

INTRODUCTION AND EZEK. 1:1 – 7:27¹

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Introduction

Preface – The 19th-century Puritan scholar William Greenhill characterized the book of Ezekiel as "full of majesty, obscurity, and difficulty" (Block, 89). My hope for this class is that I can convey enough of its majesty, remove enough of its obscurity, and lessen enough of its difficulties to make it worth your time to be here.

In this class, I plan to comment on blocks of text. I'll not always read the sections in the class before commenting, so it might pay for you to read a bit ahead of me each week.

I. Historical Setting

A. Shortly after the death of King Solomon in 931 B.C., the nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. In 722/21 B.C., the Assyrians completed their conquest of Israel, the northern kingdom, by capturing the capital city of Samaria, and that part of the Promised Land was absorbed into their empire.

B. After the fall of Samaria, the Judean king Hezekiah abolished the worship of Canaanite and Assyrian gods. Around 711 B.C., he joined with Ashdod and the kingdoms of Edom and Moab in an unsuccessful revolt against Assyria. When the Assyrian king Sargon died in 705 B.C., Hezekiah again rebelled against Assyria, this time forming an alliance with Egypt contrary to Isaiah's advice. The new Assyrian king, Sennacherib, invaded Judah in 701 B.C., conquering many of its fortified cities, but God protected Jerusalem from Sennacherib's assault by annihilating his army with a plague (2 Ki. 19:25-26).

C. Hezekiah was succeeded by Manasseh who, despite a late-conversion (2 Chron. 33:10-20), is labeled the worst of the Judean kings (2 Ki. 21:1-18, 24:3-4). He reigned for about 55 years, from around 697 – 642 B.C.,² and reversed the reforms of Hezekiah. Daniel Block says of Manasseh (p. 2):

[T]he kingdom of Judah never recovered from the spiritual degradation to which he had brought the nation. After [fifty]-five years of court-sponsored paganism, Judean apostasy was so deeply entrenched that the sweeping reforms of the good king Josiah (640-609) could do no more than scratch the surface, but not for lack of trying.

¹ This study draws heavily on Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel*, The Communicator's Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1989).

² Some conclude that he reigned 45 years, from 687 – 642 B.C.

D. The ancient kingdom of Babylonia began a new rise to prominence with King Nabopolassar (626-605 B.C.). In 612 B.C., the Babylonians, assisted by the Medes, destroyed Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. When the Babylonians and their allies took Haran in 610 B.C., the Assyrian Empire was finished. The issue was whether Egypt or Babylonia would rule Palestine and Syria.

E. Josiah was killed near Megiddo in 609 B.C. when he confronted the Egyptians who were in route to assist the Assyrians in their effort to regain Haran (2 Ki. 23:29; also 2 Chron. 35:20). Josiah probably was trying to prevent Pharaoh Neco II from coming to the aid of Assyria, fearing Egypt more than the distant Babylonians.

F. While Pharaoh Neco was campaigning in northern Syria, the people made Josiah's son, Shallum, king of Judah (with the throne-name Jehoahaz) (2 Ki. 23:30; 2 Chron. 36:1; Jer. 22:11). But Jehoahaz ruled for only three months before Neco II, on his return from Syria, deposed him and deported him to Egypt. In 609 or 608 B.C., Neco replaced Jehoahaz with Eliakim, another of Josiah's sons, and renamed him Jehoiakim (2 Ki. 23:31-34; 2 Chron. 36:3-4; Jer. 22:10-12).

G. In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, while still crown prince, soundly defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish, establishing Babylonia as the undisputed controller of Palestine. That battle is recounted in the Babylonian Chronicle and also is referred to in Jer. 46:2. Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylonia that same year.

