Palestine - and really what that means is, as you can see from this map and the other map, it is the lower part of what we have known in the 20th-century to be the nation of Russia. We see it geographically, we see it historically, and it's very interesting to note this evening that 'Caucasus' - which is where we get the Caucasian Mountains from - literally means 'Gog's Fort'.

Geographical evidence, historical evidence, but thirdly there is also - not that we need it - there is linguistic evidence. Classical Greek writers used to say that the people called 'Meshech' in our passage here are the Muschoi. The Assyrian records in history refer to them as the 'Mushki', and the old Russian name for Russia was the Muscovy - and you can see the similarities in these linguistic terms. Again these people were said, historically, to have migrated and to have settled in the area of Armenia. Now the area of Armenia - you see this middle bit, you're getting used to it now - it's just a wee spot, a wee tiny country, see that pink bit? That is Armenia, and you will note that Armenia is on the border of Turkey, on the border of Iran, and on the border of Russia. It's very significant strategically.

Also Greek writers have told us that Tubal was located in the central part of Turkey - look again around the same area, there you have Turkey - Tubal, historically, is in the central part of Turkey, immediately west of what we read in Ezekiel of being Togarmah. Now let me say this: linguistically it seems also that this passage indicates that Russia is the northern invader that will come down into the land of Israel. Let me quote you Dr John Walvoord, a prophetic scholar, he says: 'In Ezekiel 38 Gog is described in the American Standard Version and in the Revised Version of the Scriptures as the Prince of Rosh'. Now let me digress from Dr Walvoord for a moment: usually 'Rosh' in the Hebrew language means 'head' or means 'chief'. Over 600 times in the Hebrew Scriptures it means 'head' or it means 'chief', and that's why in the Authorised Version he's described as the chief of this particular nation - it doesn't say 'the Prince of Rosh'. The American Standard Version and the Revised Version have changed it to mean 'the Prince of Rosh' - it reads like this: 'Son of man, set thy face toward Gog, the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal'. Apparently this is a more literal rendering of the Hebrew. In other words, in the context of the language, speaking of geographical places, it would seem that it's better at this point to translate 'Rosh' not as 'chief', not as 'head', but as a people just like Meshech and Tubal.

Dr Walvoord goes on to say: 'Rosh may be the root of the modern term 'Russia'. In the study of how ancient words come into modern languages, it's quite common for the consonants to remain the same and the vowels to be changed. In the word 'Rosh' if the vowel 'o' is changed to 'u' it becomes the root of the modern word 'Russia'. In other words, the word itself seems to be an early form of the word from which the modern word 'Russia' comes from. A man called Gesenius who was a famous lexicographer studying words, and ancient words, and the origins of words, gives the assurance that this is a proper identification - that is that 'Rosh' is the early form of the word from which we get 'Russia'. The two terms also in this passage 'Meshech and Tubal' also, Dr Walvoord says, correspond to some prominent words in Russian. The term 'Meshech' is similar to the modern name 'Moscow', the term 'Tubal' is obviously similar to the name of one of the most
prominent Asiatic provinces of Russia up there in north Siberia, 'Tobolsk'. He concludes that when the evidence is put together it points to the conclusion that these terms are early references to portions of Russia. Therefore we conclude the geographical argument, the historical argument, and the linguistic argument all come together to reinforce and to support the idea that this northern invading force is the nation of Russia.

Now, people say: 'Ah, pastors in the Iron Hall have preached on this before, prophetic scholars have preached on this before - but then your bubble was burst when the USSR crumbled, when the Berlin Wall fell, when communism was made extinct! What do you make of all this prophecy about Russia invading Israel now? You have to be so careful'. Well, you do have to be so careful. Where does that leave prophecy now? Is it all up in the air? Let me say: it does not matter, it doesn't matter one iota! First of all: because God's word endures forever. We are not interpreting God's word by the historical circumstances around the world today. What God's word says will endure, and if the political and geographical situation today doesn't lend itself to fulfilling prophecy - one day it will!

The point I want to make to you this evening is that the things that God is concerned with are not the modern borders of our world today. It doesn't matter to God if a border changes here or there, it doesn't matter if a map changes from what it was 10 or 20 years ago! What God is concerned with is the ethnic people, the origin of the people who have populated these nations today. God is concerned with the ethnic descent of these nations, not what their name is, not what their map looks like, not where their border is - that's what God is speaking of. No matter whether you call it Russia, no matter whether you look at the word 'Rosh' or not, or 'Tubal' as Tobolsk, or Moscow as 'Meshech' in its original word - it doesn't matter. The fact remains that these people who were Magog, the grandson of Noah, they all migrated over the Caucasian Mountains and they are situated - whether they are in part of Turkey, whether they are over here in the Ukraine, whether they're here at the bottom of Russia, whether they're in Armenia, it doesn't matter - that ethnic people that is Magog reside there today.

Now, that is the invader's identity - I hope that's clear enough for you. The second thing is the invader's allies - it's not just Russia on her own, there's more to it in this passage of Scripture. If you look at verses 5 and 6 you will see that there are five nations who will join the Northern Confederacy during this massive invasion of Israel. They're identified in verses 5 and 6 as Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, Gomer, and all the bands of the house of Togarmah. There you have them, the names as they were in Ezekiel's time, and I believe that we today can actually equate these names - somewhat uncertainly I must say, but we can round about work out where these places are by following present-day nations as we speak.

Look at the first: Persia. Persia would seem tonight to be modern Iran - and there's modern Iran there in the orange. It, tonight, is ruled by Islamic fundamentalists. It's building a significant military power as we speak, which includes the development of nuclear weapons - and of course, please don't forget that it has openly declared its commitment to the annihilation of the Jewish people and the Jewish state. Persia - Iran. The second nation in verse 5 is Ethiopia. Now, we tend to think of Ethiopia in Africa - and it may well be in Africa, but it's not the Ethiopia that there was a famine in in the 1980s. Biblical Ethiopia is a different nation, but it can mean the black North African nations - that could be what it is meaning. 'Cush' and 'Put' in Old Testament language can also correspond to Ethiopia. If we wanted to pick a country for it it would be the Sudan, about the middle of Africa, that would correlate to Ethiopia in the Old Testament Scriptures. Tonight, now at this very moment, Sudan in Africa is dominated by an Islamic fundamentalist government that is using brutal means - including the crucifixion of Christians - to try and establish a pure Islamic state, as we speak.

The third nation is Libya. We would know Libya - there's Egypt, and Libya is right beside Egypt, the Western neighbour of Egypt. It is also an Islamic country today. It's strongly anti-Western, it doesn't want anything to do with America, anything to do with Britain. It's also anti-Israeli, which seems to come together
with anti-American and anti-United Kingdom. Western intelligence has informed us that Libya has hired ex-Soviet and Eastern European military scientists to aid its development of her military power.

Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, and then there is Gomer. Now the nation of Gomer is a little bit less distinct in understanding who she is. The Jewish Talmud would tell us that Gomer equates to our modern day Germany, and especially East Germany. Originally, if we go far back, we find again that Gomer is also a people that migrated over these Caucasian Mountains into the part north of Palestine. So, who is Gomer? It may be that Gomer is Germany, it may be that Gomer is a part of this little southern tip of Russia, it may also be that by Ezekiel's time Gomer correlates to the central part of Turkey - just round about here beside the Black Sea and beside the Caucasian mountains - and that would fit in with everything that we're reading in the book of Ezekiel. But it may be the German race, and it may be that Gomer migrated over these mountains, through Turkey, and eventually did settle - as the Talmud said - in the nation of Germany as we know it tonight.

Then in verse 6 the final people is 'all the bands of the house of Togarmah'. Again this corresponds to southern Russia, it corresponds to the Cossacks and probably also Turkey - the rest of Turkey apart from that central part. Josephus identified it as the Phrygians who settled in Cappadocia, which is now Eastern Turkey. I hope you see it's all coming together - we can't say certainly, but we can think that these nations will be involved as Ezekiel said, and we can almost pinpoint them, this evening, to modern day nations. We can say that modern Iran will be involved in this northern invasion, some black African nations will be involved, Libya will be involved, Gomer will be involved - whether it be Germany or Turkey - Togarmah, certainly Turkey will be involved in one way or another. As we speak, the present government of Turkey is threatened by Islamic fundamentalists who are wanting to make Turkey into a nation like Iran. If this comes about, that the Islamic fundamentalists come to government in Turkey, it means that every single nation that we have listed in this passage will be led by Islamic fundamentalists that hate Israel to the core!

Now look at verse 10 of chapter 38; 'Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages', that is Israel, 'I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates'. Russia will think an evil thought, they will believe that it's very straightforward: 'Israel is at peace, there's no walls around the city protecting her. So we will just go in and we will plunder'. Now as we read down this passage we will find, verse 13, that there are nations that will rise up and will oppose Russia's invading of Israel. Sheba, verse 13, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish - they will aggravate and antagonise the northern peoples coming down to invade. In other words, they will befriend the Jews, they will make an alliance with the Jewish people.

Now we ask the question: who is Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish? Well, we think that Sheba and Dedan are probably Arab peoples who are not sympathetic with the rest of the Arab nations, but for some reason - we don't know why - become sympathetic to the Israeli cause. But this is very interesting: who are the merchants of Tarshish? For, as we look at this word 'Tarshish' we find that in Scripture it is identified as far West Europe. It includes the nation of Spain, part of the nation of Spain, but as we look into history and we look into etymology - which is the study of words - we find that 'Tarshish' also signifies, believe it or not, the British Isles! You might think that's astounding, but we know from Phoenician records that they obtained tin from Tarshish. The Latin name 'Britannia' means 'the land of tin'. It would all fit very cosily together, wouldn't it? Although Britain, their history has not be squeaky clean with regards to Israel, they have been sympathetic and they had a hand in the independence of Israel the state in 1948. All these things would seem to mirror the events that are taking place even today.

So there you have the invader's allies. Thirdly you have in this passage the invader's intentions. You might ask the question: 'Why?'. It appears quite clearly that Russia will lead this future invasion of northern nations into Israel that is foretold in these two chapters, but why would Russia want to do this? Now there are a number of reasons, and you should jot these down if you have pen and paper with you this evening. The first
reason is anti-semitism. You may not know this, but before communism Russia was notorious for severe persecution of the Jews. Now, while communism was in the Soviet Union it sort of had an iron grip upon the people by the government and by the establishment and the nation, and it suppressed the outward expression of hatred for the Jews. But today, as we speak, that communism has fallen, it has lost its grip - at least for a while that is, it may come back one day. But at this moment anti-semitism is being allowed in Russia and is raising its ugly head again. I read today that there are some members of a group called 'Pamyat', which is a strongly anti-Semitic organisation that wants to get rid of all Jews out of Russia - in fact it blames Jews for all the nation's problems. Some have even accused the Jews of being the source of AIDS! As a result of these ominous trends and echoes of Nazi Germany, a mass exodus of Jews have left Russia and are in Palestine this evening - right from 1990 to today, the majority of Jews have left Russia. Anti-semitism.

Another reason why they would want to invade Palestine is the desire for status. When the USSR had fallen and collapsed, they are now striving in the world with every opportunity to have status, to be a superpower, to be seen as strong in the world today. According to the Independent Intelligence Agency, officers of Armed Forces of the former Soviet Union believe that Russia can still have a superpower status - even without communism. The reason they believe it can happen - now listen carefully to this - is: if Russia will ally itself with Islamic nations against Israel. Now, maybe you don't believe that. Well, in the early history that we know of we learn that the Russian government representative in the 1990s stated that young people in their schools are being required to learn Arabic as their second language - the reason given: 'Because this government has concluded that the future of their nation lies with the Islamic nations of the world'. Is that plain enough?

Anti-semitism, getting status whatever way they can, then there is cashing in on Palestine's riches. We see this in verse 12, because the prophet speaks of these northern nations wanting to take a spoil, to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places. You see that 'taking a spoil'? If you look at our map tonight - whether it's that map or this map on the right - you will see that if Russia comes down to Israel it will have a waterway into the Mediterranean and into the Western world, it will also have a waterway across the Arabian desert, into the Persian Gulf, and right across Asia. That is one of the spoils it will have: a waterway. Then we don't need to mention oil, for when it gets into Israel it can get into the rest of the Arab nations - and it wants oil, it wants to be self-sufficient. Then, if you want to take Israel specifically, you have the Dead Sea. I don't know whether you know this, but the Dead Sea is full of mineral deposits - to such a great extent that in monetary terms it cannot be valued in today's market! It is priceless! It is saturated with chemicals, the water has untold wealth within it. It's estimated that the Dead Sea contains two billion tonnes of potassium chloride, which is potash, which you sweep along ground that is barren and it sweetens it, it enriches it, it makes it fertile soil, it makes fruit grow lavishly again. Two billion tonnes of potassium! Twenty-two billion tonnes of magnesium chloride, twelve billion tonnes of sodium chloride, six billion tonnes of calcium chloride, and in addition to all of that it has cerium, cobalt, manganese, and even gold in the Dead Sea!

Now can you understand why they'd want to invade Israel? Even more, verse 4 of chapter 38, God says: 'I will turn thee back', speaking to Russia, 'and put hooks into thy jaws'. What's that? A bait! What is the bait that God is using to bring this northern nation into His God-given nation? It is the bait of the riches and the wealth of Israel. Then another reason is to control the Middle East. You can study your history books and you will find that ancient conquerors have always known that if they could conquer Palestine they could have control into Europe, into Asia, and into Africa. That little part of your map, as you look at it tonight, that is called the 'Middle East Bridge'. Do you see the way it just bridges all of the known world? It is the very centre of the world itself, it brings together three continents - Europe, Asia, and Africa. If a conqueror could get his hands on that, he's got his hands on the world!

