



Class Notes

Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1-48

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What happens when God's chosen people take the place God intended as a hub of his life-giving presence and corrupt it into a source of abuse and injustice? Walk with Ezekiel through the tragic loss of the temple in Jerusalem to see how God will bring restoration, hope, and new life on the other side of exile.

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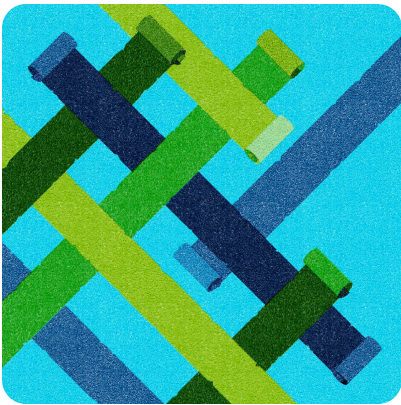
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Module 1: Introduction to Ezekiel

SESSIONS 1-4

Trace the outline of the book of Ezekiel, and learn how this scroll is woven into the family quilt of the Hebrew Bible.

Session 1: Understanding Ezekiel

Key Takeaways

- The composer of Ezekiel coordinates the book within the larger story of the Hebrew Bible by linking the opening lines of the scroll to the events in 2 Kings.
- Ezekiel is a war refugee and captive who has been stripped of all social standing and exiled in a foreign land.
- Ezekiel lives in the window between two tragedies. His job is to tell his fellow exiles about the greater tragedy on the horizon.

Starting Point #1: Who Is Ezekiel?

The book of Ezekiel begins with a narrative about an Israelite sitting by a river (or, more likely, an irrigation canal) in Babylon. This man is the son of a priest, and he lives among a group of exiled Israelites.

Ezekiel 1:1-4 Instructor's Translation

¹ Now it came about in the thirtieth year,
on the fifth day of the fourth month,
while I was among the exiles,
by the river Chebar among the exiles,
the skies were opened
and I saw visions of *Elohim*.

² “On the fifth of the month”—This is the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin.

³ The word of Yahweh came to Ezekiel, son of Buzi, the priest,
in the land of the Chaldeans,
by the river Chebar,
and there the hand of Yahweh came upon him.

⁴ ... and I saw, and look: a storm wind was coming from the north ...

Who is this man? Where is he exactly? Why and how did he get there? The explanatory notes in 1:2-3 serve as hyperlinks to the story of Judah’s kings and Jehoiachin in particular, which is found in the scroll of [2 Kings 24-25](#).

The king of Babylon first attacked the city of Jerusalem in the year 597 (see [2 Kgs. 24:10-16](#)), when he took the current king from the line of David away into captivity along with the leaders of the city (including Ezekiel, Daniel, and lots of others).

Babylon appointed new puppet leaders, including a new king, Zedekiah, who ruled in Jerusalem for 9.5 years, until he joined a rebel alliance with Egypt against Babylon (see [Ezek. 17:15](#)).

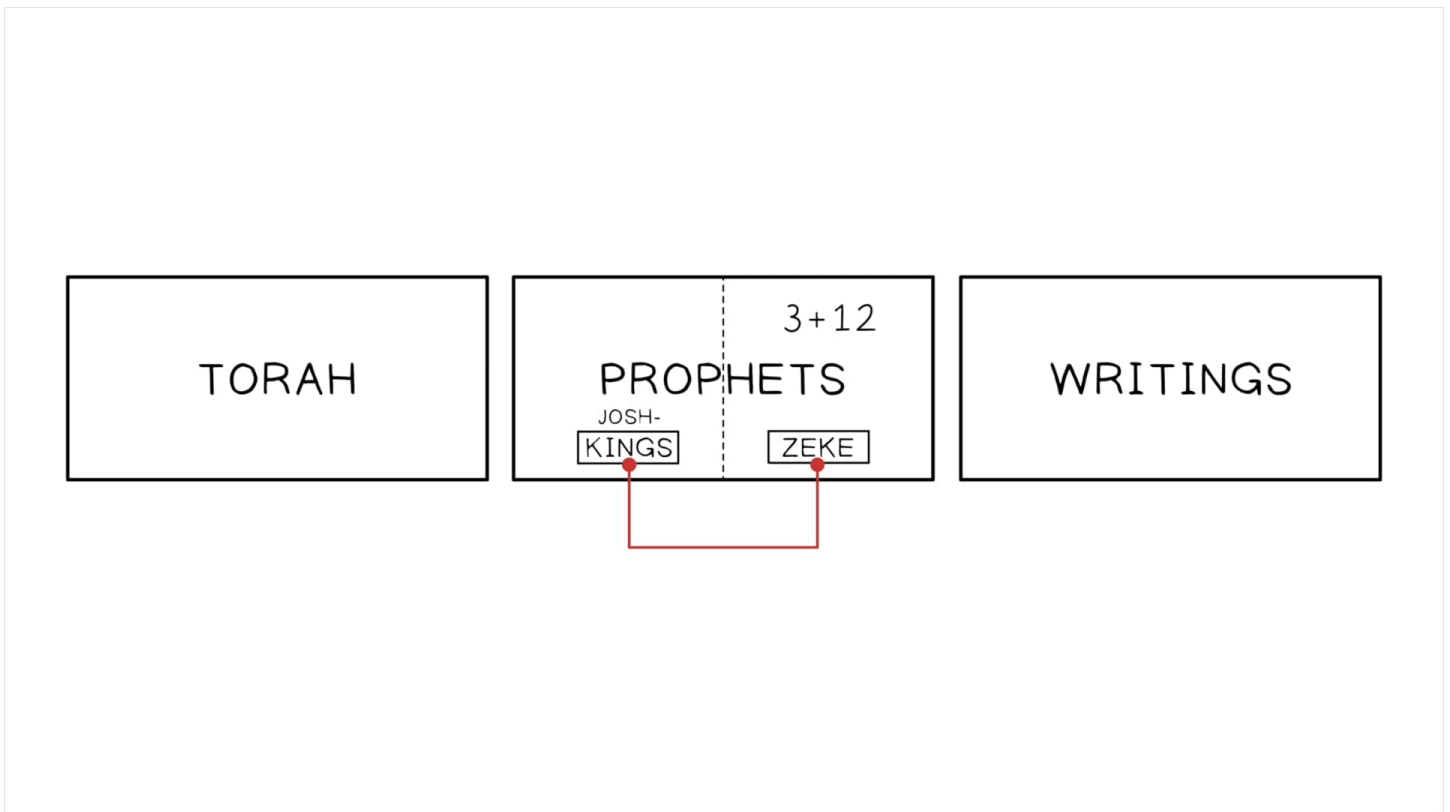
Babylon came back with a vengeance and besieged Jerusalem for 1.5 years until the city collapsed from food and water shortages (see 2 Kgs. 25).

So Ezekiel is a war refugee and a political prisoner who was taken from his homeland and forced to live in a refugee camp in the flood plains of Babylon. And there Ezekiel has a frightening encounter with the God of Israel who commissions him to give a message to his people.

But this is only the first level of explanation, and it raises some bigger questions.

- Where am I in the larger plotline of the biblical story?
- How does this character (Ezekiel, a prophet-priest) and how do these places (Jerusalem and Babylon) fit into the larger themes of that story?
- Why does any of this matter?

TaNaK Prophets Links



TaNaK Prophets Links. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How does knowing Ezekiel's personal experience as a war refugee, captive, and exiled priest shape the way we read his scroll?

Session 2: The Main Themes of the Torah

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 1-11 serves as the introduction to the Hebrew Bible and establishes a pattern of themes that are repeated and developed throughout the rest of the story, including Ezekiel.
- The precise design and arrangement of each section of Ezekiel echoes the Bible's thematic melody introduced in the early chapters of Genesis.