H. Daniel 1:1-2 informs us that King Nebuchadnezzar (or possibly subordinates acting under his orders) came against Jerusalem in 605 (under one way of reckoning the years of a king's reign), presumably because Jehoiakim was pro-Egyptian, and took tribute from Jehoiakim in the form of people and cultic articles. This is when Daniel was deported. (It seems from 2 Chron. 36:5-8 that Jehoiakim himself was either deported to Babylonia or threatened with deportation. If the former, the deportation must have been temporary.)

I. Some years later, Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Ki. 24:1), which led to a massive invasion in 598/597 B.C. Jehoiakim died probably in 598/597 and was succeeded by his son Jehoiakin (2 Ki. 24:6; also spelled Jehoiachin). Jehoiakin promptly (he reigned only three months) surrendered to the Babylonians without a fight in order to avoid complete annihilation of Jerusalem.

a. Jehoiakin, the royal family, and a large portion of the Judean elite, including Ezekiel, were led into exile (2 Ki. 24:14), and more treasures from the temple and royal palace were carried off.

b. Jehoiakin fared relatively well in Babylon. We've actually found Babylonian chronicles detailing the rations given to him and his family from the royal storehouses. He was freed after 37 years of captivity when Evil-merodach succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon (2 Ki. 25:27-30) and enjoyed the favor of the king.

c. Despite the exile, the prophets never lost hope in the continuation of the Davidic line, and Jehoiakin remained the critical link (Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23-24, 37:24; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 4:6-9, 6:9-15). This is the Jeconiah listed in the genealogy of Christ in Mat. 1:11-12.³

J. When Jehoiakin surrendered to the Babylonians in 598/597 B.C., Josiah's son (Jehoiakin's uncle) Mattaniah was installed as a puppet king in Jerusalem and given the throne name Zedekiah. After a number of years, he foolishly initiated a rebellion against the Babylonians, which resulted in a furious retaliation. This culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587/86, following a two-year siege of the city (2 Kings 24:17 - 25:26).

³ Jeremiah 22:28-30 says of Coniah (= Jehoiakin) (ESV): "Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah." The question is how this can be squared with Mat. 1:11-12 which traces the genealogy of Jesus, who has been given David's throne (Lk. 1:32), through Jeconiah (a nickname for Jehoiakin). Here are some possibilities.

a. There is evidence that Jehoiakin repented and that any generational curse subsequently was removed. After the strong words directed toward Jehoiakin in Jer. 22:24-30, the prophet reports in Jer. 52:31-34 (see also 2 Ki. 25:27-30) the special favor that was shown to Jehoiakin after decades in prison. This striking reversal of circumstances suggests a change of Jehoiakin's heart. Further evidence is provided in Hag. 2:20-23 in which God says he will make Zerubbabel, Jehoiakin's grandson, like his *signet ring*. This reverses the language of the curse in which he told Jehoiakin that even if he were a *signet ring* he would be cast off. Based on these texts, Rabbinic literature is filled with references to Jehoiakin's repentance and his subsequent restoration. See, e.g., Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus Vol. 4* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 100-102.

b. The curse may have applied only to Jehoiakin and his immediate descendants. Here's how Michael Brown argues the point (p. 98):

A command is given (v. 30) in the pl. (*kitbu*, write!) to record that he will be *'ariri*, childless (see Gen. 15:2, and note esp. Lev. 20:20-21, where being *'ariri* is a curse for an unauthorized union), yet v. 28 spoke of his offspring while 1 Ch 3:16-17 states that he had seven sons. The explanation for this is found in the rest of v. 30, which should be understood in light of the presumed ardent hope and desire of the people of Judah -- in their land and in exile -- that this son of David, or one of his sons, would be restored to the throne. God says it will not happen, the emphasis being on "his lifetime" (in which he'll not succeed) and the lifetimes of this sons, none of whom would reign on the throne, making it as if he was childless (so NIV). In keeping with this, the divine promises to the line of David are not renewed until the days of Zerubbabel, his grandson (see Hag 2:20-23, and . . . Jer 52:31-34).

c. The curse may refer only to the actual, *biological* descendants of Jehoiakin and not to *legal* descendants who were adopted into his line. Jesus had no human father, but he was a legal descendant of Jehoiakin through his legal father Joseph. This is the approach suggested in Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992) 277.

d. The curse may be restricted to a descendant reigning from a physical throne *in Judah*.