Then finally, prophetically speaking, the northern kingdom will want to invade Israel to challenge the authority of the antichrist. In Daniel chapter 11 verses 40 to 41 we read this: 'At the time of the end shall the
king of the south', that is Egypt, 'push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind', that is Russia, 'with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over'. It is speaking toward the antichrist, they will come to threaten the reign of the antichrist! That is the invader's intentions.

Now, that takes us to our final point, the invader's impending doom. Before we enter into the judgement of God upon this northern people, we need to ask the question: when is this going to happen? This is perhaps the most difficult question of all - the most difficult question is not 'Who are these invaders?', if it is Russia, but 'When will this take place?'. Now some very reputable scholars believe that this will happen at the end of this age. If you look over your sheet at the diagram of end time events, I'll be able to describe that a bit better to you. Some people believe that this will happen just before number 4 on your chart, which is the rapture of the church - it will happen before the church is taken out of this scene of time. Some people believe it will happen at the beginning of the tribulation, just there at number 6 on your diagram. Others believe it will happen at number 8, at the end of the tribulation period. Others believe that this is the same battle that you find at number 11, Revelation 19 also speaks of a battle of Gog and Magog - and people believe that this is the same battle.

Now, you can see tonight that it's a very complicated subject, and it's very hard to know with any certainty when it is. But there's one clue that I believe would lead us a bit closer to when this will take place. Verses 11 and 12 of chapter 38 tell us that Israel will be an unwalled city, she will be sitting in peace, there will be no threat, Israel will be living in security - whether it's a real security or only an imagined security in their mind, they will be safe as far as they are concerned. Now, that rules out the millennial reign of Christ, because these northern invaders come in - and the millennium is a peace time, there is no war that is allowed to come into the millennial reign of Christ. Micah 4 verse 3 tells us: 'Neither shall they learn war any more'. Also, look at verse 16: 'Thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days' - Russia will come and invade in the latter days. Now, in biblical terms, that is a
technical phrase referring to the tribulation period - that's the period between number 6 and number 8 on your diagram. The seven years where God will pour His wrath upon this earth, and He will judge the earth for its sin.

Now, here's the big question, here's the question that may solve this problem for us: is there any time between now, this very moment, and the return of Christ to establish His reign in the millennium - number 8 on your diagram - is there any time in between those two time periods when Israel will be at peace? Well, the answer is that there is. If you look at number 7 on your diagram you will see there that that is halfway through Daniel's 70th week. There will be a peace pact between antichrist, who will be the leader of the revived Roman Empire in Western Europe, he will make a peace pact with Israel. He will swear to them that there will be peace in Israel, he will take charge of their security - and that is the only way in which Israel can feel secure. He will promise them security. So it would seem to be that the only possible time that this battle can take place is just before number 7 on your diagram, the middle of the tribulation period - just before a great war, a great bloodshed, a great torment, and really all hell is let loose on earth.

We read about it in Matthew 24, that men and women in Palestine will flee to the mountains. Israel's security only lasts to the middle of the tribulation period - three and a half years. It would appear, therefore, that this battle begins right in the middle. So it's not the battle of Armageddon at number 8, at the end of the tribulation; it's not the final rebellion of Satan at number 11, at the end of the millennial reign of Christ - but it's something different. It's when the Jews are in safety, 'the latter days' speaks of the tribulation period - the only time in the latter days when the Jews are safe is the first half of the tribulation period, so it must be right at the middle.

After we're gone, brethren, things will move swiftly. Things are moving rapidly as we speak, but that revived Roman Empire headed by antichrist will make this peace pact with the Jews, and it will seem - after Gog and Magog is destroyed - that the antichrist will have a free reign, and he'll want to rush right down into Jerusalem, he'll want to keep his covenant with Israel. He'll discover that Gog and Magog are no more a threat to him, and he will set up himself in the Jewish temple as God, as the world dictator, and that is the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 39 tells us that that defeat of Gog and Magog is effected by the following events, and God causes them - antichrist doesn't cause them, God causes them. Verses 19 to 20 of chapter 38 tell us that there will be a mighty earthquake. Verse 21 of chapter 38 tells us that there will be a mutiny among the Russian troops, they will fight one another, in the confusion they will turn against one another - and it may be because the Russian Federation takes such a number of little lands and ethnic groups that there will be a civil war between the Russian army. Verse 22 of chapter 38 tells us that there will be a plague among the troops. Verse 22 again tells us that there will be floods, great hailstones, fire and brimstone like that on Sodom and Gomorrah. The result of the invasion is found in verse 2 of chapter 39, it says that five-sixths - of the Russian soldiers will be destroyed. Verse 4 and verses 17 to 20 say that those corpses will lie all around the mountains of Palestine, and God will begin a grisly feast as the birds of the air and the animals come and eat of that carrion.

It's similar to what will take place at Armageddon, and this battle may even lead right through - I don't know - to Armageddon. But the thing that the word of God would teach us is this: seven years will be spent burning the weapons of war, seven months will be spent burying the dead Russians - seven months burying them, seven years destroying their weapons! If this does take place right at the middle of the tribulation, that means that the destruction of these weapons will run right into the millennial reign of Christ! Where they will hammer their weapons into ploughshares. If this invasion takes place I believe, my friend, that it must take place then - I wouldn't be dogmatic about it, but that's what I feel from my studies.
Out of all of this we must not miss that God's purpose is to glorify Himself before His own people, Israel, and before the nations of the world. He says it in chapter 38 verse 16, verse 23, verse 7 of chapter 39, verse 13, verse 21 to 22 - look at them all! He says 'That they, the nations of the world, my people, and the heathen may know that I am the Lord'. Joseph Stalin said these immortal words: 'We have deposed the tsars of the earth, and we shall now dethrone the God of heaven'. Whereas God declares to him and his descendants, and to every nation of this world, in chapter 39 and verse 7 - listen to this verse: 'I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am Yahweh, the Holy One in Israel'.

Let's bow our heads together. Now, I have to say to you: if you're listening to the tape, or maybe if you're here tonight, and you're not converted - do these events not speak to your heart? Does what's going on in our world, that is pushing, pushing, pushing, toward these events - does it not speak to you? Is it not time that you sought the Saviour and were converted?

Our Father, we thank Thee for our Lord Jesus - our Saviour who will save us from the wrath of God that is to be poured out upon this world. We thank Thee that one day, when all of Israel's enemies will surround her, that He will come and His feet will stand upon Olivet's Mount, and He will reign where'er the sun doth its successive journeys run. He will reign in righteousness, our Father, and we long for that day when sin and sorrow will be no more, and when Jesus will reign. Lord, we pray as Thy people before He comes, that He may reign in our hearts, and that others may look and see within us the kingdom of God that one day will be consummated upon the earth - but they may see it in us, and they may be converted. Take us now to our homes in safety we pray, for Christ's sake. Amen.
Ezekiel chapter 40, and we hope to study through to chapter 43. I hope that you've read the chapters before you've come this evening, because we'll not have time to read them or to deal with everything within them, but it's good that you would have a basic head-knowledge of the gist of what God is saying through the prophet. We'll read chapter 40 verses 1 to 4 to begin with, and then a few verses from chapter 43. We're dealing this evening, if you haven't already guessed, with the millennial temple.

Verse 1 of chapter 40: "In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten". Just to paraphrase that a little bit: that date is the start of the preparation for the Passover - that may make it a bit easier for you to understand. "On that day, the start of the beginning of the preparation for the Passover, the city of Jerusalem was smitten, in the selfsame day the hand of the LORD was upon me, and brought me thither. In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel" - note that, underline that - "into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain", probably Mount Zion, "by which was as the frame of a city on the south. And he brought me thither, and, behold, there was a man, whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; and he stood in the gate. And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee; for to the intent that I might show them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel".

Then from verse 5, right through to the end of chapter 42, you have the description of this temple in great detail that we will look at in a few moments. I want to bring you to chapter 43 and verse 1 now. After this man that was covered in bronze as it seemed, with a measuring rod in his hand, showed Ezekiel all the extent of this millennial temple - where it would be, and all the services concerning it - he now comes in verse 1, and we see here a sight that is really a blessed sight when you recall everything that we have learnt of the judgement that has come upon Israel for their sin. Verse 1: "Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east" - that's important. "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face" - you remember the vision he saw in chapter 1, he's seeing it again. "And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east" - that's important. "So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me".

If you turn back to chapter 40 we have, in these chapters 40 through to 43, and in fact right through to the end of chapter 48, the manifestation of the glory of God. This great major prophet really is concerned,
primarily, with the theme of the glory of God - the Lord Jehovah. We learnt how, in the beginning of this book, the glory of the Lord departed from the temple because of the sin of the people. Now we've entered into the final section of this book, where is depicted for us a future restoration of the children of Israel - the national, ethnic people of God will be restored - and we're seeing it in these chapters as the glory, the Shekinah, shining glory of God returns to the temple. The chapters that we'll look at tonight, chapter 40 through to chapter 43, depicts for us a new temple. We'll be looking at that new millennial temple this evening, but later we hope again on another evening chapters 44 to 46 depict a new worship - a different type of worship that will take place within the millennial temple. Then the final chapters, 47 and 48, depict for us a new land - in fact, not a specific new land, but a new layout to the land of Israel, the tribes, where they will all be laid out - and indeed we'll see in a later week where this millennial temple will find itself in the new land of Israel.

Now these next chapters that we're looking at specifically tonight contain the details for a temple that will be erected in a future day in the city of Jerusalem. Before we begin this study let me say that there are many - and I freely admit - many difficult things about the study of the millennial temple. I don't stand here this evening and try to tell anybody that I understand everything. There are many great questions, but before we start we've got to - as we have done in previous weeks - lay our interpretive foundation. What I mean by that is: how we are looking at these passages, how we are understanding them. The reason why I say that is because there are several biblical fundamentalists, and conservative biblical scholars, who do not interpret these verses as a literal temple at a future day in the literal city of Jerusalem belonging to literal Israel. In fact there are a great deal of scholars who see it as a symbol, a prophetic symbol albeit, of the Christian church that we inhabit today. That is a very common interpretation of these verses that we'll look at tonight, but there are many others.

People make the mistake of thinking that there are only two - it's either a literal temple, or it's the church of Jesus Christ in some kind of spiritual form. There are many other interpretations, for instance some believe that this temple spoken of by Ezekiel is a memorial to the temple that was destroyed when the Babylonians came and took the land captive. We've seen that in this book, the temple was destroyed, and they think that this description is some kind of memorial to a temple that has now been destroyed. There is a great problem with that - first of all because of the prophetic nature of these verses and chapters that indicate that it seems that there will be a literal temple one day. More than that: Ezekiel didn't need to make a memorial for Solomon's temple that had been destroyed, because the book of Kings - 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles - do just that, so why would the Holy Spirit do it again?

There are others who believe that this temple is the temple that was built after captivity, not Solomon's one that was destroyed but Zerubbabel's one that was built after the captivity - that great temple. But we read, and we have learnt in the book of Haggai, that the people wept because the glory of the first house was better than this one. It speaks that the glory of the latter house would be greater than the former, in other words that there was another temple coming, one day, that would be greater than all of these other temples. The main fact that it cannot be the temple that was rebuilt after captivity is the fact that there are more differences between Ezekiel's temple here than there are similarities between it and the temple after captivity. Therefore some get around it by saying: 'Well, this is the temple they should have built. This is the way the temple should have been built, but they failed to do it'. The greatest problem with that is primarily this: that means that God's prophecy through Ezekiel has been unfulfilled, really God's prophecy has failed! We can't go down that road, obviously.

Of course, as I've already said, others say that these are the spiritual blessings of God's church. Let's analyse that for a minute. That cannot - as far as I can see - be the case, simply because it does not explain the symbolism that we find within this passage. If it was representing the church, it's very strange that it never mentions the Day of Atonement that is the type of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. It's very
funny that it doesn't represent the Feast of Weeks that is also typical and relational to the church of Jesus Christ. It's very strange that it doesn't outline in any way the ministry of the Great High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, that the whole book of Hebrews has as a theme - how He carries out His ministry. You would think that all of those three things, at least, would be primary main themes if it was a future vision of the church of Jesus Christ, but none of those things are within this temple. More than that: I think we would have to go back in time, and we'll have to go back into our last Bible Study which was the book of Ephesians, and we would have to say to Paul: 'I'm sorry Paul, but you were wrong, you got it wrong - the revelation of the church, it wasn't given to you first, it was given to Ezekiel'. The mystery of the church isn't really a mystery, we would have to change verses in the book of Ephesians because it was shown to Ezekiel first. We learnt that a mystery was something that had been hidden beforetimes, and now had been revealed - well, Paul, it was revealed to Ezekiel, you got it wrong!

So you see, I hope, that it has to be - surely it has to be - a literal temple. The sad thing, as I've been studying this subject for some time now, is that even some pre-millennial dispensationalists do not agree that this is a literal temple. It fails me to see how we can interpret the book of Ezekiel up to now absolutely literally - all of Israel's sin, all of Israel's judgement, all of Israel's destruction - and all of a sudden we change the goalposts, and we spiritualise it near the end. But more than that, and here is the key reason I believe it has to be a literal temple: the descriptions, the specifications, the measurements, of this temple can only mean that it's going to be literal. They're so exhaustive that you can actually make a sketch or a diagram of it, as you can of all the temples that have ever been built in Israel. In fact, F. Gardner in Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, he succeeds himself in sketching out a diagram and a layout of the millennial temple - yet all through his commentary and his prose he denies that it is possible to build one. Yet he is able to make a sketch of it! Because of that one writer has said: 'If an uninspired commentator can make some sense out of an architectural plan, doubtless the future builders working under divine guidance should have no trouble putting up the building themselves'.