Starting Point #2: The Story of the Covenant and the Prophets

1. The promise of Eden and God's royal priests foolishly fail.
 - God brings order out of chaos and appoints humans as royal-priests in a cosmic temple where Heaven and Earth are one.
 - Humans foolishly rebel, and they are exiled from sacred space out into the wilderness, where chaos and violence keep re-cycling into wider circles of destruction leading to Babylon's rise, fall, and scattering.
2. God chooses one family from the scattering of Babylon (see [Gen. 11:10-32](#)) and promises that through this family, he will restore the blessing of Eden to all nations (God's blessing and covenant with Abraham in [Gen. 12](#), [15](#), [17](#)).
3. As the family grows, God rescues them from slavery in Egypt and invites all of them to become his covenant partners and priestly representatives to the nations.
 - [Exodus 19-24](#): God calls Israel to obey the Torah in order to become priests to the nations.
 - [Leviticus 26](#): God promises blessing for covenant obedience and increasing levels of curse leading to exile for covenant disobedience.
4. Moses as the archetypal prophet leads the people toward the land, and he warns them of the dire need for covenant faithfulness.
 - [Deuteronomy 27-30](#): Moses warns Israel of the consequences of covenant failure—the blessing and the curse.
 - [Deuteronomy 31-32](#): Yahweh and Moses warn Israel that they're going to be unfaithful to the covenant and turn toward other gods for help. Moses' poem of "testimony" ([Deut. 32](#)) is a preview of Israel's story in the land.
5. The family as a whole consistently fails as God's covenant partners, so God raises up a king and promises that through his line a future descendant will realize the promises made to Abraham and Israel.
 - God's covenant with David: [2 Samuel 7](#); [1 Chronicles 17](#); [Psalm 2](#), [Psalm 132](#), [Psalm 72](#).
 - God promises a royal descendant who will come from David's line and restore the Eden blessing to the nations.
6. David's descendants fail: 1-2 Kings.

- David's sons are led astray through idolatry, money, sex, and power. They run Israel, the temple, and Jerusalem into the ground.
 - Babylon arises to conquer the whole ancient Near East, and God allows them to overpower Jerusalem and force David's line into slavery.
7. The scrolls of the prophets link back to earlier in the story and focus on key moments when Yahweh raised up more Moses-like mediators between God and the people.
- [Isaiah 1:2](#) opens with the same words as Moses' song in Deuteronomy 32.
 - Jeremiah resists his calling as a prophet with lame excuses that imitate Moses' lame excuses at the burning bush ([Jer. 1:1-10](#) echoes [Exod. 3-4](#)).
 - Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot echoes Moses' vision of Yahweh in the burning bush ([Exod. 3](#)) and on Mount Sinai ([Exod. 19-24](#)).

The Essential Plot Conflict of Ezekiel

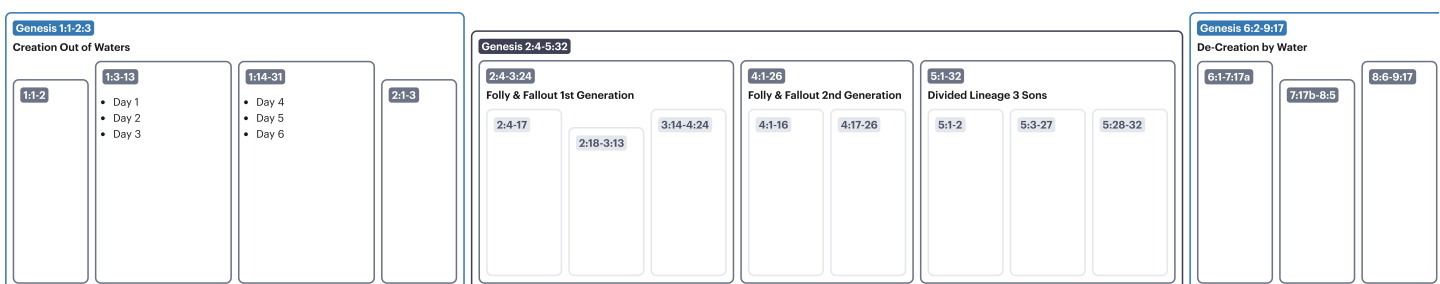
The Story: God appoints Abraham, Israel, and David's line as the way he will restore the Eden-blessing to the nations and so demonstrate his character and justice (see [Gen. 12:1-3](#); [Exod. 19:1-6](#); [2 Sam. 7](#); and [Ps. 72](#)).

The Crisis: Every generation of Israel and its king breaks the covenant and fails to faithfully represent Yahweh to the nations. Even the remnant of Judah begins an irreversible descent into exile and destruction.

The Questions Raised: Would Yahweh really allow people to be decimated and sent into exile? Would he really destroy the temple, his chosen place to live? What about his promises to Abraham and David? Is there any hope for the future of the covenant? How will Israel ever become a faithful covenant partner? Will the Heaven-on-Earth dream of Eden ever be realized?

Starting Point #3: The Thematic Melody of the TaNaK

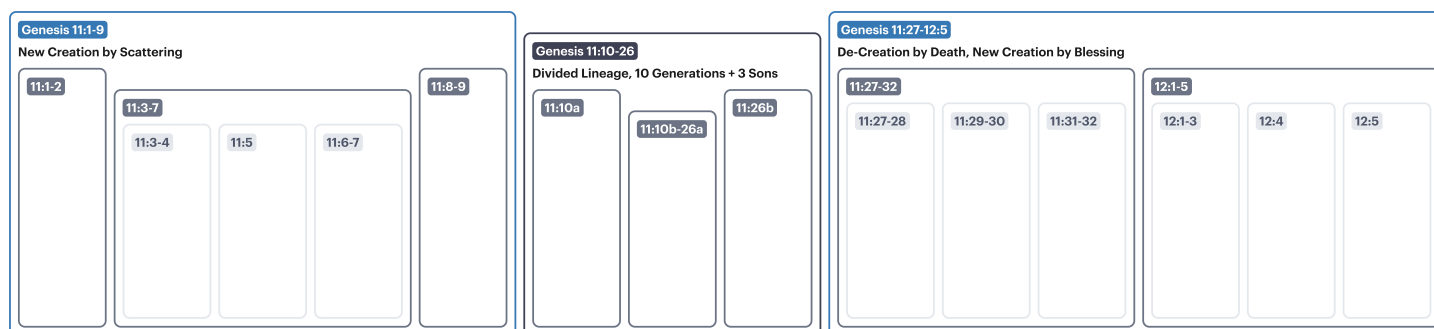
The literary organization of Genesis 1:1-11:26, both in its design and the main themes explored in the narratives, forms the template for the organization of the TaNaK. So then, to truly grasp what the entire TaNaK is about, we need to recap the story so far, as it's presented in Genesis 1-11 (adapted from D.A. Teeter, personal communication and his "Biblical Symmetry and Its Modern Detractors" paper delivered at the 2019 Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament).



Genesis 1:1-9:17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).



Genesis 6:1-11:9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).



Genesis 11:1-12:5. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

These thematic cycles set up a narrative pattern and thematic melody that re-cycles with each following generation as well as developing and advancing. The basic melody goes like this.

1. Creation and Blessing

- God brings order/life/blessing out of chaos/waters/death/curse.
- Key words: life, blessing, create, establish, seed, sprout, grow, fruit, fruitful, and multiply; seven, fullness, and oath (all spelled שבע)
- Key images: dry land, refuge, safety, order

2. Folly, Test, and Failure (a.k.a. “The Foolish Fall”)

- God invites a chosen human partner to share in the order/life/blessing, which places a decision/test of their trustworthiness on the table.
- God’s chosen partner fails/succeeds the test, usually involving deception/division/violence.
- The same person/next generation faces their own opportunity and test, and fails/succeeds, usually involving an intensified expression of deception/division/violence.
- The escalating sequence of tests and failures leads to a separation between the key characters so that one person or family splits off from the rest and is chosen by God for a new future.

3. De-Creation and Re-Creation

- De-creation: God brings about an inversion of #1 above, usually an escalation of chaos/death/curse.
- Out of that de-creation, God chooses/preserves a remnant/seed and begins a new movement of re-creation through them (often marked by covenants and wordplays on the Hebrew root שבע, “seven/fullness/oath” or “covenant,” ברית).