II. The Prophet

A. Our only information about Ezekiel comes from the book of his prophecies, and it contains very little of a biographical nature. He was the son of a priest named Buzi (1:3), which means he would have been educated as a young man for priestly service. According to Num. 4:30, 30 was the age at which priests qualified for induction into office, which means Ezekiel probably was not yet inducted into the priesthood before he was exiled.

B. His name represents either an affirmation of faith, "God strengthens/toughens," or an appeal of faith, "May God strengthen/toughen." And God does indeed strengthen him in the face of cynicism and rejection of his ministry.

C. If "thirtieth year" in 1:1 refers to Ezekiel's age, as seems likely, he was born in 623 B.C. So he grew up during the last years of relative independence for his home state of Judah, which was constantly threatened with military subjugation by the Babylonian Empire. As I said, eventually he was exiled to Babylon, at around age 25, and it was there that he served as a prophet. He was settled in a Jewish colony near Nippur on the Chebar canal.

D. He had a wife who died in Babylonia during the exile (24:18).

III. The Book

A. Date of prophecies - The dated prophecies of Ezekiel fall between 593 and 571 B.C., from 4/5 years after his deportation in 598/597 to 15/16 years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586.

B. Character - Ezekiel communicated the message of God to his contemporaries in a variety of ways. He certainly engaged in "straight" verbal prophesying, but he also recounted visions, used parables and allegories, and took symbolic action. This book is very "visual literature," and one cannot approach it as though it were, for example, a letter.

C. Organization - It is arranged thematically in four major sections, and within these sections the material is almost entirely chronological. The major sections are: Before the Fall of Jerusalem (1-24), Oracles Against the Foreign Nations (25-32), Hope and Danger in the Future (33-39), and Vision of the New Temple and Land (40-48).

EZEK. 1:1 – 7:27

I. Before the Fall of Jerusalem – Chaps. 1 – 24

A. Ezek. 1:1-28

1. The Heavens Opened - 1:1-3

a. Ezekiel was among the captives who lived in Tel Abib (3:15) along the Chebar River. It was actually an irrigation canal that took water from the Euphrates River at the city of Nippur and carried it in a large semicircle through the countryside until it rejoined the Euphrates downstream near the city of Uruk. Since "Tel" can mean "ruined mound," the Judean exiles may have been put here to repopulate a destroyed or abandoned city.

b. One can only imagine how discouraging this was for the Jews living there. Not only were they laboring in a Babylonian wasteland, but the economy and society were alien and they were out of range of ever worshiping at the Jerusalem temple as the law required. The attitude of many is powerfully expressed in Psalm 137, which begins with, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion."

c. In this setting of isolation, to these people seemingly cut off from "the action," which focused on Jerusalem, God has a message. He gives revelatory visions to Ezekiel; he chose Ezekiel to be his spokesman. They were neither out of God's sight nor out of his mind.

d. This divine appearance to Ezekiel in Babylon flies in the face of the widespread myth of the day that the influence of gods was limited to their "home turf." Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, appears whenever and wherever he chooses.