These things are difficult to understand. If you read Exodus chapter 20 and the following chapters, you will find that they're no more difficult to understand than the tabernacle was. We find it difficult because it hasn't been seen yet by human eyes, and we find it difficult to understand. But I want us just for a few moments, and we've a lot to get through tonight, I want us to take a look at all the temples of the Bible to understand a little bit the significance of this millennial temple and where it fits in. This millennial temple is the last of seven - seven is a significant number, as you know, in scripture, completeness and perfection - it is the last of seven temples within the word of God.

The first temple is the tabernacle, if you like, in Exodus chapter 40 and following. It was from 1500 BC to 100 BC - and I'm sure you're familiar with that tabernacle in the wilderness where the people of God worshipped God when they were in the wilderness going to the Promised Land. Then the second temple is the temple of Solomon, that you find described in 1 Kings 5 and through to chapter 8, it's from 1000 BC to 586 BC - we know all about that, the beauty of Solomon's temple, the great trouble and money and expense and time that went into it. Then the third temple is the temple of Zerubbabel, that was the temple built after Solomon's temple was destroyed, in the captivity that we're speaking of, and then Zerubbabel built this new temple and that same temple - Zerubbabel's temple - was, if you like, fixed by King Herod, it was the same temple that King Herod inhabited and King Herod built. So, you find Zerubbabel's temple in Ezra chapter 6, and the same temple in John chapter 2 that the Lord Jesus Christ would have gone to. It was the same temple that was destroyed in 70 AD - it was the temple that the Lord went through and turned over the moneychangers and so on.

The fourth temple that we find in the Bible is the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. You remember He said: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again', and He spoke concerning His body. We know that, and that temple was from 4 BC through to 30 AD, when He died at Calvary at 33 years of age. The fifth
temple is the spiritual temple of the church of Jesus Christ, it is the temple that we are today. It is the temple of God, in other words where God dwells, from Pentecost where the church was formed in Acts chapter 2 right through to the rapture, when the church will be taken out of this scene of time and translated to glory. That temple is described as the whole church of Jesus Christ, every single believer. In Ephesians 2:21 Paul describes it as: 'Living stones fitly joined together as a temple of God'. So it describes first of all the whole church, but we find in 1 Corinthians 3 verses 16 and 17 where Paul is speaking of sin coming into the church, that the temple of God, that spiritual temple of the church today, is also the local church. He calls that local church in Corinth: 'Ye are the temple of the Holy Spirit'. So, it is the whole worldwide universal church, it can also refer to the local church, and as we go further into Corinthians - chapter 6 and verse 19 - we find that it can also apply to the individual Christian. 'Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit'. Three ways that we can describe this spiritual temple today that the Lord dwells in.

But then the sixth temple, and it's important not to confuse this one with the millennial temple that we're looking at tonight, the sixth temple is the tribulational temple. I believe that that is the temple spoken of in Revelation chapter 11, it is the temple where antichrist will set himself up as God, to be worshipped as God, and to rule as God. It is the temple in which will take place the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel and by our Lord Jesus Christ. There are no drawings, there are no descriptions of this temple, but as we will see in just a moment this temple is already being prepared in Jerusalem as we speak. It will take place between the rapture of the church and the battle of Armageddon. Then there is the millennial temple spoken of here, chapters 40 through to 48, spoken of also - this is not the only book that speaks of it - it's spoken of by the prophet Joel in chapter 3; Isaiah chapter 2, chapter 60; Daniel chapter 9; and Haggai chapter 2.

I want you to just see how these things are coming to pass. We are this spiritual temple, the fifth temple. There are two more temples to be built as yet, and the sixth - the tribulational temple - at this moment is being prepared. I want you to watch just a clip now of a video. Elwood McQuaid (sp?), is the preacher or the speaker if you like, it's from the Friends of Israel, and I think that you'll find it very interesting as you see what is going on:

[Begin transcript of video]

Elwood McQuaid: "The subject of the temple is a troublesome topic for major elements in the Jewish community. Liberal Jews view the temple, with its animal sacrifices, as something of a national embarrassment. For many Orthodox Jews, however, the absence of the temple leaves them without a true sacrifice or a fulfilling worship experience. Earlier we walked along the brow of Mount Moriah, now I have the privilege of standing on the exact spot where Israel's ancient temples once stood. Of course the artefacts from those temples are many feet below us here on this level, however there is no doubt in competent scholars minds that this is actually where the Jewish people from all over the world came in ancient days to worship Jehovah. This rabbinic tunnel is adjacent to the Western Wall, many feet below street level. The tunnel continues until it reaches the Via Dolorosa. Facing east is an ancient entrance to the Temple Mount, known as Warren's Gate, it was here in 1981 that Rabbis Goren and Getz began excavating in search of the Ark of the Covenant. Before they were able to complete their search the entrance was sealed by Muslim and Israeli authorities. However, the rabbis remain firm in their conviction that the Ark is buried in a protected vault nearby. Many people are interested in the location of the Ark because to them it represents the very presence and power of God.

"In addition to those who are diligently searching for temple artefacts and remains from the past, others are preparing to build a new temple. Their determination would compare to that of Zerubbabel of old. Today, overlooking the Western Wall, is a room which some hope will play an important role as part of the new temple. When Rabbi Goren constructed this room, what did he envision for this room to represent?"
Elwood McQuaid: "That's quite a vision! There is no question about the fact that there is a rising of Messianic expectancy among grass-roots people in Israel today. This is reflected not only by what we see here, but by other groups who are preparing independently on their own account. The Temple Institute, which is not far from where we are today, is preparing implements for sacrificial worship, garments for the priests, and other things that pertain to worship at the new temple. Explain to us, would you please, the objectives of the Temple Institute".

Interviewee: "Well, the Temple Institute really was founded with a unique goal in mind, and that is to try to raise the consciousness and awareness of people as much as possible towards the central role that the holy temple plays in the life of mankind, and to actually try to do as much as possible about building the temple in our time".

Elwood McQuaid: "Now, you believe that God has instructed you or led you to do this. What actually are you involved in? What actually are you doing in a physical way?"

Interviewee: "What we are doing at this point, which is most remarkable actually, is the restoration of the vessels that can actually be used in the temple. They're made from the original material, whether it's gold, copper, silver etc. - and so really it's the first time that these things can be seen on the face of the earth for 2000 years, and they're ready for the resumption of the service of the temple. This is actually considered, like, the first stage of building the temple itself".

Elwood McQuaid: "There is another group called 'The Faithful of the Temple Mount' who have actually prepared a cornerstone for rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. So we can conclude that, despite overwhelming political and religious opposition, there is still a flurry of anticipation and activity going on right now in preparation for a new temple on Mount Moriah. But who are these groups that want to rebuild the temple? What is their motivation? For the most part they are Jewish people who promote strict adherence to the Old Testament Mosaic law. Their motivation is simple: without the temple and the sacrificial system, they believe there is no way for them to atone for their sins. Their entire belief system requires the existence of the temple".

[End transcript of video]

These things are coming to pass. You noticed how that Jewish gentleman in the Sanhedrin, the place where they want to hold the Sanhedrin, said that this was for the building of the third temple. Well, obviously they wouldn't recognise the tabernacle as the first temple, they don't recognise this temple that we are that the Holy Ghost inhabits today, for them it is the third temple - for us it will be the sixth, the tribulational temple.

Now, we want to look at the millennial temple. That temple will be destroyed when the Lord Jesus comes again to the Mount of Olives for Israel, then a new temple will be built - the millennial temple, and that's what you have on the back of your sheet, if you look at it, this evening. First of all, if you just turn it over to that diagram, but if you also look at verses 1 to 4 in chapter 40 you will see that there depicted for us is the man with the measuring rod. Ezekiel is given the vision of the city of Jerusalem - that's important, this is not the church - he gets a vision of the city of Jerusalem. He sees a new temple, it's in the 14th year after"
Jerusalem was captured and Ezekiel is taken up in visions and set on a very high mountain - probably Mount Zion - and he is shown the city and the temple by a man whose appearance is like bronze, probably an angel. He is told to fix his eyes and his mind on everything he sees, and to declare it to the house of Israel.

Now, please note: it is Jerusalem, it is Israel, it is Mount Zion. This is the earth. The Holy Ghost is speaking to us about the earth. It is different than the new Jerusalem that you find in Revelation 21, it is not the same. The new Jerusalem will be our eternal home, and indeed for all believers, in a new heaven and in a new earth - that is the eternal state, that is after the thousand year reign of Christ. This has got nothing to do with it, this millennial temple. John tells us of that eternal state, the new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem - he says: 'I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it'. There is no temple there, but here is a temple. We'll not need a temple in heaven, but there will be a temple on earth during the millennial reign of Christ specifically for the Jewish people. Now that's a good tip in expositing the word of God, and we saw it yesterday as we were looking at 'The Barren Womb and the Virgin Birth'. We saw that whenever scripture usually speaks of the earth, it is in relation to Israel, but when it speaks of heaven it is in relation to the church of Jesus Christ - we are a heavenly people, Israel is God's earthly people.
So, there is the man with the measuring rod - and then he goes in verse 5 through to 47, your second point, he measures the outer and the inner courts. First of all he speaks, in verses 5 through to 16, of the east gate of the outer court. If you look - if Paul would put up the second overhead, that was the wrong one I put up there, sorry Paul - and you look at the back of your diagram - by the way, I got rid of my old stick and somebody out of the Royal Victoria Hospital lent me this! He starts here, if you can see it, at the bottom and that is east - if you look at your diagram you have North, South, East and West - but the gate, the very front of the temple is facing east. The man with the measuring rod starts to measure there at the east gate, you can see that clearly in verse 5. With this gate the whole architectural description of the temple begins, and first he starts to describe the wall all the way round the outer court of the temple.

Verse 5, that's where he begins, and then he speaks of the east gate of the outer court, and he begins - see this east gate here? - he begins to describe this in great detail. Now, if Paul would put up number one, this is a blown up form of the east gate that he describes. Let's read together these facts, look at verse 6: 'Then came he unto the gate which looketh toward the east, and went up the stairs', you can see the stairs there, 'and measured the threshold of the gate', that's the threshold there, the threshold of the gate. He measured it, and then every little chamber, verse 7: 'Was one reed long', those little chambers, this is still the gate of this millennial temple as you can see from your diagram. He went on to the porch and the gate with one reed, there's the porch there entering into the temple, and he measures it too. 'He measured also the porch of the gate within, one reed. Then measured he the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and the posts thereof, two cubits; and the porch of the gate was inward'. So in between these little alcoves these are like pillars, and we'll see later that there will be set on these pillars, palm trees - and this is only the gate of the millennial temple.

'He measures', verse 11, 'the breadth of the entry of the gate, ten cubits; and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits. The space also before the little chambers was one cubit', and so on and so on. He measures the gate from the roof of one little chamber to the roof of another, he measures the post, he measures absolutely everything - verse 16, even the little windows. You see 'W' here? The alcoves, these little windows, God even measures these for Ezekiel, the arches around them and all the intricacies of it. He says at the end of verse 16 that there will be palm trees on these posts. So there you have the outer court and the east gate into that court.

He begins then to describe the outer court, now you can see it written on your diagram: this is the outer court, and this is the inner court, and this is the temple here itself. He starts to describe not just the gate but the outer court. It's probable that this ground will be covered in a mosaic. The temple of Solomon was covered in a mosaic, the king's palace in Shushan that we read of in the book of Esther was also covered in mosaic, and it seemed to be the practice of the day. Round here in verse 17, the second part, it tells us that there are 30 chambers all around this outer court reserved, probably, for storage - we don't really know what they will be used for, but you can see the size of this thing. Then he talks about the other two gates, these gates - the North and the South gates, which are identical to the east gate. He gives us a really detailed figure of it all.

Then he speaks of the inner court - here we are, the inner court, and there are three gates there the same: East, and North, and South. He gives us a detailed description of those in verses 28 through to 37. Then he talks in verses 38 through to 43 about the equipments that will be used in this temple, equipment for sacrifice. He tells us that in this vestibule there will be eight tables - that's the northern gate, and in the northern vestibule there will be eight tables for animal sacrifice, and also there will be four tables hewn out of stone that will be used for burnt offerings, and on those tables will be instruments to sacrifice and to pull these animals apart. In verses 44 through to 47 we find that he speaks of chambers for the priests, you can see it 'PC' on your diagram. These are specific chambers for the priests, some of the priests will perform the sacrifices, some of the priests will praise God and will have various other occupations within the temple.

Then he speaks in verses 48 and 49 of the vestibule of the temple and the inner court, this part here - the entrance to the temple. He describes it in great detail, he talks about pillars that remind us of what it was like
in Solomon's temple, and those pillars were even named: Jachin and Boaz were the names of them, 1 Kings chapter 7. Chapter 40, really, we haven't even entered chapter 41, but if you to get this in your mind - you'll never be able to remember all those facts - but chapter 40 is to do with the surrounding area, he hasn't even touched the temple yet, that's chapters 41 and 42. This is only the inner court he's talking about, and the outer court - he takes a whole chapter to deal with this in detail. Then we come to chapter 41 which details the temple itself. Now the question that I want you to ask yourself and all biblical scholars when you look at the intricate detail of everything about the inner and the outer courts is: if this is only spiritual, why all the detail? What's the point of it all? And then, if it's typology, what does it stand for? Can you tell me what this alcove, what this little chamber and storage room, what it stands for in the church of Jesus Christ? It cannot be an allegorical depiction of the church!

As I've been thinking and studying this, it's ironic to me that a-millennialists, people who don't believe in a literal millennial reign of Christ on the earth, don't believe in this temple, they think we are the only temple that there will ever be again - these are people, commendably, that are leading defenders and advocates and exponents of expository exegetical preaching, in other words going down the word of God and asking what it means. But yet, when it comes to these passages in Ezekiel, they pass over it all as allegory - there's no explanation for any of it, nobody ever tells us what these things mean. They just say: 'Oh, it's the church of Jesus Christ, that's it'. But why all the detail? I'll tell you why all the detail: because this temple will be built, specifically to the specifications that God has given in the word of God. I'll tell you why: because Moses was told with regards to the temple, in Exodus chapter 25 verse 40: 'Look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed Ezekiel on the mount'.