4. Press Repeat

Creation

- Out of darkness & disorder
- Order / life / blessing / rest / seed / fruit
- Patterns of 3+1 / 7 / 10

The Test (a.k.a. "The Foolish Fall")

Pass/Fail

- Deception
- Doing "good" in one's eyes
- Division

Pass/Fail

- Deception
- Doing "good" in one's eyes
- Division

Pass/Fail

- Deception
- Doing "good" in one's eyes
- Division

De-Creation & Re-Creation

- Disorder / death / curse
- Rescue of remnant
- Patterns of 3+1 / 7 / 10
- New order / life / blessing through covenant

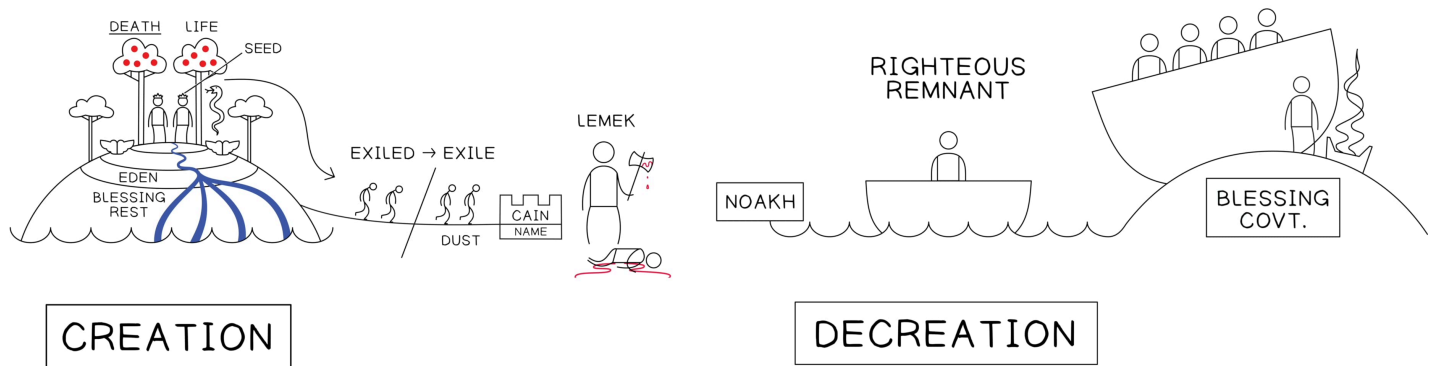
Genesis 1:1-11:26. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The Ezekiel scroll is organized according to this same thematic melody, as the cycle replays itself on the macro-level, medium-level, and micro-level of each part of the story.



Ezekiel 1-48. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Exile and Covenant in Genesis



Exile and Covenant in Genesis. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How does familiarity with the cycle of themes from Genesis help us understand Ezekiel?

Session 3: The Importance of the Temple

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 1 describes the three-tiered cosmos as a cosmic temple. Later biblical authors will develop this theme, depicting God enthroned above the skies with the land as his footstool.
- Genesis 2 depicts the garden in Eden as a proto-temple, with humans serving as God's chosen priests.
- The tabernacle and, later, the temple serve as symbolic versions of this cosmic reality, and the journey of the high priest on the Day of Atonement into the holy of holies represents a return to Eden.

Starting Point #4: The Temple-Centered Worldview of the Biblical Story

Genesis 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-3:24 present the story of creation from two overlapping angles, both of which are rooted in a cosmic temple conception of reality.

- Genesis 1:1-2:3: God brings order out of dark chaos to create a holy cosmic order where God and humanity, Heaven and Earth, are united together in eternal Sabbath harmony.
- Genesis 2:4-3:24: Heaven and Earth are ideally bound together in Eden, where God's royal priests will mediate God's life out into the world.

The Cosmic Temple of Sabbath Harmony

The prologue and epilogue of Genesis 1 are designed as a macro-frame around the internal sequence of six days.

1:1 Summary Prologue

In the beginning, God **created** **the skies and the land** [7 words]

1:2 Exposition of Prologue in 3 Lines

Now, **the land** was wild and waste (תהו ובהו *tohu va-vohu*)

and darkness was over the face of the deep abyss (תהום *tehom*)

but the breath of *Elohim* was hovering over the face of the waters (המים *hammayim*) [7 x 2 words]

Day 1

Day 4

Genesis 1 Themes. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Day 2	Day 5
Day 3	Day 6
<p>2:1 Summary Epilogue Thus were finished the skies and the land and all their host</p>	
<p>2:2-3 Exposition of Epilogue in 3 Lines</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. And God completed on the seventh day his work which he had made [7 words] 2. And he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made [7 words] 3. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it [7 words] because on it he rested from all his work which God created to make [key word of 1:1] 	
<p><i>Genesis 1 Themes. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).</i></p>	

This design structure acts as an envelope around the sequence of six days, and it clearly emphasizes the sevenfold symbolism of God's actions and the culmination of the entire narrative in the seventh day.

The Meaning and Significance of Seven in Genesis 1:1-2:3

Seven is symbolic in ancient Near Eastern and Israelite culture and literature. Seven communicates a sense of fullness or completeness. "Seven" (שבע) is spelled with the same consonants as the word "complete/full" (שבע).

Seven being symbolic of completeness is likely due to the lunar calendar of moon cycles. The biblical Hebrew word for month is "moon" (חדש), which is a homonym of the Hebrew word "new." It refers to a time reckoning of 29 days in each month, so that each month consists of four seven-day cycles, making a "complete" cycle of time (see Maurice Farbridge, [Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism](#), 134-137).

There are seven words (1x7) in Genesis 1:1, fourteen words (2x7) in Genesis 1:2, and twenty-one words (3x7) that describe the climactic seventh day in Genesis 2:1-3.

The concluding seventh paragraph in Genesis 2:1-3 has three lines, which have seven words each (Gen. 2:2-3a).

- And-finished / God / on-the-day / seventh / his-work / which / he did
- and-he-rested / on-the-day / seventh / from-all his-work / which / he did
- and-he-blessed / God / the-day / the-seventh / and-he-sanctified / it

There are seven paragraphs in Genesis 1:1-2:3 marked by "evening and morning."

Each of the key words in Genesis 1:1 is repeated by multiples of seven in Genesis 1:2-2:3.

- "God" = 35x (7 x 5)
- "Land" = 21x (7 x 3)
- "Skies" = 21x (7 x 3)

Key words are repeated seven times.

- “Light” and “day” on day one
- “Light” on day four
- “Living creature (חיה)” on days five through six
- “God saw that it was good”

God speaks 10 times in Genesis 1:2-2:3.

- Seven of these speeches are divine creative commands to the creation itself: “let there be ...”
- Three of these speeches are divine initiatives toward humanity: “let us make ‘adam ...,” “be fruitful and multiply,” “behold I have given to you ...”