2. Creatures in the Wind - 1:4-14

a. The raging storm and great cloud approaching from the north suggests the appearance of God. On occasion God's abode was symbolically depicted as in the north (Ps. 48:2; Isa. 14:13), and storms and clouds were often associated with divine appearances (e.g., Isa. 29:6; Job. 38:1; Ps. 29:3-9; 104:3).

b. The four living creatures that appear from within this glowing cloud fit the general description of cherubim, and 10:1-22 makes this identification certain. They are supernatural creatures that are often depicted as the creatures that bear God's throne or chariot (Ex. 37:7-9; 1 Sam. 4:4; Ps. 18:10, 80:1, 99:1). As the following verses make clear, in this instance they are bearing the divine chariot. Just as we associate the president with a black limousine, ancient Israelites associated the "presence" of God with cherubim.

c. These creatures certainly reflect the glory of their position, glowing and having the faces of the most impressive of earthly creatures (lion – strength and majesty; eagle – swiftness and mobility; bull – procreative power; human – wisdom and reason), but the key point about them in this vision are that they are oriented to all directions. They did not need to turn to face the intended direction of their flight because they were already facing every direction. They simply moved at the will of God.

d. Thus far, the vision makes two things clear: Something that is supernatural and that involves God on the move is about to happen, and it is of importance to the exiles who saw themselves as out of God's presence and program.

3. Wheels in Wheels - 1:15-21

a. The cherubim are stationed at the four sides of the divine chariot, each able to see and move in all directions.

b. The wheels of the chariot were actually four pairs of wheels that intersected at right angles. Thus, no turning was necessary to go in any of the four directions.

c. Being right next to the cherubim, there was no lack of response to the cherubim's leading. In fact, the spirit of the cherubim was in the wheels so the response was instantaneous; the chariot was, in essence, an extension of the cherubim that directed it.

d. God is not confined to any particular locale. As symbolized by this supernatural vehicle, he can go anywhere anytime. He travels the whole earth and is control of it all. His being "on the move" is a cause for encouragement for all who truly worship him.

4. Firmament and Throne - 1:22-28

a. The cherubim are pictured as supporting a gemlike firmament (something extensive and spread out) that functions as a platform for God's throne. The "likeness" on the throne was that of God. He could not really be seen except in general shape, and his most "visible" feature was his glorious shining brightness. The entire vision proclaims through its profound imagery the glory, holiness, and sovereignty of God.

b. Ezekiel naturally (for that culture) fell on his face. That was standard practice when appearing before an earthly monarch, let alone the Almighty.

c. The fact God appeared in this way to Ezekiel raises the expectation that God is going to reveal what he is about to do.

d. As awesome as this glory is, God's most direct self-manifestation has been his arrival as a human being. He came in remarkably humble circumstances, living and dying in a rather obscure part of the world, but Jn. 1:14 tells us that in Christ we beheld God's glory.

e. As awesome as this glory is, it is something we are to reflect as a result of God's indwelling Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

B. Ezek. 2:1 – 3:27

1. Commissioned as a Prophet to Rebels - 2:1-7

a. Ezekiel is here (and about 90 times throughout the book) addressed by God as "son of man." This emphasizes his humanity, his mortality, as over against God's

supernatural greatness and power. Later, the term "son of man" took on the symbolism of *The Human* and became a Messianic term (as it is when applied to Jesus).

b. God tells Ezekiel that he is sending him to speak his words to the children of Israel. He makes clear that this will not be a "cushy" assignment:

(1) He describes the Israelites as rebels, transgressors, impudent, and stubborn.

(2) He instructs Ezekiel not to be afraid of them or to be afraid of their words.

(3) The Israelites are pictured as briars and thorns and as scorpions, things that wound and sting.

c. Ezekiel's assignment is to speak God's words to them, not his own, and to do so regardless of their opposition and regardless of their refusal to heed that word. His call is to be a faithful proclaimer of God's message.

2. Ezekiel's Relationship to the Message Symbolized - 2:8 – 3:3

a. Unlike rebellious Israel, Ezekiel is to heed the word of the Lord. He is to be a faithful servant, one who can be trusted to faithfully discharge his assignment.

b. The scroll represents God's message for Israel. The fact it has writing on both sides suggests that God is calling him to communicate a great deal (since scrolls normally had writing on only one side). The message Ezekiel is to preach is in large part going to be bad news to the Israelites, one that will produce lamentations, mourning, and woe.

c. The action of eating the scroll says several things:

(1) Obedience to this unusual command shows Ezekiel's willingness to be the faithful servant God is calling him to be. He is saying "yes" to that call, "yes" to doing whatever God asks of him.