So let's look at the temple building, the third point on your outline - the actual temple. This is it here, and if Paul would put up the third transparency there for a moment. Chapter 41 and verses 1 through to 4 describe the sanctuary - this main part here, forget about all this round here, the sanctuary, this middle part, and the most holy place. It is a direct replica of Solomon's temple, to a tee, everything in it, but also in the tabernacle you would know that there's the main sanctuary, the holy place, and the holiest place of all - it's separated into two compartments. It's twice as large as the tabernacle was in the wilderness, and the man with the rod in his hand brings Ezekiel into the sanctuary and there he does the same: he measures everything out. But listen: only the bronze man goes into the holiest place of all, Ezekiel is left outside.

If you read right through you find described in verses 5 to 11 these side chambers, all of them. As we read on we find - you can't see it in this diagram, but if there was a three-dimensional diagram you would see that there are three storeys of these little chambers. So multiply them by three up on top of one another, and you get an idea of the size of this thing. They will increase, the Bible says, in size as they ascend - verse 7 tells us that. It says - if you put on the second one there Paul - if you look at the back of your outline, there is a building here at the back of the temple that we don't know what it's going to be used for - we haven't a clue, it doesn't say, but it's a massive building as you can see and we don't know what it's for. It's facing west, it's 70 by 90 cubits, which is about 122 by 157 feet as you can see in your diagram - we don't know what it's for.

Then Ezekiel goes into verse 15 through to 26, and he describes for us the decoration of this temple and the furniture that will be in the temple. If you read carefully, we don't have time to go over it tonight, but there are two significant things that he mentions. One: cherubim, and two: palm trees. This temple, internally, is decorated by cherubim everywhere, and palm trees everywhere. The reason being, we have learnt already as we've gazed at cherubim in recent days, that cherubim speak of the righteous government and holiness of Almighty God. Palm trees in scripture, generally, represent victory and righteousness. So you can see the two coming together: God's holy rule, which means victory and righteousness upon the earth. The cherubim are described as having faces: one of a young lion, and one of the face of a man - now we know that they have the face of an ox and the face of an eagle as well, but the only two that are described here are the young
lion and the face of a man. I believe that that is specifically referring to the humanity of Christ as Messiah, and His Kingship in Israel as He sits on the throne during this millennial reign. The lion speaks of the King, and the man speaks of His humanity.

The specific thing that Ezekiel says is that this cherubim is facing the palm trees. In other words, there's a significance that the Lord Jesus Christ's humanity and His divine Messiahship in Israel have brought righteousness and victory to reign upon the earth. The angel measures it in verses 15 to 20, he measures the whole thing. His measurement of it - we don't want to go into the detail of it - his measurement of it would lead us to believe that Mount Moriah, at this moment, this temple couldn't sit on it - it's far too big! A lot of the scholars therefore say: 'Well, there you go, it's not a real temple at all, it's a spiritual temple'. But we must turn then, we haven't time but I'll read it to you, to Zechariah 14 verse 10 where it says: 'All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem'. Some topographic event will take place that will flatten the land, the word of God teaches it, that will enable this temple to be built on Mount Moriah.

He describes again the altar, he tells us - there it is there on your diagram - that it is made of wood. The angel describes it as the table that is before the Lord, and in our next study we will look at why there is an altar in the millennial temple - you might think: 'I thought all sacrifices were finished for ever?', you would maybe understand the book of Hebrews to teach that, but we'll look at that in our next study. Then he goes on and he talks about two doors in the temple here, at the very entrance of the main building, and he speaks of these two doors being of two panels each also carved with cherubim and palm trees - victory, and the righteous holiness of God. This vestibule here is to be covered over by a wooden canopy. It's a beautiful building, but these are details that I have brought to you not to load your memory, or overload your memory, but simply to bring to you how detailed this is - it must be a literal building!

But there is something more than that I want to bring to your attention tonight, and it's this: this building is unique. It is different to any other temple that has ever been built. There are several articles and objects that are present in Moses' temple, in Solomon's temple, in Herod's temple, that are absent from the millennial temple. I want you to look at your diagram and see that. There is no veil between the holy place and the holiest place of all - there's no veil mentioned in this temple. Why? Because through Christ at Calvary, there in those hours when He cried: 'Finished!', the veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, 'Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent'. That's why there's no veil - hallelujah! It will never reappear, isn't that wonderful? There will never be separation between man and God, redeemed man, any more. There will be no barrier to keep man from the glory of God, but the way is open that we can go through with boldness, without any fear, into the very presence of God.

The furniture of this temple, if we could blow it up even more - we can't do that - but if you remember the tabernacle, I'm sure you've studied it, you would see a lot of pieces of furniture. You see the furniture and the implements and the candlesticks that's already being prepared for the tribulational temple, you don't have any of these in here. You don't have the table of shewbread which speaks of the Bread of God, why? It's not needed! We have the Living Bread! Israel will realise their Living Bread, and He will be there, they'll not need a type of Him, He will be in their midst! There's no lampstands any more, they're not needed because He is the Light of the world, and He Himself personally will shine forth over all the earth. Look at the holiest place of all, there's no Ark of the Covenant, there's no physical Ark - why? It's unnecessary because the actual Shekinah glory of God Himself, He Himself, will hover over all the earth the word of God says. His glory cloud that was once in the temple will be there again, but over all the earth - and you don't need an Ark when the Lord Jesus Christ has fulfilled it! It's only a type of Him. Fifthly, there is not one mention within this whole depiction of this temple of a High Priest. Why? Why? 'Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession' - that's why. He will be their High Priest!
This has been a blessing to me. Look at chapter 44, I know we're going out of our remit tonight, but bear with me, I want to deal with this in the time that we have. Ezekiel 44 and verses 1 and 2: 'He brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut' - note that, underline it. 'Then said the LORD unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the LORD, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut'. You see this gate down at the bottom, which is the main gate, the natural entrance which is on the east? God says, in chapter 44 verses 1 and 2: 'That gate has to be shut'. 'That gate is shut', God says, 'because that's the gate that God comes through'. Now, what is He talking about? This is the gate, probably, through which the Lord Jesus Christ will enter this temple. We'll look at it a little bit later, but as a mark of respect in ancient lands - especially to eastern kings - no person was ever allowed to enter into a temple or into a palace by the same gate that the king went through. That gate will be closed, let me remind you of something else - turn with me to chapter 10, we're going back on a study we did several weeks ago. Chapter 10 and verses 18 and 19, remember the glory left the temple? 'Then the glory', verse 18, 'of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them', and so on and so on, 'and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above'. The glory left the temple, and what God is saying here - listen: 'That is the gate that I left the temple from, and that is the gate that I will return to the temple in, and I want you to seal up that gate because I will never leave you again!'. Isn't that beautiful?

We see fourthly, your forth point, the return of the glory of the Lord. Now I want to bring this all together, and please give me the time - will you give me the time tonight to do this in about 5 or 10 minutes? Here we have the glory departing, you have it in chapter 11:23 as well, and you see that it moved to the threshold of the temple, it moved from the threshold to the Mount of Olives, and then eventually it left the whole nation of Israel. I don't know whether you can remember - turn with me for a moment to chapter 21 of Matthew's gospel, verse 12. You remember the Lord, angry at what they were doing in the temple, it says: 'Jesus went into the temple of God', that's Herod's temple which was Zerubbabel's, 'and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves'. Verse 17: 'And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there' - note that.

The Lord was rejected by His own people, and when He was rejected in His own temple the Bible says that He wrecked the place and then He left! And I believe He left by these gates, for if you look - and before I asked Arthur Carnigan this tonight I already believed this, so it's not because of what he told me. That's the east gate there of the old temple that the Lord left, that is the gate that is blocked up at this moment that the Lord Jesus will return through at His second coming. The Mount of Olives is down here in the piano somewhere! Bethphage is at the top, and over there is Bethany - and it says He left the temple and went to Bethany, and to my mind the most natural exit He would have went through was the eastern gate. That gate is closed up tonight, but that gate will be opened one day for the Lord Jesus returning, and it will be closed up for ever for He'll never leave His people again. More than that, go to chapter 23 verse 37 of Matthew's gospel - and remember this is the gospel of the Kingdom - He stands, where is He standing when He says this? Where's He standing? The Mount of Olives. Where did His Shekinah leave? It went out the east gate. Where did it rest? The Mount of Olives. 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'.

Do you see it? He left! He went to the Mount of Olives and He left them desolate! And they are desolate today! 'But a day will come', the Lord says, 'when I will come in, the Shekinah glory' - and the Shekinah glory today is our Lord Jesus Christ, and He will enter the temple for good, and the doors will be shut and He
will be with His people as Messiah forever. Look at verse 6 of Ezekiel 43 - verses 6 to 9, it says He will dwell forever in the midst of His people. No more, He says, will you practice harlotry and idolatry and the abominations in My house, the house of the Lord. Here's the key, here's the reason why the Lord will do it, verse 10 of 43: 'Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern'. 'They will be ashamed that they have rejected My Son. They will look upon Him whom they have pierced, the One who was rejected in the house of His friends, and they will be ashamed' - but their glory will come again. They will see the pattern and the design and the arrangement of the new temple, and they will repent, and they will be given new hope in the Lord Jesus, when they see His face they will repent.

The poet said:

"'Tis the look that melted Peter,
'Tis that face that Stephen saw,
'Tis the heart that wept with Mary,
Can alone from idols draw'.

It came from the east, that glory came from the east where it left. Ezekiel saw it now, as he saw it beside the River Chebar, he fell on his face as he did at the River Chebar, and it says that the glory - chapter 43 - the glory filled the temple as it filled the tabernacle, it filled this temple as it did in Solomon's temple, and it stayed there. Why did it fill the temple? How did it fill the temple? Listen: that glory, the Lord Jesus, will enter through the eastern gate, enter through the eastern door of the temple, enter into the temple, for He is the brightness and the express image of God's person! What glory! That will be a centre for the King of Glory, Isaiah says: 'It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem'.

Let me put your mind back just for one moment: where are these people? They're in a concentration camp beside the River Chebar in Babylon. Their city has been burnt down, they've been taken captive, their present temple is destroyed - but Ezekiel comes to them and brings them a message of good news. I couldn't help think today that this is like the book of Revelation to the church in the New Testament. Persecuted Christians, downhearted, being slain, and John comes with a revelation of Jesus Christ from God's Holy Spirit, and he tells them: 'Look up! When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh'. We can look up like Israel is going to look up one day!

My friend, what are you going through tonight? What are you going through? Look up, the best is yet to be! My friend, listen to what Paul said to Timothy, listen: 'If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him' - reign here! - 'but if we deny him, he also will deny us'. He's a wonderful Saviour, isn't He? I don't know about you, but from my studies today it has drawn worship out of my cold heart to this wonderful Redeemer and Christ.

O our Father, we thank Thee for the plan of salvation - that we have been engrafted into this blessing through grace, people that were not a people are the spiritual people and temple of God. Lord, it is a question that we must ask: if we are Thy temple today, how much of this great Shekinah is shining in us? Lord, we thank Thee that there is a day to come when Israel again will know Thy glory in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, and the Lord Jesus will come and enter that gate and it will be shut for evermore. There will never be another fall, our Father, there will never be another curse - Jesus shall reign, hallelujah! Lord, we look forward to that.
day, with birth pangs our bodies and this planet cries out for its redemption. We thank Thee, like others around us, we are not without hope - for we have the hope of the word of God, and we say: 'Even so, come Lord Jesus'. Amen.
Ezekiel - Chapter 23

"Temple Worship In The Millennium"

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Now we're turning to Ezekiel chapter 43. You'll remember on our last Monday night before the break, before the Christmas holidays and the New Year holidays, we were looking in some depth at the new millennial temple that will be built in Jerusalem in the thousand year reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. We quite hurriedly looked through that, and if you want to know a bit more - there's probably quite a lot that you missed that evening - why not get the tape and the study notes if you weren't here, and the boys up in the room will be glad to facilitate you in that way. I'll just put this up on the board tonight [diagram of Millennial Temple from previous study] so that you can be refreshed, perhaps you weren't here as we looked at the temple.

We're looking this evening at "Temple Worship in the Millennium", the worship that will be going on in the temple. This will refresh your mind, and some of the things that we'll be talking about we'll be able to point out to you on this diagram. We're not going to do any reading as such, but we'll just look at a few verses from verse 13 on of chapter 43 to get the context. We'll be looking right through to chapter 46 right to the end. "And these are the measures", verse 13, "of the altar after the cubits" - now you'll remember in the last study that we were taking we looked specifically at the building, the outer court, the inner court, and the actual building of the new millennial temple. We noted a number of the furniture that was around this temple, and we noted some that were not there and some that are there. One of the very significant things that we have just reached in verse 13, and the reason why we've left it today, is because it's one of the central features of the worship in the millennial temple - and that is the brazen altar.

There are many things that are not in this millennial temple, but one thing that there is - specifically the Holy Spirit tells us - is an altar. Verse 13 tells us: "The cubit is a cubit and an hand breadth; even the bottom shall be a cubit", and so on, and all the details of this great altar are laid down. Then we go through the ordinance of how that altar is to be consecrated in the rest of the chapter. If you cast your mind back for just one moment, you will remember that we have been studying right through the whole book of Ezekiel, and the theme of Ezekiel is the glory of God. First of all, how the glory of God rested with His people, Israel. The specific place that it rested was over the mercy seat, that is above the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, in the tabernacle in the book of Exodus, and then in the temple later on in the Old Testament. But the book of Ezekiel is the story of how the glory had departed - Ichabod, the glory had gone because of the people's sin. We've seen in recent chapters that the sin of the nation of Israel, specifically the city of Jerusalem and the leaders of the people, was gradually creeping into the very holiest place of all, the temple of Almighty God.
We looked in weeks gone by at the awful abominations that were taking place right in the very premises of God's holy temple. Now, because of that, God removed His glory - and that is what the book of Ezekiel is about: the departing of the glory. We noted how it came, and it hovered over the threshold at the door of the temple, and then it went to the Mount of Olives, and then eventually it disappeared. Just as the people had been taken captive into the land of Babylon there by the river Chebar, it was as if the glory of God, the Shekinah of God, had also been taken captive with them and was no longer in the temple. We noted how Jerusalem was absolutely destroyed, and then the temple was destroyed also. A terrible tragic scene, and we've been through many a dark chapter in Ezekiel where there was no light at the end of the tunnel, where there seemed to be no promises for the people of God from their Holy Jehovah.