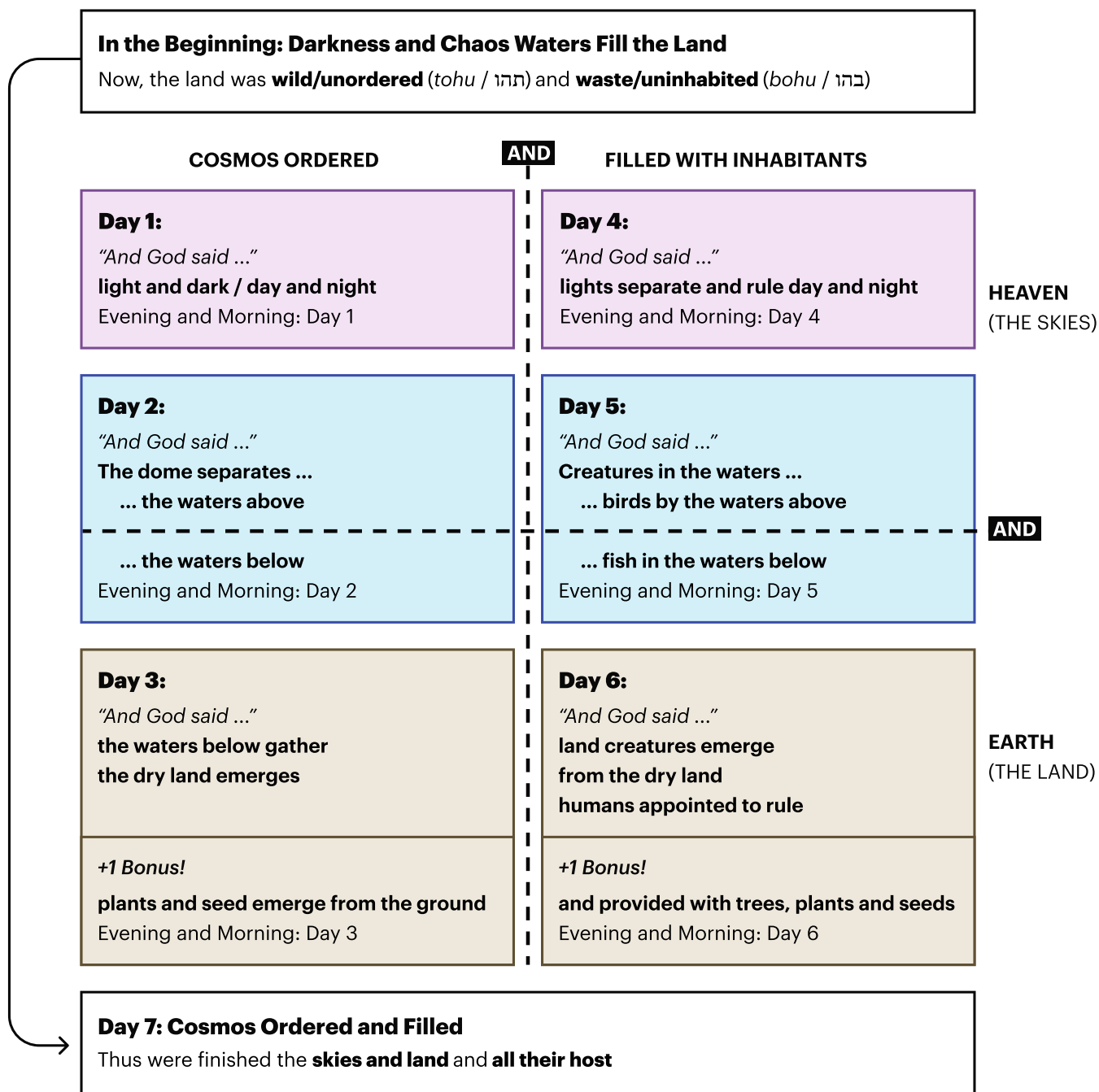
“To suppose that all these appearances of the number seven are mere coincidence is not possible. This numerical symmetry is, as it were, the golden thread that binds together all the parts of the section.”

Cassuto, Umberto (1961). [*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I, From Adam to Noah \(Genesis 1-6\)*](#). Magnes Press. 93-94.

The Cosmos of Genesis 1: Days One Through Six

Days one through six have been neatly organized as two triads that each address the “problems” with the cosmic order presented in Genesis 1:2: disorder and uninhabited darkness. Days one through three address the problem of disorder as God organizes the cosmos into distinct realms: the heavens above, the middle heaven/earth, and the land below. Days four through six then supply each of these realms with their appropriate inhabitants: the heavenly realm with lights, the middle heaven/earth with birds and fish, and the dry land with creatures and humans.

When these overlapping design structures are laid on top of each other, we get what scholar David Andrew Teeter calls “literary origami.” The six days of Genesis 1 are arranged along two “folds”—a vertical axis that forms two matching triads, and a horizontal axis that forms each triad into a mirror shape.



Origami of Genesis 1. Adapted from David Andrew Teeter by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

The “world-picture” that emerges from this conception of reality is a three-tiered cosmos of the skies, the land, and the waters under the land.

Psalm 24:1-2 NASB*

¹ The **land** is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the **world**, and those who dwell in it.

² For **he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers.**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 136:5-6 NASB*

⁵ [Give thanks] to him who made the heavens with skill, for his lovingkindness is everlasting;

⁶ to **him who spread out the land above the waters**, for his lovingkindness is everlasting;

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Exodus 20:4 NASB*

⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in **the skies above** or on **the land beneath** or in **the water under the land**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The Heavenly Divine Throne

The biblical cosmos consists of three tiers: the heaven, the land, and the sea, but the primary realms of the biblical drama are “the heavens and the land.”

In Genesis 1, heaven and land are two distinct yet overlapping realms. The heavenly/higher realm is transcendent, ultimate, and from there life, meaning, and order originate.

Psalm 103:19 NIV

The LORD has established **his throne in heaven**,
and his kingdom rules over all.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Instructor's Translation

⁵ This is what the LORD says:

**“The heavens are my throne,
and the land is my footstool.**

Where is the house you will build for me?

Where will my resting place be?

² Has not my hand made all these things,
and so they came into being?”

Psalm 11:4 NASB*

The LORD is in his holy temple; **Yahweh's throne is in heaven**;
his eyes behold, his eyelids test the sons of men.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Because the heavenly realm is the divine throne, it is often depicted as a “divine council” room.

Psalm 103:19-21 NIV

¹⁹ The LORD has established **his throne in heaven**,
and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰ Praise the LORD, you his **angels**,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.

²¹ Praise the LORD, all his **heavenly hosts**,
you his servants who do his will.

1 Kings 22:19 NASB

Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the **host of heaven** standing by him on his right and on his left."

Psalms 89:5-7 NASB*

⁵ The heavens will praise your wonders, O Yahweh;
your faithfulness also in **the assembly of the holy ones**.

⁶ For who in the skies is comparable to Yahweh?
Who among the sons of God is like Yahweh,

⁷ a God greatly feared in **the council of the holy ones**,
and awesome above all those who are around him?

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

But [Genesis 1](#) provides us with just the first cosmic-temple angle on the meaning of the cosmos. The second and most fundamental angle comes in the following narrative, [Genesis 2:4-3:24](#) (and really, all of Genesis 1:1-11:26, but that's another story).

The Planting of Eden, the Cosmic Proto-Temple

^{4a} These are the generations of the skies and the land,
when they were created:

The Waters

^{4b} In the day when Yahweh made the land and skies,

⁵ **now**, no shrub of **the field** was yet in **the land**,
and no plant of **the field** had yet sprouted,

for the Lord God had not sent rain upon **the land**,
and there was no **human** to work the ground,

⁶ but **a stream/flow would go up** from **the land**
and it would water the whole face of the ground,

Humans in the Garden and the Tree of Life

^{a 7} **and Yahweh God formed the human** of dust from the ground,

and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
and the **human** became a living being.

B

- b⁸ And Yahweh God planted a **garden in Eden**, toward the east/from of old,
a' **and he placed there the the human whom he had formed**
b'⁹ and Yahweh God caused to sprout from the **ground**
every tree that is desirable to sight and good for **eating**
and **the tree of life** also in the **middle of the garden**,
and **the tree of the knowledge of good and bad**.

The Waters

10 **Now, a river went out** from Eden **to water** the garden,
and from there it separated and became four heads:

A

- a¹¹ **The name of the first** is Pishon;
b it goes around the whole **land** of Havilah,
which has there gold
¹² and the gold of that **land** is good;
there are the bdellium and the onyx stone.
a'¹³ **And the name of the second** river is Gihon;
b' it goes around the whole land of Cush.
a'¹⁴ **And the name of the third** river is Tigris;
b' it goes east of Assyria.
a' **And the fourth** river,
b' it is the Euphrates.

Humans in the Garden and the Tree of Death

15 **And Yahweh God took the human**
and he rested him in the **garden in Eden** to work (עבד • 'avad) and to keep (שמר • shamar) it.

16 And Yahweh God commanded the **human** saying,

B

- a " **From every tree of the garden**
b **you may surely eat**
a¹⁷ but from **tree of the knowledge of good and bad**
b **you shall not eat from it**,
a for in the day that **you eat from it**,
b you will surely **die**."