(2) It symbolizes the importance Ezekiel is to attach to the message of God. It is to be as his food; it is to be essential for his life. When Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work" (Jn. 4:34), he was indicating the priority of God's will in his life. In Ezekiel, the message he is called to deliver is to be his "food," his top priority.

(3) The fact he is to *fill* his stomach with the scroll suggests that it is to be all that he delivers. In other words, he is to have nothing to preach except the Lord's message.

(4) The fact this nasty looking scroll actually tasted as sweet as honey allows Ezekiel to experience that faithfulness with regard to God's word is the path of blessing even when it may not appear so. It also generally testifies to the goodness of God's word (e.g., Ps. 119:103).

3. Divine Strengthening Promised - 3:4-9

a. Though God is sending him to his own people, to people who speak his language, they will not listen to him because they do not listen to God, and they do not listen to God because they are impudent and hard-hearted. The resistance Ezekiel meets as a faithful spokesman for God will not be personally directed, though it may appear so.

b. God encourages him with the statement that he has given him the strength to face their hostility, symbolically expressed as making his face strong and hard against them. It is not going to be easy to be faithful in proclamation, but God will give him courage. What he cannot do is alter the message!

4. Divine Delivery to the Audience - 3:10-15

a. God tells him, "receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears." The point is that Ezekiel is to be accurate in transmission. He is not to misunderstand or forget the message God calls him to deliver.

b. He is miraculously transported from his position at the Chebar River to Tel Abib proper, to the exiles to whom he is to prophesy.

c. His being taken up is accompanied by "bitterness" and "agitation." This is understandable. One minute he was a non-descript exile; the next minute he was under a divine calling that promised difficulty, rejection, and hostility. The hand of the Lord was strong on him, meaning he was under God's direction, which is precisely why he was distressed. He knew that faithfulness did not mean easy living.

d. The visions, conversations, and experience of miraculous transport overwhelmed Ezekiel. He was in "spiritual shock" for a week, undoubtedly trying to grasp what had happened and its implications.

5. Responsibility of the Watchman - 3:16-21

a. After his week-long recuperation, God tells Ezekiel that he has made him a watchman or sentinel for the house of Israel. God has given him the responsibility of delivering God's warnings.

b. As one who sounds God's warnings, his role as watchman is really one of mercy, but it will not be perceived that way by those who do not want to hear. They will blame him rather than appreciate his warning.

c. Regarding the wicked, if Ezekiel fails to deliver God's warning to them so that they might repent and be spared, he will share responsibility for their condemnation. If, however, he warns them and they do not repent, Ezekiel will not have any responsibility for their condemnation.

d. Regarding the righteous, if Ezekiel fails to warn them when they turn to sin, he will share responsibility for their condemnation. If, however, he warns the righteous and they avoid sin (either do not begin or repent), they will avoid condemnation, and Ezekiel will have discharged his duty.

e. As Christians, we all have responsibility for maturing the body of Christ by sharing the warnings we know (Eph. 4:11-16). If a brother or sister is in danger, it is our duty to tell them. We are not responsible for their reaction; our duty is limited to sounding the warning.

6. The Final Stage of the Commissioning - 3:22-27

a. Ezekiel is told to go to the plain (or valley), and there he again sees the glory of the Lord that he saw by the river. God reinforces his awesome splendor in Ezekiel's mind.

b. Ezekiel is commanded to take his first symbolic action, but its message is directed to himself rather than to the Israelites. He is to be tied up (by friends or family) in his house so that he could not go out, and he is to be deprived of speech by God. This symbolizes two important things about his role:

(1) When and where he prophesies is not his decision. He has no freedom in that regard; he can only go when released.