But now we have entered into the last section of this great prophecy, and in recent weeks we have been noting how God is going to gather His scattered people from all the ends of the earth and bring them, one day, to the land of Israel - that's what Ezekiel said. We see it happening today: 1943, the nation of Israel was made a specific nation again. We see it as a physical people, they are formed again as a nation, but they are not spiritually yet. What Ezekiel talks about is a day when the Shekinah glory of God will return again to His temple. Now, that has never ever happened, and it is still to come in a day in the thousand year reign of our Lord Jesus Christ - and where we're reading and where we are studying tonight, the glory has returned, the Shekinah glory of God is back with His people, and therefore we must say upon the authority of God's word, no matter what theologians and great preachers say, God is not finished with His ancient people Israel. God still has a plan for them.

His plan is that the glory that was with them once will shine again from the temple - in fact, it is greater than that: for the glory will be greater than it has ever been before. So, the glory is back in the temple, and the people are therefore instructed to worship God according to the new glory that they are seeing in Him. Of course, we know that that glory that will return to the temple is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't know whether you have the prophecy timeline that I gave you a few weeks ago on the back of one of your study sheets, but if you don't let me just remind you of the calendar of God's prophetic word. First of all, the next thing that we are waiting on, is the church of Jesus Christ to be raptured - to be taken out of this scene of time and to go to heaven for the Judgement Seat of Christ, where we will be rewarded for our works, and where there will be the marriage of the Lamb, when the bride of Christ, the church, will be united to her Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. But while that is going on in heaven, there will be seven years of tribulation here upon the earth. We learnt that during that seven years a tribulation temple will be built, and we saw in our last study that that tribulation temple - as we speak - is being prepared. But then, at the end of the seven years, there will be a great war. We learnt how all the nations of the world, many of them, will go around Israel and will attack her. At that point Israel will cry out to a Saviour and to God to deliver them, and at that moment the Lord Jesus Christ will return and His feet will bodily land on the Mount of Olives, and He will defeat Israel's enemies, and He will usher in 1000 years of peace and righteous reign upon the earth. Now that is what we mean when we speak of the millennial reign of Christ - 1000 years where Christ will reign upon the earth.

So, this temple will take place during that 1000 years. Jews specifically, but all the world will worship God from this temple, and we have in these next chapters - specifically 44 through to 46 - the code and the instructions of how God is to be worshipped in this temple. The Lord Jesus Christ will return, He will come through the eastern gate of the temple. After He comes through the eastern gate of the temple that eastern gate will be sealed as a mark of honour that only Christ can go through in and out of that eastern gate. I did say to you in our last study that the eastern gate in Jerusalem today is sealed, but I hope I didn't confuse you into thinking that that would be the gate the Lord Jesus Christ would come through into the temple - He may well come through that gate when He returns to the Mount of Olives, and go through it and then go through into the temple, but that is not the gate that is spoken of here, although He probably will come through it. He
returns, and His very presence brings that Shekinah glory of God again, and God's people Israel are now commanded to worship.

Now, let me say before I go on: this is a very complex study tonight, it's a very difficult study. I do not stand here and think that I have all the answers, for I have not - and I may well be wrong - but I'm giving to you tonight a great deal of what I believe the word of God teaches with regards to this worship. I'm trying to be honest with the word of God. These next few chapters tell us, first of all, about the participants within the worship in this millennial temple. Chapter 44 to chapter 45 verse 8, and in verses 5 through to 31 of chapter 44 we have its priesthood, the priests that will operate within this temple. Who are they? Who will these priests be? Now, with your Old Testament knowledge of the word of God, you would be excused for thinking that these priests will be Levites, for all the priests in the Old Testament were Levites - of the tribe of Levi. That is a bit of the truth, but as we look closer within Ezekiel - look at chapter 40 for a moment and verse 46 - we get a few clues to who these priests will be. "The chamber whose prospect is toward the north is for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar: these are the sons of Zadok among the sons of Levi, which come near to the LORD to minister unto him". Chapter 43 and verse 19 tells us: "And thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that be of the seed of Zadok, which approach unto me, to minister unto me", or to serve me, "saith the Lord GOD, a young bullock for a sin offering". Chapter 44 and verse 15, again 'the sons of Zadok' are mentioned. Chapter 48 and verse 11, again 'the sons of Zadok' - four times or more the sons of Zadok will be assigned in the word of God to be priests in the millennial temple.

Now, Zadok was of the tribe of Levi, but they certainly weren't all the tribe of Levi that operated as priests in the Old Testament Scriptures. So we need to ask the question: why is it that all of the Levites are not included in this? Why is it that Zadok, specifically his sons, are going to minister in this new millennial temple? He is the 11th in the descent from Aaron. Well, the reason can be found in 1 Samuel chapter 2 and verse 35 if you turn with me, God says: "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever". During the reign of David the Old Testament Scriptures teach us that there was one priest who alone had unwavering loyalty to the King - that priest was Zadok. Because of that position in Israelite history that priest will be given the glorious opportunity and the glorious privilege of being a priest before God in the millennial reign of Christ.

The Levites, all of them who were given the privilege in the Old Testament, they will not be given that privilege in the millennial reign. All the other sons of Levi, yes, as we read on they're given positions of authority, they're given positions of ministry and service, but they are not allowed to present the offerings, the sacrifices, and the pinnacle and crux of the worship in the millennial temple can only be for the priests, the sons of Zadok. The reason being, if you go right back to the very beginning of the priesthood in the Old Testament Scriptures, right from the very start of Aaron and right through all the tribe of Levi, you will find that almost from the beginning it was an absolute failure. Sin, right from the start to the very end of the Old Testament Scriptures, and because of that God has taken away from them the privilege of priesthood and given it to Zadok who was faithful to God and faithful to David in days of declension and in days of apostasy.

This is a very minor point in the whole of the worship in the millennial temple, but I think it's a very, very important one for us tonight in the 21st century - why? Because here we have a spiritual principle: God is saying from the Old Testament, He is saying in the millennial reign, and indeed He is saying to us now in the church of Jesus Christ and the dispensation of grace: 'Them that honour me, I will honour'. You know the parable of the nobleman, and the ten servants and the ten pounds in Luke chapter 19, and in verse 17 the Lord says: "The nobleman said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities". Is it not a spiritual principle that those of us who are faithful in little will have committed to us much in the eyes of God? How do we fare with this? There are things that we
class as little things, like reading our Bible, like praying to God, like witnessing to folk, like fellowshipping with God's people - perhaps there are other things that you consider even less. But, my friends, there is a principle - and oh, the Levites will find it out in the millennial reign of Christ to their detriment and to their poverty, that because they failed they will lose the privilege of priesthood and it will be given to one who overcame. The priests will be the sons of Zadok, and what a lesson there is for us in that.

Then secondly, the second participant that we read of is the prince. Now this is a very strange individual, in chapter 45 verse 7 we read of the prince, in verse 8 we read of him, then again in verse 17, and in chapter 46 verses 1 through to 20 we are given a description of the prince, and indeed an area within the new land of Israel that this prince will be given all to himself - and we'll be looking at that next week. We looked at the new temple in the last study, we're looking today at new worship, and in the next week we'll be looking at the new land and the layout of the land of Israel. But some 17 times in these chapters the prince is mentioned and, whoever he is, he occupies a very important role in the millennial temple itself. Apparently, according to the word of God, he holds an intermediary place between the people and the priesthood - he's like a mediator between the men and the priests.

Now let me say this: some scholars would tell us that this prince in the millennial temple is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that would be a rational assumption to make - if we think of a prince, or a King of kings and a Lord of lords, a prince of peace, we would obviously think of the Lord Jesus, and perhaps we would find it hard thinking of another prince in the millennial reign of Christ. But it cannot be the Lord Jesus Christ - how do we know? Well, there are several reasons, but one is found in chapter 45 verse 22: "And upon that day shall the prince prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bullock for a sin offering". Now the Lord Jesus Christ cannot present a bullock for a sin offering, for He knew no sin, He did no sin, in Him was no sin, He was separate from sinners - it cannot be Him. But there are more reasons than that, chapter 46 and verse 16 tells us: "Thus saith the Lord GOD; If the prince give a gift unto any of his sons". There's another reason: this prince is married, and this prince has sons. Another reason, as we go through these chapters, is that he cannot enter by the east gate - it says that the prince is specifically prohibited from going through the east gate, but who goes through the east gate? The Lord Jesus Christ goes in and out the east gate, that's why other people are prohibited - so it cannot be Him.

The fourth reason we find is because he cannot offer sacrifices. If you read through the chapters you find that this prince is not to perform priestly acts, but we find right through the Old Testament - Psalm 110:4, Zechariah 6:12,13 - that in the millennial reign the Lord Jesus Christ will perform sacrifices. He will [serve] as a priest in the millennium. Then fifthly, chapter 46 verse 2: "And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate without, and shall stand by the post of the gate, and the priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate". The Lord Jesus Christ cannot worship the Lord, because the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord. He will serve in a priestly capacity, as the Great High Priest - perhaps I said 'worship' earlier, that was wrong - He will not worship, He will be worshipped.

So there are five reasons: He cannot prepare a sin offering for Himself; this man is married with sons; this man cannot enter in and out of the eastern gate; this man cannot perform priestly duties as Messiah will; and this man must worship the Lord. Now some people, for that reason, suggest it is the seed of David. There's a good case for that, that it is the seed of David, it will be a descendant of David - but the problem is today we don't know who the descendants of David are. Other say that, after the Old Testament saints are resurrected, that this will be David in his resurrected state who will carry out this type of operation as a vice regent to the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings. Do you want to know my answer? I haven't a notion! I don't know, and I don't think we can truly tell - but one thing is sure: there will be a prince in the millennial reign, in the temple, who will administer the kingdom of God on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ for those 1000 years.
Do you see the picture being painted? I don't expect you to remember everything that we say tonight, but just note that there will be priests in this temple and there will be one individual who is categorised as the prince. Then thirdly on your sheet you see 'the pure' are mentioned. Chapter 44 and verses 5 to 9, specifically verse 5 at the end, you will see this statement: "mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary". That could be translated: 'Mark well those who may enter'. Now, picture this: the Lord's glory is filling the temple, the reason why the Lord's glory left the temple in the book of Ezekiel is because of the sin of God's people - therefore God is saying: 'In the millennial reign of Christ you mark well who comes in and who goes out of the temple. It is a sanctified place'. In verse 4 Ezekiel saw that the glory of God filled the place so much that he fell on his face before God in worship. Therefore, because it is so holy, because it is so set apart, God is extremely particular about who goes in and who goes out, the kind of people that worship there. In other words, the sins of the past - chapters 8 through to 11 - that were so graphically painted for us, they will not be repeated! And if any Israelite wants to repeat them, they will be excluded from the temple for the glory of God is coming back again to Israel, and the glory of God is going to stay there.

The Lord says that only the circumcised in heart may enter in. My friends, as you go through the word of God you find that circumcision, right from Abraham through the Old Testament, was a picture of their devotion to the Lord. But never ever forget that in Deuteronomy, right at the very beginning of circumcision, the Lord said that He one day would circumcise the people's heart, and the heart of their seed, to love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul, that they may live. God always intended for circumcision not to be a thing that marked the external flesh, but He wanted it to be testimony of a circumcised heart that loved God. There were individuals who were like that towards God, but never was the whole nation circumcised in heart before Him. He said through the prophet Jeremiah: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and takeaway the foreskins of your heart ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my fury come forth like fire and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings". We see in the book of Romans chapter 2 that what is important in the eyes of God is circumcision of the heart.

Now, Ezekiel is told: 'You mark well who comes into this temple, and the only people that I'm going to allow into this temple are those who are circumcised in their heart'. It doesn't matter whether they're from Israel or whether they're from another nation, verses 7 and 9 tell us that. There will be many other peoples apart from the Jews that will go into the kingdom in unresurrected bodies - in other words, there will be people converted during the seven year tribulation period, and they will enter into the millennial reign of Christ in their ordinary bodies that you're in now. They will worship God from their redeemed, circumcised hearts, because they were ready for the Lord's return.

Circumcision of the heart represents sincerity before God about removing sin, and sincerity before God about devotion and worship to Him. Remember God told the people through Jeremiah that He would put a new heart in them, He would put His Spirit in them, He would take away their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh, and He said: 'On that day that I do that', and that's speaking of the millennial reign, He said, 'Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart'. We can apply that to ourselves, but in its context it is speaking to Israel on the great day, and only those - mark well now, Ezekiel - only those with circumcised hearts. Jews with an uncircumcised heart but circumcised flesh will not be allowed in; Gentiles with uncircumcised flesh but a circumcised heart before God will go in and worship God.