Genesis 2:4-17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

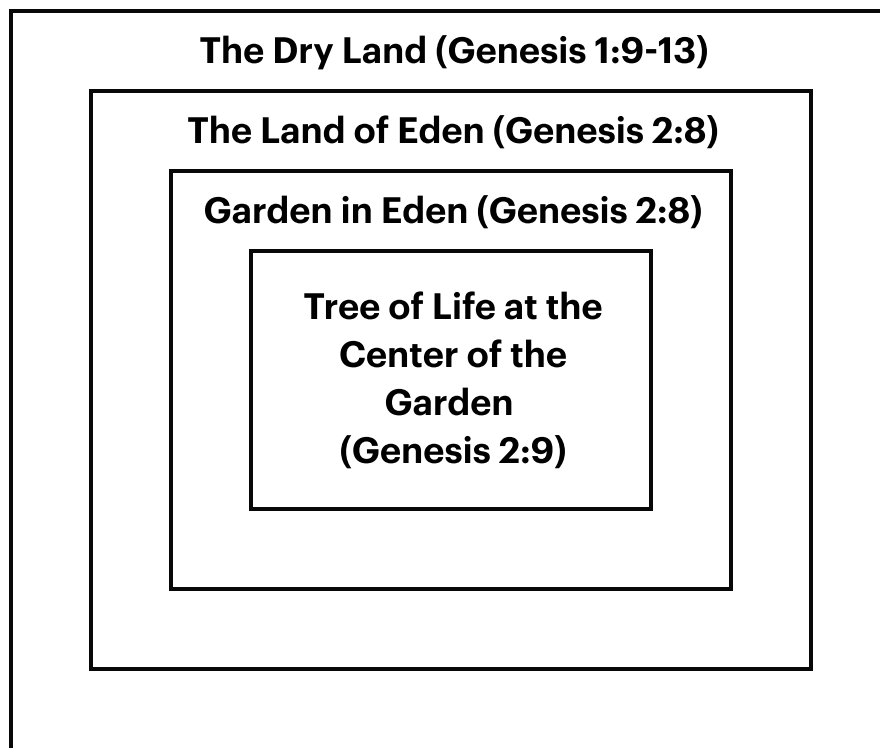
This symmetrical design invites the reader to compare the pre-garden waters (A) with the garden waters (A'). The stream/flow by itself does not create Eden in 2:4b-6, but it does create the clay and generates potential for Eden to exist. For Eden to emerge, God must direct the waters toward a purpose and then plant a garden (B), which then (B') creates an overflow of value for the nations (Israel, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Assyria).

The double placing (B and B') of humanity in the garden is intentional. The first placement in 2:7-9 and 2:10-14 is about God setting humanity in a cultivated environment that is ripe with potential. The second placement in 2:15-17 focuses on the test that the garden represents for the human.

- Genesis 2:15: “And he rested him” (וינחהו) points forward to the story of Noah (נח) who will have to bring comfort (נחם, 5:29) to the land that is cursed because of humanity’s folly in the garden by offering a sacrifice on top of the sacred mountain. This comparison invites the reader to see how God places this human atop a sacred mountain of Eden in this story as well. It also hints forward to Noah’s own failure in his garden-vineyard (Gen. 9:20-24).
- Genesis 2:16: The divine command to eat from all trees except for one sets up the plot tension of the test.
- Notice that the first introduction of the trees in (B) emphasizes the tree of life, while the introduction of the divine command (B') emphasizes the tree that could bring death.

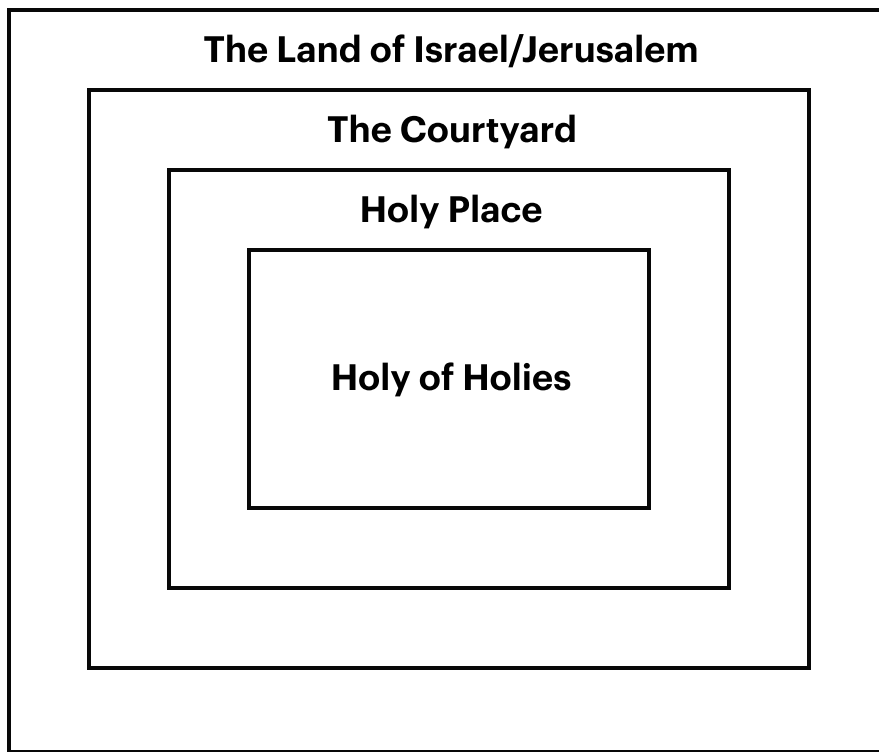
The Three-Part Geography of Eden

The geography of Eden within the dry land of Genesis 1-3 depicts a three-part topography.

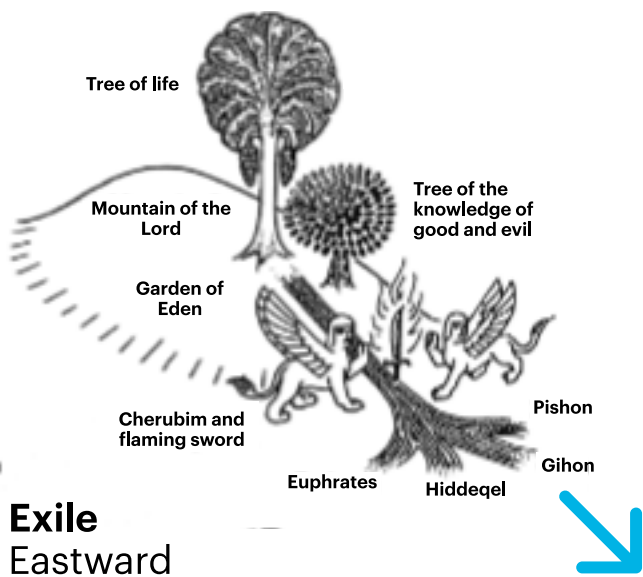


Three-Part Eden Geography Diagram. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

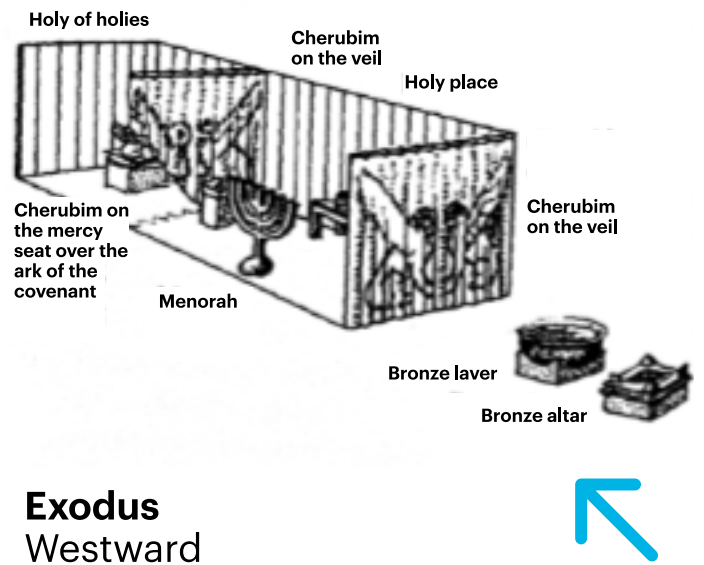
This conception of the garden of Eden on the dry land provides a symbolic template for Israel’s tabernacle temple, especially as described in Ezekiel’s ideal/restored temple (Ezek. 40-48).