(2) What he prophesies is not to be his own words. He is only to say what the Lord gives him to say; he is not to invent anything or take his message from anyone else.

c. Again, God indicates that the response to the message is not the prophet's responsibility; his duty is to faithfully proclaim the message.

C. Ezek. 4:1 - 7:27

1. Symbolic Portrayals of Jerusalem's Coming Siege - 4:1 - 5:17

a. Ezekiel builds a model of Jerusalem - 4:1-3

(1) God instructs Ezekiel to portray Jerusalem on a clay brick or tablet and then to lay siege to it.

(a) This involved making models of the instruments of siege: siege-wall (possibly protection for archers), earthen ramp or siege mound (necessary for use of the battering ram), battering ram, and military encampments.

(b) This indicated to the inhabitants of Tel Abib that, contrary to their expectations, Jerusalem would again be attacked by the Babylonians. The worst was not over for that city.

(2) In addition, Ezekiel set an iron plate (a cooking pan) between himself and the besieged city, as he continued to stare toward it. This symbolized God's rejection of the city; he was separated from it and was executing its judgment.

(3) The message for the exiles was that God's blessings and fellowship are conditioned on faithfulness. The fact God had blessed Jerusalem and established his Temple there did not mean that its inhabitants could sin with impunity. The wickedness of the people continued unabated under the reign of Zedekiah (2 Ki. 24:19-20), and God will not be mocked.

(4) The message for us is that we cannot be deceived into thinking that being a Christian is a license to sin. As Paul says in Gal. 6:7-9:

⁷Do not be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, this also he will reap. ⁸For the one who sows to his own flesh, from the flesh shall reap destruction, but the one who sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life. ⁹So let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we shall reap a harvest if we do not give up.

b. Punishment compared to that of northern kingdom - 4:4-8

(1) With Jerusalem symbolically under siege, Ezekiel lies on his left side for 390 days (not continuously - e.g., "he preached on Ephesians for two months"), representing 390 years of Israel's punishment for wickedness, and on his right side 40 days, representing 40 years punishment for Judah's wickedness.

(2) The point seems to be that, contrary to the expectations of the exiles, Judah will suffer the same kind of punishment as Israel. In other words, its capital will also be destroyed and its existence as a nation ended. The only difference will be the length of that punishment.

(3) The years of punishment are best understood as symbolizing captivity. 430 years spoke to the Jew of Egyptian bondage (Ex. 12:40-41). They are divided

390/40 because 40 years was the length of time the Jews wandered in the wilderness as punishment for unbelief and disobedience and because Israel's years of exile would be significantly longer than those of Judah (from 722/21 B.C. to 539 B.C.).

(4) During these 430 days, or perhaps just during the final 40, Ezekiel was required to stare toward the model and was bound so that he could not turn his back to it, thus symbolizing God's determination to execute his judgment. At the same time, he prophesied against the city with a bared arm, thereby verbally announcing its fate and symbolizing God's readiness to bring it about (see, Isa. 52:10).

(5) The implicit message of hope was that the days of Judah's exile would end, just as the 430 years of Egyptian bondage had ended.

c. Famine in siege and defilement in exile - 4:9-17

(1) Ezekiel's daily diet, at least his public diet, during the 390 days consisted of rationed portions of a "make-do" type bread (about 8 ozs.) and water (just over a pint). This symbolized the famine that would accompany the long siege of Jerusalem, a fact God makes plain in vv. 16-17.

(2) God first directed Ezekiel to bake this mixture over dried human excrement, which would make the food ritually unclean (probably because human excrement was to be buried - Deut. 23:12-14). The point was that those exiled from Jerusalem would eat defiled foods in captivity, because of both restricted selection and preparation options (see, Dan. 1:8; Hos. 9:3-4). In kindness to Ezekiel, whose priestly sensitivities revolted against eating defiled food, God blunted the symbolism and allowed him to cook over dried animal dung, which was a common fuel and not in violation of cleanliness regulations.