We have today - praise His holy name - the imputed righteousness of Christ. Do you ever think about that? You know that if you look through rose-tinted glasses you see rose-tinted things, don't you? If you trace your eye along a stained-glass window, you would see a blue window. When you look out at the street below you would see everything blue, you look through the yellow one and everything is yellow, you look through the red one and everything is red. God looks through the Christ one, and He sees you covered with His
righteousness! That's the imputed righteousness of Christ, and we've got it! But my friend, the big question to apply to our hearts tonight - mark well those who enter into worship of God - it's not just the imputed righteousness that we have, but if that imputed righteousness is in us surely there must be a practical righteousness that outflows from it? How do we fare there? God says we have a worship, we have sacrifice: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" - not 'wholly', but 'holy' - "holy, acceptable unto God, which is your expected spiritual worship".

In the study today I was looking through a few books, one of them is this thick and it outlines every conceivable and possible theme and subject concerning Christianity, and spirituality, and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and there was an article about that long on holiness in it. I went to another great book that many of you will know of illustrations - I don't want to name it, for the brother is good that writes it - but I looked under the title of holiness and I found nothing! Friends, that reflects the health of holiness, or the wholeness of holiness, in the church of Jesus Christ today - it has been put aside. But God says in the millennium - now we're not talking about the Old Testament - in the millennium, 'Mark them well, I'm not going to let just anybody in'. For God says: 'Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord' - thank God we'll come not in beauty of our own, but in His imputed righteousness. But friends, do you have that practical righteousness?

There was a mother who visited her boy at university, and entering his room she was horrified as her eyes scanned the wall to see about a dozen suggestive pictures on the wall. She said nothing, but her heart was broken and she went home, and she decided that she was going to send her son a picture in the post. The next day the postman brought the parcel to the young man's door, and as he opened it over his breakfast he found that it was a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. He took it very proudly and he hung it above his desk, but as he looked at it for a few moments he took down some of the pictures round about it. Then the next day a few more of those pictures went into the wastebasket, until eventually all of the pictures were gone. Do you know what that means? Without holiness no man can see the Lord - mark well! Mark well who enters and who goes out!

Those are the participants, and we must move on to the practices because this is the most controversial part of the new worship in the millennium. The first thing that we see taking place is business within this temple, and this might be surprising to you when you consider the actions of our Lord Jesus Christ in the temple in Jerusalem. But the reason why He acted in that way was not because there was business specifically in the temple, but because of their exploiting of the business - they were ripping the people off. Right throughout the Old Testament it seems to be normal, as far as I can discern, for there to be a little bit of tax within the temple to run the temple. It will be the same in the millennium, chapter 45 verses 9 to 16, there will be general office business if you like, standard weights - that is to ensure that people will not be conning other people in their weighing and in their measuring. There will be a temple tax to run the temple, to facilitate the sacrifices and the priest. Then there will be some specific affairs: there will be land allotment - and we'll see this in our next study, chapters 47 and 48 - the whole land will be divided up again between the twelve tribes of Israel, and it will be a total size approximately the size of the piece of land that was promised Abraham in Genesis chapter 15.

So, there is business, and then we find there are feasts in the millennial worship. Chapter 45 and verses 18 to 22, one of the greatest feasts that will be celebrated will be the Passover. If you look on the back of your study sheet that you were given this evening, you will see that there is a comparison there of the Levitical feasts in the Old Testament in the book of Leviticus, in the first five books of the Bible, specifically Leviticus, and these feasts that will take place in the millennial reign of Christ, in the millennial worship.
We find that three of the six Levitical feasts will be celebrated in the millennial reign of Christ. The three that are specifically celebrated are especially fulfilled in the millennial reign. Now we can't go into that tonight, we don't have time, but take it from me that these three are especially fulfilled - the other three have been fulfilled, and can't be more fulfilled in any capacity in the millennial reign. There you have the New Year, which is a new feast; then you have the Passover; the feast of Unleavened Bread; and the feasts of Tabernacles. As you go into the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 5 and verse 7, we find that Paul says this: "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us". You might say here tonight: 'Well, surely Christ is our Passover? Surely what you're resurrecting tonight, David, whether it's from Ezekiel or not, it's all Old Testament things, it is all the stuff of the law, of the Pentateuch, and has that all not been done out by Christ in the New Testament in the dispensation of grace? Is Christ not our Passover sacrifice for us?'.

Well, if you look at the second list on your sheet, Millennial Sacrifices, you see that not only will there be millennial feasts and three of the six of Leviticus will be celebrated - but all of the millennial offerings will reflect the Levitical offerings in the Old Testament, every single one of them, all seven of them will be repeated in the thousand year reign of Christ.

Look at them. There is the burnt offering, and the burnt offering was simply all of the lamb or the beast was burnt, and it signified, it represented the whole of the Lord Jesus Christ dedicated to the will of God, going to sacrifice. The burnt offering will be celebrated. As you read on you find that the meal offering will be celebrated, the meal offering was simply a handful of flour, and part of oil, and part of frankincense. It spoke typically, it represented the unblemished nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He delighted God, that His humanity is presented before God - God took great pleasure in it. Then you find thirdly the peace offering, that was all the fat of the beast offered to God, and that spoke of the reconciliation between us and God - for He is our peace. Not only breaking down the wall of separation between us and God, but the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, bond and free, and so on. That will be repeated. Fourthly the sin offering will be repeated. The Lord Jesus Christ was made sin for us that we might be made the
righteousness of God in Him, but that offering will be repeated in the millennial reign of Christ. Fifthly there is the trespass offering, and that's speaking of going over the line of the law, breaking the law of God toward men and toward God. But Ezekiel says that that will be repeated too in this thousand year period.

Now here's the big question: since all of these Old Testament offerings were ultimately fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, and perfectly and completely fulfilled in Him, why do they need to be restored again in the thousand year reign of the Lord Jesus? That's the crux, that's the most difficult question perhaps in the whole of the book of Ezekiel, and that is the point at which amillennialists try to destroy pre-millennialists arguments. Let's look at these offerings, your third point on the practices. Now as we've seen already in the previous week there are parts of this temple, parts of the furniture of the Old Testament temple, that are not found in this new millennial temple. You remember we looked that there is no veil, for the veil has been rent in twain. There is no table of shewbread, because the Lord Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life come down from heaven. There are no lampstands in the new temple, because the Lord Jesus is the Light. There is no Ark, because He has perfectly fulfilled it, and He is now God's mercy seat. But we've seen already, chapter 43 verse 13, there will be a brazen altar, there will be sacrifices again.

Now it's not just in Ezekiel. You can go to Isaiah 56, Isaiah 60, Zechariah 14, Jeremiah 33 - at least four places in the Old Testament does God's word speak about sacrifices in a day yet to come, specifically in this millennial temple. So you don't have to just explain away Ezekiel if you want to do away with these sacrifices, but you've got to put away Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah. Why are they needed? Christ has died, He has risen again, why are they needed in a golden age? Surely is Christ not enough, is Christ not the end and no more? Why does it say in verse 19: 'A young bull is to be given for a sin offering'? Now, let me tell you that the language in these passages is almost exactly the language of Moses from the Levitical books - just as it was given to Moses. Now here's the question: as these commands of sacrifice and offering were given to Moses in his day, did he fulfil them literally or spiritually? Of course he fulfilled them literally. But you say: 'David, that's not the point! Surely sacrifices are not needed today any more, Calvary covers it all! You would have to contradict the book of Hebrews, David, to see this in the book of Ezekiel!'.

Turn with me to Hebrews for a moment, Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 28: "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation". Chapter 10 verse 10: "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all". Verse 12: "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God". Well, how do you get round that one? We don't need any more sacrifices, that's the objection. We don't need anything more to cleanse us from our sin, because Calvary covers it all - praise God, Calvary does cover it all! But that argument doesn't do away with these verses in the book of Ezekiel.

If you go to chapter 10 again of Hebrews and verse 4, if anything I believe that that objection itself contradicts the whole book of Hebrews. Why do I say that? Verse 4: "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins". My friend, let this sink into your mind and into your heart: never, ever once did any animal sacrifice take away sin - never! It didn't take away sin in the Old Testament, and it surely will never take away sin in the millennial reign of Christ. They weren't efficacious sacrifices in the Old Testament, and they won't be efficacious in the millennial reign of Christ. Now what are they for if they didn't take away sin? They are symbolic! My friend, if you say to me: 'What do we need sacrifices to take away sin for in the new millennial reign of Christ?', I ask you: what did we need them for the Old Testament when they didn't take away sin either? They never took away sin, but what they were was a symbol and a representation to show Adam and everybody after him that the wages of sin is death, and someone had to pay for sin, someone one day would have to take away sin for ever - there was a penalty for it. It was to teach the people the awfulness of their sin, it was to show them that a sacrifice was needed - but not one of those Old Testament sacrifices in any real sense brought the people into the presence of God. You say: 'Well, the word
'atonement' is right through the Old Testament - it is; not only is it right throughout the Old Testament, it's right throughout these chapters in Ezekiel. But my friend, atonement in the Old Testament not once means the putting away permanently of sin - not once! It speaks of a covering, a ritualistic purification, a ceremonial cleanness that allowed the people to temporarily have fellowship with God - but all that they were doing was looking forward to Calvary, because they could never take away sin!

Those sacrifices in the Old Testament were prospective, they were looking forward to Calvary; and these sacrifices in the millennial temple are retrospective, looking backward. They are memorial in their nature, as the Old Testament sacrifices pointed forward to Christ's death these are tangible expressions - they're not trying to compete with Christ's death, but they're showing the value of His effective sacrifice once and for all. If any man was saved in the Old Testament it was through faith on the basis and on the credit that the sacrifice of that man was pointing forward to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who John said takes away the sin of the world. Only His blood can take away sin in the Old or in the New Testament!

But in the millennium, for the very first time, Jews will understand what they have been doing for thousands of years. Just for a moment: do we not do this in the Lord's Supper? Do we not use bread and a cup, and they're meaningful to us, but they don't in any way compete with Christ's sacrifice - they're only memorials looking back at what He has done, of His glory. Do you know what we do? We sing that great hymn:

'If now with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs but see not Him,
Oh, may His love the scales displace,
And bid us see Him face-to-face'.

And then we go to Ezekiel and we get so taken up with the signs that we miss what they're pointing to, which is the Lord Jesus. 'Can't have sacrifices any more!' - you're missing the point. The sacrifices don't do anything but point towards Christ and His eternal, once for all, finished sacrifice! Don't get obsessed with the sacrifices and miss the fact that they represent Christ the same as the bread and the wine. If you do, let me tell you that you're making the mistake of the papist, because the papist looks at the emblems - the wine and the wafer - and believes that they are efficacious, and if you look at these sacrifices in Ezekiel and say: 'They can't be there because they take away sin, and we don't need to take away sin!' - that's the mistake of the Roman Catholic. Nevertheless, think about it this way: could you imagine a believer remembering the Lord Jesus' death in any other way than the Breaking of Bread? I can't. Can you think of a better way for a Jew to remember the death of the Lord Jesus Christ than a sacrifice that he's been doing for thousands of years? I can't.

Blood flowed like a mighty ocean from thousands of stone altars for thousands of years, yet they could not see. The Lord Jesus came unto them and they did not recognise Him as their Messiah. He died at Calvary, He rose again, but they could not see it - but one day soon, praise God, they will look on Him whom they have pierced and be saved! For 1000 years God will restore to them the years that the locusts of their unbelief have eaten away! Then they will see it! Picture it: they will see the blood dripping from that little lamb, they will see the smoke rising from the burnt offering, and they in tearful worship will remember Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us! Can you see them in the temple? Weeping as they watch the blood dripping and remember their rejection and their crucifixion of their Lord, their Messiah in the house of His friends. Can you imagine at that moment, not only their sorrow and their feeling of guilt in a sense, but can you imagine their appreciation that God has brought them back? Can you imagine the extent of their worship? I'll tell you the extent of their worship, it's Ezekiel in 44 verse 4: 'I saw the glory of God and I fell at His feet'.

Let me show you this, verse 9 of chapter 46, what will it do to these Israelites? I'll tell you what it will do, it'll do what worship should do to us. Chapter 46 and verse 9: "When the people of the land shall come
before the LORD in the solemn feasts, he that entereth in by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate: and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth the other way". Do you know what that means? In my language: 'You'll go out a different way than you came in'. We can do that now, we can do it when we seek Christ, our Passover; when we fall at His feet and worship, and when we walk out different people because we have seen the freshly slain Lamb of God.

Oh, there's so many other reasons we haven't time to give you why there will be sacrifice. If you think about it, there won't be sin to the extent that there is in the world today - imagine, a new generation growing up where sin doesn't reign; where there is little sorrow or suffering, sickness; Satan is bound; there's no separation from the fellowship of God on the earth. We're so used to these things that we cannot imagine it, but the point is this: during that millennial reign, for 1000 years remember, there will be a whole generation - in fact more than one generation - that will grow up not knowing the heartache and the pain and the sin that we have known, how will they get saved? How will they realise the pain of sin? How will they realise that the penalty of sin is death when they're living for more than a hundred years perhaps? How will they realise that Christ had to die? You don't need to think about it long - they're sinners too, and except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God, they will have to be saved. They will be reminded through these sacrifices of the necessity of the new birth, of the costliness of salvation, of the awfulness of our sin as it was laid upon Christ, and of the holiness of God as He forsook the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. That will remind them!

The most marvellous thing, perhaps, in chapter 43 is verse 27 where God says - listen to this, if you've been studying this book with us these weeks this should astound you - God says, verse 27 of 43: "I will accept you, saith the Lord". He's going to accept them! But my friend, what about us? That's Israel now, but we, now, are accepted in the Well-beloved before Israel! One day this temple will be done away with - this is one of the hurdles, people think this is going to carry on - after the thousand years that will be the end, and we will go into a new heaven and into a new earth, we will go into the new Jerusalem. The book of the Revelation chapter 21 tells us that there will be no need of a temple there, for the tabernacle of God will be with men and the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be the temple thereof.

'Behold', friends, 'we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure'. Let it purify you.