Three-Part Tabernacle Layout. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).



Exile
Eastward



Exodus
Westward

Image adapted from Morales, Michael L. (2015). *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. IVP Academic.

Adapted from Morales, Michael L. (2015). *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. IVP Academic. By BibleProject for Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Eden as a Cosmic Mountain

Eden is depicted as a high place from which flows a river of divine life that provides life for all of the nations, and this image is foundational for the biblical storyline. Eden is "Heaven on Earth" in the form of a cosmic high place, where the life of Heaven is one with Earth.

1. Eden is a high enough place for a river to flow out to water various distant regions of the land.

Genesis 2:10 Instructor's Translation

Now, **a river went out** from Eden **to water** the garden; and from there it separated and became four head ...

2. Eden is referred to by later biblical authors as a "mountain."

Ezekiel 28:13-14 NASB

¹³You were in **Eden, the garden of God** ... ¹⁴ you were on the **holy mountain of God**.

3. The plans for the tabernacle, which is designed as a micro-Eden, are revealed to Moses on top of Mount Sinai, where he encountered Yahweh in the burning tree.

Exodus 24:16-18 NASB

¹⁶ The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷ And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. ¹⁸ Moses entered the midst of the cloud as **he went up to the mountain**; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. ...

Exodus 25:8-9 NASB

⁸ Let them construct a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among them. ⁹ **According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture**, just so you shall construct it.

4. The Jerusalem temple, which was designed as Heaven/Eden on Earth, was built on Mount Zion, a high hill which is constantly likened to Eden.

Joel 2:1, 3 Instructor's Translation

¹ Blow the trumpet in **Zion**, sound the alarm on my holy mountain ...

³... before them [the army] the land is like the garden of Eden; behind them, a desert wasteland ...

Isaiah 51:3 NIV

The LORD will surely comfort **Zion** and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts **like Eden**, her wastelands **like the garden of the LORD**. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.

Ezekiel 36:34-35 NASB

³⁴ The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by.

³⁵ They will say, "This desolate land has become **like the garden of Eden**; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited."

"In Genesis 2-3, Eden is not explicitly described as a mountain, but this can be best understood by a careful reading of many biblical texts that symbolically identify Eden with Zion. Through the temple ritual on Mt. Zion, the cosmic images of Eden became an earthly reality. Genesis 2:10-14 mentions the four great rivers that proceed from Eden and water all the earth. One of these cosmic streams is the Gihon, which appears only elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in reference to the main source of Jerusalem's water ... This connection between the Gihon of Eden and of Jerusalem is not the result of fuzzy or illogical mode of thought on the part of the biblical authors. This symbolic matching reflects Zion's cosmic and spiritual importance ... The image of Jerusalem's cosmic stream is no more inappropriate than similar imagery applied to Jerusalem in Psalm 48:1-3 ('Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the entire earth, Mt. Zion in the far north') or Isaiah 2:1-4 ('Mt. Zion will be raised up as the highest of all mountains on earth'). In the symbolic world of Israel's temple liturgies, ordinary space became sacred space, the meager water spring of the city became a cosmic river, and the little knoll of Jerusalem became Mt. Zion, the highest mountain on the earth, and Jerusalem, a peripheral city in the ancient world, became the center of the earth (Ezek. 38:12)."

Anderson, Gary (1988). "The Cosmic Mountain: Eden and Its Early Interpreters in Syriac Christianity." *Genesis 1-3 in the History of Exegesis: Intrigue in the Garden*. E. Mellen Press. 192-193.

5. The heavenly Jerusalem (renewed Eden on Earth) is described as a high mountain garden-city that flows with the river of life.

Psalm 46:4 NIV

There is **a river** whose streams make glad **the city of God**, the holy place where the Most High dwells.

Psalm 48:1-2 NIV

¹ Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in **the city of our God, his holy mountain**. ² Beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like **the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King**.

The river of God flows out from the temple in [Ezekiel 4](#).

Joel 3:18 NASB

And in that day the **mountains will drip with sweet wine**, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water; and **a spring will go out from the house of the LORD** to water the valley of Shittim.

Revelation 21:10 NIV

And he carried me away in the Spirit to **a mountain great and high**, and showed me **the Holy City**, Jerusalem, coming down **out of heaven from God**.

Revelation 22:1 NASB

Then he showed me **a river of the water of life**, clear as crystal, **coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb ...**

Genesis 3:22-24: Exile From Eden = From the Holy of Holies

Exile From Eden

22 And Yahweh God said,

"Look, the human has become like one of us, **knowing good and bad**,
and now so that he won't send out his hand and take also from **the tree of life (חיים)**,
and eat and **live (חי)** forever ..."

23 and Yahweh God **sent him out** from the garden
to work the ground from which he was taken

24a and he **banished** the human

24b and he made to dwell at the **east of the garden of Eden**
cherubim and the flame of the whirling sword to guard way to **the tree of life (חיים)**.

Genesis 3:20-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

This concluding unit represents the inversion of the Eden story's introduction.

- God creates the human and places him in the garden; the human is banished from the garden.
- God causes the tree of life and knowing good and bad to grow; humans are cut off from it.
- Before the garden, there was no human to work the ground; outside Eden the human works the ground.
- Humanity is made mortal so that by obeying God they could remain in the garden and receive the gift of eternal life; now they are cut off and sent into the land of mortality.
- Humanity is directed to "guard/keep" the garden; humanity is now guarded/kept from the garden.

The story's final line about the "cherubim" and "flame of the whirling sword" is a condensed hint that sends the reader forward to the design of the tabernacle and temple and into the prophetic visions of the divine throne room.

- Cherubim flank the ark of the covenant on the holy of holies ([Exod. 25:17-22](#)), and in the temple there are cherubim on the walls of the holy place and on the front doors into the temple ([1 Kgs. 6:29-32](#)).
- The "sword" will appear in the hand of the angel of Yahweh again when David goes to the hilltop in Jerusalem, which at the time was the threshing floor of Ornan ([1 Chron. 21:16](#)).

Coordinating the World-Pictures of Genesis 1 and 2

When we compare the cosmic geography of the first two creation narratives, we find a conceptual overlap that corresponds precisely to the spatial organization of the temple. The temple/tabernacle is a symbolic micro-cosmos, and the rituals performed within it are meant to uphold the stability and order of the world.

Tabernacle/Temple	Cosmic Geography in Genesis 1:1-2:3	Cosmic Geography in Genesis 2:4-3:24
Holy of holies	The skies	Cosmic mountain / The middle of the garden
Holy place Menorah/Palm trees Cherubim Priests	The land Fruit trees Animals Humans	The garden in Eden Fruit trees Cherubim Humans
Courtyard Bronze sea (<u>1 Kgs. 8:64</u>)	The waters	The land outside the garden

Cosmology of Genesis 1 and 2. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

“The function of these correspondences is to underscore the depiction of the sanctuary as a world, that is, an ordered, supportive, and obedient environment, and the depiction of the world as a sanctuary, that is, a place in which the reign of God is visible and unchallenged, and his holiness is palpable, unthreatened, and pervasive ... The temple was conceived as a microcosm, a miniature world. But it is equally the case that in Israel, the world, or I should say, the ideal world, was conceived as a macro-temple, the palace of God which is permeated with his presence and in which all is aligned with his will.”