(3) The end of v. 17 specifies that this is all due to the iniquity of the people.

d. Fate portrayed through shaving of head and beard - 5:1-17

(1) God commands Ezekiel to shave his head and beard, a humiliating act for a Jew, and then to carefully divide the hair into thirds. When the 430 days of the siege were over, Ezekiel burned the first pile, chopped up the second with a sword, and scattered the third pile to the wind, chasing after it with his sword. He then recovered a few hairs and tucked them in the folds of his garment, only to take some of those out and throw them in the fire.

(2) This symbolized the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem as a result of the siege. According to v. 12, one-third would die from the "fire" of disease and famine during and after the siege; one-third would be killed in the battle for the city and by angry conquering soldiers; and one-third will flee the city, many of whom will be cut down in the attempt. Even some of the relatively small group that survived would perish in exile. The horror of

Jerusalem's destruction is described in some detail in Lamentations (e.g., Lam. 1:7-14, 2:20-22, 4:4-10).

(3) God declares that the horrible judgment on Jerusalem is because it rejected him. God had placed it in the center of the nations and established his Temple there so that it would be a beacon of holiness, a light to the Gentiles. Instead of fulfilling its special place in God's plan, its inhabitants spurned his will and lived worse than the surrounding pagan nations! God makes it clear that he is going to vindicate and rebellious Jerusalem is going to be humiliated before the world.

(4) As Christians, you and I have been blessed more than Jerusalem. We are children of God and heirs of eternal life. God calls us to live holy lives (1 Pet. 1:14-15), to let our light shine in this sin-drenched world that he might be glorified (Mat. 5:14-16). If we, having been given so much, turn our backs on God, there is a terrible judgment in store (Heb. 10:26-31; 2 Pet. 2:17-22).

2. The Coming Judgment Predicted - 6:1 - 7:27

a. Ezekiel repeatedly preached the annihilation of Judah so the message would have a chance to get through to a stubborn people. These two chapters are relatively straightforward predictions of doom and disaster.

b. Chapter 6 is a judgment on idolatrous Israel (understood to be Judah, what remained of old Israel).

(1) Idolatry was the standard way of worship in the ancient world. In fact, all religions everywhere were idolatrous except Judaism. Non-idolatry was so out of step with prevailing beliefs, that sticking to it was very hard. Douglas Stuart in his commentary on Exodus (NAC, 450-452) summarizes the strong appeal of idolatry as follows:

(a)

It was believed that by making a likeness of a god or goddess, the essence of that divinity could be brought close to a group of humans. Idols were believed to represent a god, similar to the way a voodoo doll represents a person. What is done to the idol will be done to the god represented by it.

This was compounded by the fact idolatrous religions made no ethical demands and often included ritual sex. Orthodoxy became a minority view in Israel and idolatry prevailed during most of the nation's history.

(3) The fact it was the majority view did not alter the fact it was an outrageous affront to God, spiritual adultery, and required punishment. God promises to bring this abomination to an end with the wholesale destruction and slaughter wrought by the Babylonians.

(4) But even in the midst of this destruction, a remnant will survive and in captivity come to realize the horror of what they had done to God. They will realize who God is, that he cannot be mocked and treated as irrelevant, and they will recognize just how serious he is about covenant loyalty.

c. In Chapter 7 God announces that the disaster is imminent. His wrath is coming in punishment of their wickedness. All things in which they trusted for security would fail to protect them.

(1) Their own strength would not stop the disaster (v.14).

(2) Their wealth would not stop the disaster (v. 19). In fact, the love of wealth had lured them to iniquity and thus to judgment.

(3) Their religious environment would not stop the disaster. The Temple, which gave them a false sense of security, will itself be destroyed (v. 20-22).