Our Father, we bless Thee for our blessed Saviour, Israel's Messiah, and the church's Lord: Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that all the types are fulfilled in Him, we thank Thee that He is the filling up of all the law and the prophets. Our Father we just pray now that as those two on the road to Emmaus, as they had taught to them and preached to them of Christ concerning all the Scriptures, that we would know the experience of Jesus drawing near and going with us. Amen.
Ezekiel - Chapter 24

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Ezekiel 47-48

1. The River Of Healing (47:1-12)
2. The Borders Of The Land (47:13-23)
3. The Distribution Of The Tribes (48:1-29)
4. The City Of The Name (48:30-35)

We're turning to Ezekiel 47, Ezekiel chapter 47. We're looking, as I said, at our last study this evening. We have looked at three sections in the final chapters of this book that have been dealing with the restoration and the future of the nation of Israel. Several weeks ago we looked at the new temple that will be situated in the land of Israel, where the Jews will worship again. Then we looked, in our last study in Ezekiel, at the new worship - how men and women in this dispensation of the millennial reign of Christ will worship God in His temple. So, there has been the new temple, the new worship, and now tonight we're looking at the new land - the new Holy Land, 'The Millennial Holy Land', which is not the land this evening as we know it.

Let's read from verse 1 of chapter 47: "Afterward [this angel] brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar. Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. And when the man that had the line", the measuring rod, "in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over. And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh". Verse 11: "But the miry places thereof and the marishes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt. And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for food, and the leaf thereof for medicine".

If you turn over to chapter 48, to the last few verses of this chapter - verses 30 through to verse 35. In between our last reading and verse 30 we get a description of the border of this new land of Israel, and also of the dispersion of the tribes among this new land. Now we're coming and Ezekiel is being told about the city, the new city of Jerusalem in the millennial land of Israel. Verse 30: "These are the goings out of the city on the north side, four thousand and five hundred measures. And the gates of the city shall be after the names
of the tribes of Israel: three gates northward; one gate of Reuben, one gate of Judah, one gate of Levi. And at the east side four thousand and five hundred: and three gates; and one gate of Joseph, one gate of Benjamin, one gate of Dan. And at the south side four thousand and five hundred measures: and three gates; one gate of Simeon, one gate of Issachar, one gate of Zebulun. At the west side four thousand and five hundred, with their three gates; one gate of Gad, one gate of Asher, one gate of Naphtali. It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there".

During the American Civil War a delegation from the Southern states, from the Confederation, came to Abraham Lincoln and spread before him a large map of the United States of America. The Confederates of the South drew a line right across the middle of it, dividing it from North to South. They said to Abraham Lincoln: 'South of that line it will be alright to keep people as slaves, but north of that line it will be illegal'. Of course, history tells us that Lincoln placed his huge hand upon the whole of the map of United States, and he said: 'I claim it all in the name of freedom'.

There is a day coming very soon when our Lord Jesus Christ will come to this earth and He will land His feet upon the Mount of Olives, and He will put His nail-pierced hand on the whole of this planet, and He will reign and He will claim this world for Himself. Now, it's very difficult, I think, for us to imagine what the millennial reign of Christ will be like - simply because our world, as we speak, is so full of sin, immorality, unrighteousness and abomination towards God. There is so much war, so much hatred in the hearts of men and women, so much trouble around us, sadness, death, sickness and poverty. But the Scriptures speak prophetically, right throughout the Old and the New Testaments, of a time when men will make war no more, when men with joy shall draw out of the wells of God's salvation, when a child shall die at 100 years of age because few in those days will say: 'I am sick'. The Bible speaks of a time of unequalled prosperity, when the desert will blossom as the rose. There will be no more poverty, no more famine, no more want of anything. A day, as Revelation 20 tells us, when Satan will be bound and the Lord Jesus Christ, for one thousand years, will reign from shore to shore in righteousness - not in heaven, but upon the earth.

Not only does the Bible tell us that there will be a spiritual reign for one thousand years, and spiritual changes, moral changes, national changes, and governmental changes - but the prophet Ezekiel comes to us in these last few chapters and tells us that during the thousand year reign of Christ there will also be geographical changes. That is what we're looking at tonight: chapters 47 and 48, and Ezekiel is given by the Holy Spirit a vision of the new Holy Land during the millennial kingdom.

Now let's look at this tonight in some detail. I have to apologise to you, because I had a number of overheads to show you this evening, but the bulb in the overhead has gone! So, it may be a bit harder for you to picture some of these things tonight, but we do apologise for that. The first thing that Ezekiel speaks to us of in chapter 47, your first point, is: 'The River of Healing', verses 1 to 12 that we have read. Let me just say this: there is the literal interpretation of this river, and it's very important that we understand in prophetic study - and we've been looking at this week after week in the book of Ezekiel specifically - but, no matter what book we go to whether it be a minor or a major prophet, and specifically the book of the Revelation, there is symbolism within the book but generally we interpret the word of God literally. Prophetic Scriptures must be interpreted literally. It is what theologians and scholars and preachers call 'the literal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic'. The study of hermeneutics is simply the study of interpretation of the word of God.

When it comes to prophecy we look at it literally: what is the literal, plain sense of the verse? We then look at it historically in its historical context, and ask: has that been fulfilled ever in all history? Then we look at it grammatically and see what the language originally, whether in the Old Testament in Hebrew or in the New Testament in Greek, is saying. Then we put them altogether: a literal, historical, grammatical interpretation of the word of God, and it is so important that we do that when we come specifically to prophecy. Therefore, as we come to chapter 47, and not just it but the whole of Ezekiel, we believe that there will be a literal
temple, there will be a literal thousand year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be a literal new Jerusalem. We looked in our last study at how there will be literal sacrifices to remind retrospectively of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, as we come to chapter 47, we must therefore be consistent - as many scholars and preachers are not, we must be - to see that this is a literal river, a river of healing that one day will flow through the nation of Israel.

So let's look at the literal interpretation first of all. Ezekiel, in verses 1 to 12, sees a vision of a river flowing from the door of the temple, past the altar, through the south wall of the east gate, and down to the Dead Sea near the south of the land of Israel. Ezekiel is told that the waters of the sea will be healed, what does that mean? Well, you will know if you've been to Israel that the Dead Sea is a dead sea. There is nothing living in the Dead Sea because there is no outlet for the Dead Sea, there is only an inlet - the waters come in, and then more and more, and all the minerals gather and there's so much salt in the Dead Sea that nothing can live. But this prophecy is saying, in chapter 47, that the rivers, the waters of the Dead Sea one day will be healed. In other words, the Dead Sea will become a freshwater sea with an outlet again.

This is mighty, because as we read in this chapter we find that Ezekiel not only says that it will no longer be salty and will be freshwater, but there will be fish that will be found in the water. In fact, he says in verse 9 if you look at it: "It shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh". This river will flourish with multitudes of sea life and fish, and in fact the passage tells us that it will be greater in capacity of fish than the great sea - and the great sea here is the Mediterranean Sea. Now imagine that! Tonight, as we speak, the Dead Sea is literally dead, but during the thousand year reign of our Lord Jesus Christ there will be multitudes of freshwater fish in a cleansed and a healed Dead Sea.

Right throughout the Old Testament the water of life is a favourite metaphor and picture of the life of God. You will know that Palestine, and the Middle East in general is an arid place, a place of wildernesses and deserts. When God was wanting to depict to His people lushness and flourishing fertility, He would speak to them of a river of life. It was a favourite picture because the desert area needed life, and that life could only be brought through water. This stream, literal stream, will bring life, the Bible says, to the whole nation of Israel and specifically the area of Araba which is very arid this evening. This is a nation, as we speak, that has all sorts of systems of irrigation to get water into a land that has no water, but the day is coming when the Lord Jesus will come and they will have more water than they could ever need.

In fact, this river ever deepens. It gets deeper and deeper as it goes on. It brings life and health and abundant fruit wherever it goes - and please mark this: this will be a literal, geographical river that will flow through Israel during the millennium reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. God will dwell in His temple, we learnt that in chapter 44: God's glory, His Shekinah cloud, will come back again to His people - and out of that temple where God's glory is dwelling there will be a stream of blessing that will ever increase, and will flow and go forth to all of the places in Palestine. How did all this just come to be? Is this not a bit far-fetched? It's such a change in the whole geographical overlook of the whole of Palestine, how could that happen? When will it happen?

Well we must go back for moment, if you turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 1, and while you're doing that also turn to Zechariah 14 - Acts chapter 1, then Zechariah 14. You remember, the Lord Jesus has been crucified for our sins, He was raised from the dead on the third day, He spent 40 days with His disciples and has been seen of many men - up to 500 at one point. Now He stands at Bethany, and He is about to ascend into heaven to intercede for His people, but as He speaks to His disciples He says in verse 11 of chapter 1: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven". As the Lord Jesus Christ has gone, He will come again. Then Zechariah 14 and verse 4,
speaking prophetically of the Lord again: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south". Verse 8: "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be".

Do you see what's happening here? The Lord Jesus is coming again as He went, and He comes and His feet land at the Mount of Olives. As He comes to the earth there is a great earthquake triggered, and it creates a vast east-west valley and fault on the very Mount of Olives. Running through Jerusalem this great valley will be a tributary for water to flow right through it and for this great river to come. This is when it's going to happen - can you imagine what it will be like when the Lord lands on Mount Olivet, and there's an earthquake and everybody knows that the Saviour has come - the nail-printed hand has been put on the map of the earth and He is claiming it for His own!

Look at Micah chapter 1 for a moment, just so that I can prove to you that this is not a fairytale that we're seeing only in the book of Ezekiel, this is right throughout the prophets. We've seen it now in Ezekiel, we've seen it in Zechariah very definitely, and now we come to Micah chapter 1 - again, remember these minor prophets are speaking to Israel, he's speaking about the future of Israel - verse 2 of chapter 1: "Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place".

Do you see it? Come with me to the New Testament, in case you think this has all been done away with in some way in the new covenant. Revelation chapter 16 - I hope you can see how this is a consistent interpretation, right throughout the whole of the Scriptures - Revelation chapter 16 and verse 18: "And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. There we have it again and again and again, that when the Lord Jesus comes - and we're not talking about the rapture, the rapture has taken place, God's people have gone to be with Him in the air, the rapture is to the air. There will be seven years of great tribulation, the church will be going through the Judgement Seat of Christ and the marriage supper of the Lamb, but when those seven years are over then the Lord's feet will come again - His second coming, His second advent. There will be a great earthquake that the world has never seen, Mount Olivet - and there's a fault going through it tonight as we speak, they won't build anything on top of it - it will cleft and this river of healing will come forth from God.

Its mighty stuff, isn't it? What is the source of the river? Look at verse 1 of chapter 47, we have to move on but there's so much spiritual truth within this passage. Chapter 47 of Ezekiel and verse 1, and if you look at it you will see that he's brought to the door of the temple and the waters issue out from under the threshold of the house eastward. It's coming out from the temple, this river is coming from the temple! It's not coming from a mountain from the rain, it's coming from God! That's the source, but what's the course of the river? Well, he says that it's flowing eastward, and it goes south through the desert and the Jordan River to the Dead Sea, where its sweet waters will purify the whole of the nation and bring life to polluted waters. Now, picture Israel in your mind, or if you have a map in the back of your Bible - I wanted to show it up on the overhead tonight, but I can't do it - but if you picture the map in the back of your Bible, you know basically the nation of Israel. Tyre is roundabout the top, OK? The north-west is Tyre, you go over a little bit to the east and you will find Damascus. Well, there will be an area right from about above Tyre a little bit right across to
Damascus, it will go down all the way to about the top of the Sea of Galilee, which is round about the middle of Israel. It will then taper in, and under the Sea of Galilee you have the river of Jordan - do you see it? It's like a 'P'-shape, that type of shape. Well, the nation of Israel, on that day of the millennial reign of Christ, will go around like that and will be all of the left-hand side between the coast of the Mediterranean and the Jordan river - all that area in the middle and right up to about the Sea of Galilee, and round in a curve around about Damascus. That is the area that will be during the millennium reign of Christ, and that is the course of the river. It will come from Jerusalem, from the temple, and will come right down the Jordan River, go right through the Dead Sea, and eventually it will meet the river of Egypt. So, you can see it's going right through the whole of the land of Israel.

That's the course of the river. The source of it, the course of it, but we see also that Ezekiel found the force of the river - for it reached Ezekiel's ankles, then it went as far up as his knees, then it came to his waist, and then he felt it was just at his neck level that he could only swim to survive. The source of the river is the temple. The course of the river is right through the whole land of Palestine, down to the very bottom, meeting in Egypt. It will make the whole land flourish, bringing healing to all the arid wilderness of the whole of the nation of God. What a force! It will increase: it will come to ankle level, then to knee level, then to the loins, the waist, and then eventually it will make the whole people of God swim in its healing river.

Today Jerusalem has no river, but in the millennium reign of Christ it will not only have a river but the death-giving Dead Sea will become alive! Joel says in chapter 3 and verse 18: "It shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim". Waters out of the house of the Lord to all of Israel! There will be, the Bible says, all kinds of fruitful trees along the banks of this river providing food for God's people. There will be fishermen on the shores of the Dead Sea - imagine that sight! - with their nets catching great draughts of fish. There will be leaves from these healing trees as medicine for the people.

Oh, it's literal alright, its literal because one of the greatest things that Israel needs this evening is water. But there is a spiritual interpretation within these verses, and it's important for us not to miss it either because the Lord is telling us that this is a healing river. This brings spiritual healing to the people because it's coming from the temple, it's not coming from an ordinary mountain. This is a vivid picture of the life-giving ministry of God. As we go right throughout the whole of the Scriptures we find that one of the symbols of God's Holy Spirit is a river and is water. As we look at this description that Ezekiel was given in a vision, this is no different here. Remember that the Lord took, in His sermon to the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman, He took the figure of water. Do you remember what He said to that old sinner woman? She was living in an adulterous relationship and had been married so many times, and the person she was living with she wasn't married to, and as far as religion was concerned there was no hope for her - culture had excluded her from any religious practices of the Jews, she was separated from Christ socially, morally, religiously, culturally, and in every way you can. But He said to her: 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst again, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him, a well of water springing up into everlasting life'.