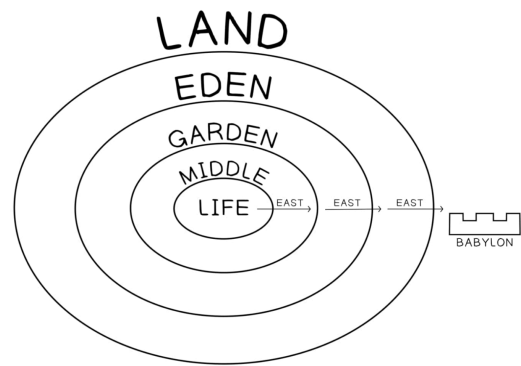
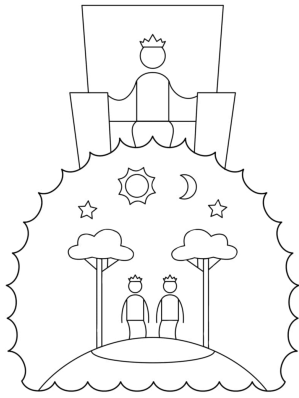
Levenson, Jon (1987). [Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible](#). HarperOne. 86.

What This All Means for Understanding Ezekiel

Every part of the book of Ezekiel takes this cosmic framework and storyline for granted. The significance of Ezekiel’s visions, the God-mobile, the defiled temple and the renewed temple, and his accusations against Israel all take this point of view for granted.

- What is the meaning of Ezekiel’s “God-mobile” and temple visions in chapters 1-3, 8-11, and 40-48?
- Why does Ezekiel assume that Jerusalem is the center of the cosmos (see [Ezek. 5:5](#) and [38:12](#))?
- Why does Ezekiel think the defilement of the temple and Jerusalem requires its total destruction and re-creation?
- Why does Ezekiel think idolatry, ritual impurity, and social injustice are equal threats to the stability and order of the entire cosmos?
- Ezekiel’s view of reality is fundamentally different from our own, and we will only fully understand his writings if we sympathetically enter into his worldview.

The Three-Tiered Cosmic Temple



The Three-Tiered Cosmic Temple. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How is Ezekiel's view of the temple connected to the garden in Eden?

Session 4: Ezekiel in Historical and Literary Context

Key Takeaways

- Studying Ezekiel along the contours of its literary design helps us recover a degree of competence with the native communication conventions of the biblical authors.
- Ezekiel's vision of God while in Babylon foreshadows the later revelation of God's presence departing from the temple in Jerusalem.
- The opening movements of Ezekiel reveal that the temple and Israel have come to represent an anti-Eden. In the final movements, God gives a vision of a new Eden and a new temple.
- Prophets like Ezekiel offer us a vision of reality that transcends our typical conscious experience of the world.

Key Historical Events in the Time Period of Ezekiel

- 623: Ezekiel is born.
- 620: Josiah begins his reform of Judah (2 Kgs. 22-23).
- 612: Assyrian capital of Nineveh falls to Babylonian takeover (see Nahum, Habakkuk).
- 605: Nebuchadnezzar defeats the Egyptians at Carchemish, and Babylon takes control of Syria-Palestine.
- 598: Babylon's first attack (with Ammon and Moab) on Jerusalem, and Babylon takes the first wave of exiles (including Ezekiel; see 2 Kgs. 24:1-17).
- 595: Zedekiah initiates a rebel alliance (with Ammon, Moab, Edom, Tyre, Sidon) against Babylon (2 Kgs. 24:18-20; Jer. 27).
- 593: Ezekiel has a vision of the God-mobile (Ezek. 1:1-3).
- 588: Babylon begins the second siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 25:1-2).
- 586: Jerusalem falls to Babylon, the temple is destroyed, the second wave of exiles are taken to Babylon, and Jerusalem is plundered by Edom and Ammon (2 Kgs. 25:3-2; Ezek. 33).
- 573: Ezekiel has a vision of the temple (Ezek. 40-48).
- 538: Cyrus topples the Babylonian empire and sends the Edict of Cyrus to Jewish exiles (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).
- 520: The first wave of exiles go from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 1-6).

The Literary Design of Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1-11

Ezekiel's vision of Yahweh's presence, which is going to abandon and destroy the Jerusalem temple

A - **1:1-3:15** Ezekiel's vision of the God-mobile and his commission as a prophet

B - **3:16-7:27** Ezekiel's basic message: warning of the coming ruin of Jerusalem and the temple

A' - **8-11** Ezekiel's virtual tour of the defiled temple and Yahweh's exit from the city

Ezekiel 12-33

Poems, parables, and sign-acts warning of the coming destruction

- **12-14** Oracles against Israel's leaders
- **15-23** Oracles against Israel
- **24-33** Oracles against the nations

Ezekiel 34-48

Promises of vindication and restoration for Israel, culminating in a vision of the heavenly temple

A - **34-37** Promises of hope for covenant renewal and Israel's restoration

B - **38-39** Yahweh's final victory over evil among the nations

A' - **40-48** Yahweh's presence returns to his people, resulting in a new creation

Ezekiel 1-48 Vertical. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Dated Superscriptions in Ezekiel

Reference	Text Date	Month/Year
1:3	30th year (?) / 4th month / 5th day (= 5th year after Jehoiakin's exile)	7/593 God-mobile vision #1
3:16	5th year / 4th month / 12th day	7/593 God-mobile vision #2
8:1	6th year / 6th month / 5th day	9/592 Old temple vision
20:1	7th year / 5th month / 10th day	8/591
24:1	9th year / 10th month / 10th day	1/588
26:1	11th year / X month / 1st day	?/586
29:1	10th year / 10th month / 12th day	1/587

Dated Superscriptions in Ezekiel. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reference	Text Date	Month/Year
29:17	27th year / 1st month / 1st day	4/571
30:20	11th year / 1st month / 7th day	4/587
31:1	11th year / 3rd month / 1st day	6/587
32:1	12th year / 12th month / 1st day	3/585
32:17	12th year / X month / 15th day	?/585
33:21	12th year / 10th month / 5th day	1/585
40:1	25th year / X month / 10th day	4?/573 New temple vision

Dated Superscriptions in Ezekiel. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

Summarize the major points of the three main sections of Ezekiel (chapters 1-11, 12-33, and 34-48).



Module 2: Visions of Yahweh Leaving and Destroying the Temple

SESSIONS 5-9

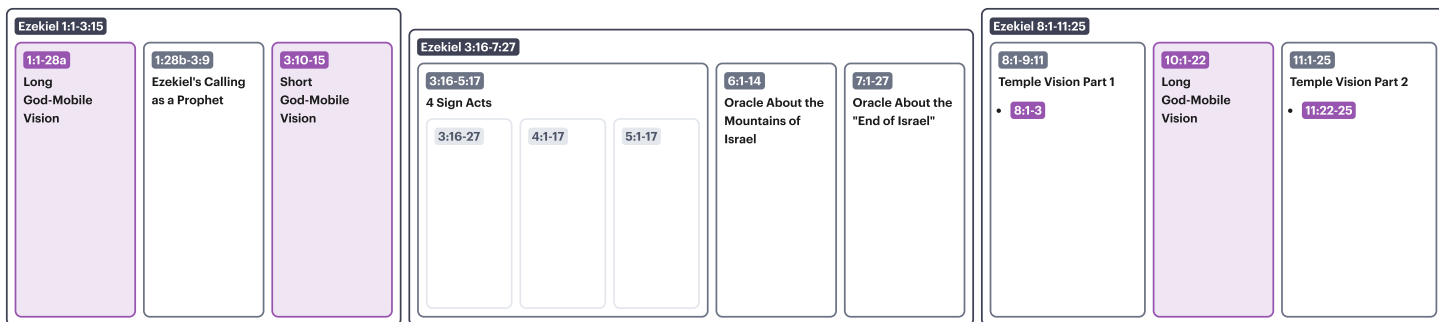
In the opening chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet receives visions from God showing the temple is corrupt and God's presence is leaving.

Session 5: Ezekiel's Vision

Key Takeaways

- Ezekiel 1-3 is Ezekiel's commissioning story.
- The phrase "visions of Yahweh" is Ezekiel's shorthand for divine visions into a realm that is usually invisible.
- The "platform" over the living creatures is a *raqia'*. Elsewhere, this word refers to the expanse of the sky.
- The living creatures, wheels, platform, and throne together present an iconic representation of God's sky-chariot carrying the mobile temple-presence of Yahweh.