You can go to the Old Testament, go to the New Testament, and water - whether it's literal water or not - is also a symbol of spiritual life. Let's look at these verses in the light of this, and I've so much to get through. Verse 1, Ezekiel says: "Behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward". Now if you look carefully at it and study it, you will find that not only do these waters come from below the door of the temple, but within the temple their source is the very altar of God. They came from the altar! Do you see what's being said here? The blessings of God originate from the altar. Remember there's no veil in this millennial temple, why? Because the veil of the temple was rent in twain when my God was satisfied with the sacrificial, efficacious, substitutionary, vicarious death of the Lord Jesus Christ - and when He said: 'It is
finished', God demonstrated that it was finished and tore the veil. Because of that in this new millennial Jerusalem temple, there will be waters issuing out from the altar of God - why? Because all the blessings we have, and all the blessings this world will ever have and the Jews will have, will be because of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My friend, remember when Abraham was told that he was going to have a child, and through that child all the nations of the earth would be blessed? It wasn't because the Jews would bless them, but it was because of his lineage and of his seed there would be that man Christ Jesus, that one day would bring the whole world underneath His rule and His sway! He didn't do it through a conquering army, He did it through His ruby red blood. Oh, if we could learn in our lives as believers that all our blessings originate from the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, from the altar of God. No wonder Paul could say: 'God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Do you know what he meant? Everything I have is because of the cross! Do you see it? The whole of Palestine is being blessed from the altar of this temple because of Christ's death.

But look on, look at verse 3, it says that Ezekiel, as he was wading through this river the waters came to his ankles. You know, we could look at that and see that it's speaking of the walk of the child of God, the walk of the believer that must be in the Spirit of God - it's in the water. We're instructed also in the book of Galatians, if we walk and live in the Spirit - we must walk in the Spirit, and if we walk in the Spirit we will not fulfil the lust of the flesh. You see, there's a progression and there's a deepening in this river. It's coming from the altar, and you have to start at Calvary. My friend, if you're here tonight and you've never started at Calvary, you're not saved at all. I don't care that you're trying to walk after Christ, I don't care that you're following His commands and trying to obey everything He said - you have to start at the altar, at Calvary! But, my friend, don't stop at Calvary like many do. You've got to go on and walk in the Spirit that you'll not fulfil the lust of the flesh. Then in verse 4 the waters rose from the ankles up to his knees, and I wonder is that speaking of prayer in the Spirit? You've got to go on walking in the Spirit, but then praying in the Spirit - for Jude says you've to build up yourselves on your most holy faith, that's the walking, but you've to pray also in the Holy Ghost.

Oh, to master praying in the Holy Ghost, praying in the will of God, praying with your whole life dedicated to prayer in the Spirit and according to the will of God and what God wants - asking for what God wants, and seeing what God wants realised in your life. Then, as we read on in the second part of verse 4 we see that the water rose to his waist, to his loins. We are told in the New Testament to gird up our loins for service, Peter says: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ". Gird up the loins of your mind, get ready for action! Watch what you're letting into your mind! But, you know, loins speak of fruitfulness, it speaks of reproduction - and I believe what the Holy Spirit is saying here is that you need to walk in the Spirit, you need to pray in the Spirit, but you need to have reproduction in the Spirit - you need to bear fruit!

Then in verse 5 we see that Ezekiel finds himself swimming in these waters. Boy, this is powerful! Do you see the progression here? Do you see the deepening walk of this child of God as he comes and he begins to be flooded by this type of the Spirit of the Living God? What does Paul say? 'Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess', when you're drunk with wine you're happy with it and you're controlled with it and it dominates you, but Paul says: 'Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit'. 'Be ye continually filled, controlled with the Holy Spirit' - and do you see what happens when you're controlled with the Holy Spirit? You lose the use of your arms, the use of your legs, and the water just takes you along! Isn't that right?

His walk speaks of spiritual direction. Where is your spiritual direction tonight? Where are you going spiritually? His knees speak of spiritual devotion and prayer life, and your heart-life with God - how is that tonight? Is it progressing? Have you moved on from the walk to the praying in the Holy Spirit? The loins
speak of development and fruitfulness - are you developing day by day? Then the swimming speaks of the dynamic, it is the fullness, the controlling power within your life - what is motivating you? Can I ask you tonight: is your walk with God deepening, is it maturing, is it developing?

Now, let's apply this to this dispensation. For in this dispensation God dwelleth not in temples made by men's hands, but Paul says to the Corinthians: 'Ye are the temple, the church of the living God'. But he individualises it by saying to the believer: 'Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit'. Now look, if this applies to us, if you're the temple, from your heart and from your body there should be rivers of blessing of the Holy Spirit flowing out to the world around. But is it? 'In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)'. But Jesus is glorified now, and the Spirit is given - does He flow out of our bellies?

God will touch others through our lives if we're filled with the Holy Spirit, but what came to me today studying this was this: you can go as deep into the Holy Spirit as you want. You can go in your Christian life as deep, as mature, as developed as you can and you want to - and the tragedy of many a believer today is this: they are sitting paddling on the edge of the shore! They have never gone in, they have never known the blessings of the Spirit of God. There's a whole ocean out there to enjoy, but they're satisfied with just dabbling! Don't linger in the shallows when there are depths for you to enjoy, my friend. Go deep, plunge in!

Verse 12 tells us of the fruitfulness. There will be many trees that will be there for the meat of Israel, the food that means, the medicine, the healing of the people. I can't help looking at this and thinking: this is just like Eden of old. You go back to Genesis chapter 2 and you find that they were given the Garden, and God told them: 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat'. What God is doing, you look at this: there at the very beginning in the rebellion of man, Adam was the chief and the king of all of creation - he was God's appointed regent. But there in the Garden he handed over all of that sovereignty and management to the devil - well, here Christ has taken it from him! Hallelujah! He has taken it back for Himself, and He has created a new Eden upon the earth. God has put under His feet every principality and power, and given Him dominion over absolutely everything.

Look at the fruit coming from these trees. It makes me think of the man in Psalm number 1, the man who is godly, the man who follows God and meditates in His law day and night: "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper". Is it any wonder the great Psalmist said: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early".

I thought I hadn't enough to say tonight, but our second point is: 'The Borders of the Land'. Verses 13 to 23, the future border and division of the land - and I've covered it a little bit already - it will be going over from Tyre sort of to Damascus in the east, and right down to the Sea of Galilee, and then it will taper in and follow the line of the Jordan. All of that west coast will be filled, from the Mediterranean to Jordan in the east, will be filled as the new land of Israel. The boundaries will be larger, substantially, to that that was told to Moses in the Pentateuch. It will be greater than that which we read in Numbers 34, detailed for us in the Old Testament. It will be greater than what Joshua inherited in the book of Joshua as he went into Canaan land - it will be far greater than all of that. It's amazing, because the land promised to Abraham - verse 14 says: "Ye shall inherit it, one as well as another: concerning the which I lifted up mine hand to give it unto your fathers: and this land shall fall unto you for inheritance". All of the land was prophesied to Abraham, all of the specific geographical limits shall be within Israel, and will be finally fulfilled and occupied by them on
that day. The Muslims might want it, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation might try to blow them and shoot them out of it, but they need to know today that God will put them in it! They will have a greater part of the land than they have ever had! Never in history have the people of Israel had that covenant promise that was given to Abraham, never have they populated that whole land - but there is a day coming when Jesus shall reign, when He will give to His people the fulfilment of that covenant.

**DISTRICTS OF THE LAND**

You've got it all detailed here. We don't have time to go into it, but what's lovely is in verse 13 we find that Joseph shall have two portions. You remember in the Old Testament, this is just the same as the Old Testament: the Levites were not given a portion. Why? Because they were told: 'The Lord is your portion', and it's no different in the millennial reign. But Joseph shall be given two portions, what does that mean? His sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, will be represented as two separate tribes because God told him that no matter what they did - and this is remarkable to me, you look at the life of Ephraim and look at the life of Manasseh and they're nothing to be proud about - but what God is saying here is: it doesn't matter, for I have promised it in My grace! Unconditional promise! It is by grace that they will be there. You remember Reuben, he gave up his birthright because he had an incestuous relationship with Bilhah, his father's concubine - but even though that happened and he gave up his birthright, he will be there as a tribe in the millennium reign of Christ, why? Why?

'Through many dangers toils and snares, I have already come. Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home'.

Isn't it well we're saved by grace? We're not talking about reward here now, that's very important for you to know. We'll see that in a minute. My friend, we'll get there, but we'll get there not on our own steam, but on grace - because God has promised that: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'. Take joy out of that
tonight dear saint of God, if you're finding it difficult with temptation, if you're going through a cold period, and you feel like jacking it all in - you'll get there by grace! The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. We'll get there because of Him.

We've got to move on: 'The Distribution of the Tribes'. You can see this on your sheet, on the back of your sheet. There's the land, that square at the very top, that rectangle: Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, Judah. Then there's an area which is blown up for you at the bottom where the temple will be. That little shaded area is the temple, the north will be for the Levites, the middle for the Priests, and then at the bottom the city of Jerusalem is in the corner there and all the people round about - but that's in the middle of your top diagram. Underneath are the tribes of Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad. Now let me please draw your attention to this. When you turn to Revelation 7 you find that during the great tribulation period the 144,000 witnesses preach the gospel during that time - Jews. But there is one tribe in chapter 7 of Revelation that is not mentioned, and that is the tribe of Dan - but the tribe of Dan is here in the millennial kingdom! I believe what that is saying to us here tonight is this: Dan has been excluded from service during the tribulation period because of their gross idolatry in their history, grace will bring them into the millennial reign of Christ, but it will be through their works that they will be rewarded - and they're not rewarded. They are not rewarded in the great tribulation serving God, preaching the Gospel. It's a very important point.

There is this special area in the middle, and then fourthly and finally there is: 'The City of the Name'. In verse 35 we have many descriptions: there are 12 gates on this city, 3 on each side; and all the tribes of Israel are represented on these gates. This will be the worship centre for the world. They will come to the temple of God, Isaiah said, they will come to the hill, all the nations of the world, and worship the Lord in His temple. It's about 6 miles in circumference, during the Lord's time the city was about 4 miles in circumference - but this will be bigger. But friends, please give me a little bit of time to come to this climax this evening. The name of that city, verse 35, will be 'The Lord Is There' - Jehovah Shammah, The Lord Is There. It reminds us of the whole of biblical truth, that from the very beginning the reason why God created Adam and Eve was to have fellowship with humanity, and to have a people to obey Him and worship Him and enjoy Him forever. Then the fall came in the Garden, and the cry went out to sinful humanity: 'Adam, where are you?', and from that moment on through bloody sacrifice, through the law of God, through the prophets, and through the temple and the tabernacle, God was seeking to know men and women. The heart of God was after men to love them and to know them, He had a plan to be close to you and to me.

We have seen right throughout this whole book, we have seen how God's people have shunned Him and the glory has departed, and God presence had left them. We thought at times it was going to leave them forever and forever, but the thing about it is this: we find at the very end, God is there! If Ezekiel is trying to tell us anything in all of these studies, and if you have missed everything - and I wouldn't be surprised if you've missed a lot of it, because I have - but friends, don't miss this: Ezekiel wants everybody to know that the presence of God is everything! Everything! If you haven't got God's presence, you're nothing! But, glory of glories, God wants to dwell with us!

Oh, if we only realised that He is what we need - that's all, just Him. Jehovah Shammah is only one of nine titles given to God right throughout the Scriptures, there are others: Jehovah Jireh - what's your need tonight? God can meet your need: Jehovah Jireh, The Lord Will Provide, the Lord will see to it. Jehovah Rophe, The Lord Who Heals - do you need healed tonight? God has the ability, if He has the will, to touch you and heal you. Jehovah Nissi, The Lord My Banner, who stands up and fights for you. Jehovah M'Kaddesh, The Lord Who Sanctifies - are you having trouble in sin and temptation? God is the One who can sanctify! Jehovah Shalom, The Lord My Peace - are you wrecked with worries and pains and anxieties? The Lord is your peace! Jehovah Tsidkenu, are you trying to strive in righteousness and earning the merit of God? The Lord Our Righteousness. Jehovah Rohi, The Lord My Shepherd. Jehovah Sabaoth, The Lord of Hosts. Do you know what that tells me? The Lord is everything we need, and no matter what we need He's enough!
My friend, if the message of Ezekiel is anything, this old prophet in this concentration camp by the River of Chebar away from home, cut off from family, his wife dead - he's looking to heaven, and he's seeing that there's hope! Would you look to heaven and see that there's hope? Whatever you need, and whatever you want, seek God and you will find your need! I finish with quoting one of my favourite hymns, I think it sums up the whole of this prophecy. It's by F. Brook, listen very carefully:

'My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace,
Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God;
'Tis His to lead me there - not mine, but His -
At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.

So faith bounds forward to its goal in God,
And love can trust her Lord to lead her there;
Upheld by Him, my soul is following hard
Till God hath full fulfilled my deepest prayer.

No matter if the way be sometimes dark,
No matter though the cost be oft-times great,
He knoweth how I best shall reach the mark;
The way that leads to Him must needs be strait.

One thing I know, I cannot say Him nay;
One thing I do, I press towards my Lord;
My God, my glory here, from day to day,
And in the glory there my great Reward'.

The Lord is there!

Our Father, we thank Thee that we have the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. No matter what circumstances we're going through, like Ezekiel and like John the apostle in the Revelation, we would lift our eyes heavenward and see that if God be for us, who or what can stand against us?
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