Literary Design of Ezekiel 1-11: Ezekiel's Vision of Yahweh Leaving and Destroying the Temple



Ezekiel 1:1-11:25. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel 1:1-3:15: Ezekiel's Vision and Commission

The opening literary unit of Ezekiel's scroll is an account of his calling to become a prophet to the exiles in Babylon. The composition begins and ends with descriptions of his encounter with the mobile presence of Yahweh, and in the middle is a tightly organized composition that portrays Ezekiel's commission as a prophet.

Ezekiel 1:1-28a

- A - 1:1 1st person introduction: date and location of Ezekiel's vision
- B - 1:2-3 3rd person explanation: date and location of Ezekiel's vision
- A - 1:4-28a 1st person vision of the divine glory

Ezekiel 1:28b-3:9

- **1:28b-2:7** Ezekiel is commissioned to speak on Yahweh's behalf to rebellious Israel
 - **2:4** "The house of Israel is hard of face and hard of heart."
 - **2:5** "I am sending you, whether they listen or resist, for they're a rebellious house."
- **2:8-3:3** Ezekiel eats the scroll of the divine message for Israel
- **3:4-9** Ezekiel is commissioned to speak on Yahweh's behalf to rebellious Israel
 - **3:7** "All the house of Israel is hard of forehead and hard of heart."
 - **3:11** "You will say to them, 'Thus says Yahweh,' whether they listen or resist."

Ezekiel 3:10-15

- **3:10-11** God's command to return to the exiles and speak Yahweh's word
- **3:12-14** Ezekiel is lifted by the Spirit and again sees the divine glory
- **3:15** Ezekiel returns to the exiles and sits angry for seven days

Ezekiel 1:1-3:15. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 1

1st Person

¹ And it came about in the thirtieth year,
 in the fourth month,
on the fifth of the month,
 that I was **in the midst of the exiles,**
by the river Chebar:
 the skies were opened
and I saw the appearances of Elohim.

3rd Person

² "On the fifth of the month"
 This is the fifth year of the **exile** of King Yoyakhin.
 a ³ **The word of Yahweh was**
 b **to Ezekiel son of Buzi the priest**
 c **in the land of Chaldea,**
by the river Chebar,
 a' **and the hand of Yahweh was**
 b' **upon him**
 c' **there.**

1st Person

1:4-14 — The storm cloud and the living beings and their appearance

- A **“And I saw** a storm cloud coming from the north ... and brightness around it” (v. 4)
“the appearance of glowing metal in the middle of the fire” (v. 4)
“the [living beings’] appearance was like coals of fire” (v. 13)

1:15-21 — The wheels beside the living beings

B

1:22-28a — The throne platform above the living beings and the human-like figure upon it

- “and I saw** brightness around him ... like a rainbow in a cloud” (v. 28)
A’ **“and I saw** the appearance of glowing metal like the appearance of fire” (v. 27)
“[the human-like one’s] appearance was like fire” (v. 28)
“And I saw and I fell on my face” (v. 28)

Ezekiel 1:1-28a. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021)

4 And I saw, and look:

- A a storm wind was coming from the north,
a great cloud,
and **fire** was **flashing back and forth**
and **brightness** was around it,
and from its middle was like **the appearance** of a **glowing-object** ,
from the middle of the **fire** .

5 And from its middle was the **likeness** of **four** **the living-beings** ,
and this was their **appearance**:

Human

- a Each had a **human likeness**,

Face/wing

- b **6** and **four faces** for each one
and **four wings** for each one of them,

Legs

7 and their legs were straight,

B

- c and the bottom of their feet was like the bottom of a calf’s foot,
and they were **glowing** like **the appearance** of polished bronze.

Human

- a’ **8** And the hands of a **human** were under their **wings** on their **four** sides.

Face/wing

And the **faces** and the **wings** for the **four** of them,

h’

⁹ the **wings** were touching one another,

Movement

^{c'} **they did not turn as they went,,
each one moved in the direction of its face.**

Face/human

¹⁰ And as for **the likeness** of their **faces**:

The **face** of a **human**,

^a and the **face** of a **lion** was on the right of each of the **four** of them,
and the **face** of an **ox** was on the left of each of the **four** of them,
and the **face** of an **eagle** was on each of the **four** of them.

^{B'}

Wings

¹¹ And their **face** and their wings were spread out above:

^b Each one had **two** touching each other
and **two** were covering their bodies,

Movement

¹² **and each one moved in the direction of its face,**

^{c'} to wherever the spirit/breath would **move**, they **moved**;
they did not turn as they moved.

¹³ And as for **the likeness** of **the living-beings** ,
their appearance was like **coals of burning fire** ,
like **the appearance** of **torches** .

^{A'} It was **flashing back and forth** between **the living-beings** ;
and there was **brightness to the fire**
and from the fire there came out **lightning** .

¹⁴ And as for the creatures, there was a rushing and turning back like **the appearance** of **lightning** .

^a ¹⁵ **And I saw**, **the living-beings** and look:
one **wheel** on the ground beside **the living-beings** , for their **four** faces.

^b ¹⁶ **The appearance** of the **wheels** and their workmanship
was like **the appearance** of Tarshish stone;

^A

^{a'} and the four of them had a one **likeness**.

^{b'} And **their appearance** and their workmanship
was as if the **wheel** was in the middle of a **wheel**.

^a ¹⁷ **When they moved,**

^B

^b **they moved to four of their sides;
they did not turn when they moved.**

A 18 And they had rims and height,
and I saw them and their rims were full of eyes/facets around the **four** of them.

- a 19 **And when** the living-beings moved,
b the wheels moved beside them;
a' **and when** the living-beings rose from the ground,
b' the wheels rose up.

- a 20 **Wherever the** spirit/breath moved,
b they moved to where the spirit/breath moved,
b' **and the wheels** rose beside them,
B' c **because the** spirit/breath of the living-being was in the wheels.

- a 21 **When they** moved,
b they would move;
a' **and when they** stopped,
b' they stopped,
a'' **and when they** rose from the ground,
b'' the wheels rose from the ground beside them,
c **because the** spirit/breath of the living-being was in the wheels.

22 **And over the heads** of the living-being was the likeness of a platform,
like the appearance of fear-inspiring crystal,
spread out over their heads above.

23 **And under the** platform
their wings were straight, each to the other;
for each one, **two were covering them**,
and for each one, **two were covering** their bodies.

24 And I heard the sound of their wings,
like the sound of many waters,
like the sound of the Almighty when they moved,
the sound of commotion,
like the sound of an army camp,
when they stood still, their wings dropped.

25 And there came a sound,
from above the platform that was over their heads;
when they stood still, their wings dropped.

26 **And over the** platform that was over their heads,

- a like **the appearance** of **a sapphire stone**,
- b was **the likeness** of a **throne**.
- b' And over **the likeness** of the **throne**,
- a' was **the likeness** like **the appearance** of **a human** on it above.

- a 27 **And I saw** something like a **glowing-object**,
- b like **the appearance** of **fire** was its frame all around,
 - c from **the appearance** of **his loins** and upwards.
 - c' And from **the appearance** of **his loins** and below,
- b' **I saw** like **the appearance** of **fire**,
- a' and **bright light** all around it.

28 Like **the appearance** of **the rainbow** which is in a cloud on a rainy day,
such was **the appearance** of the light all around.
This was **the appearance** of **the likeness** of **the glory of Yahweh**,

and I saw [framing link back to 1:1]
and I fell upon my face.

Ezekiel 1:4-28a. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021)

Vision of Yahweh's Cosmic Throne-Chariot

The "30th year" is most likely a reference to Ezekiel's birthday and the year that he would have been installed as a priest in Jerusalem (see [Num. 4:3, 35](#)). The editorial note in [verse 2](#) coordinates Ezekiel's birthday with the five-year mark since King Jehoiachin's imprisonment and exile from Jerusalem in 597.

This vision happens in 592 while Ezekiel sits by a "river" (נהר) or irrigation canal near his labor camp settlement with the exiles (named Tel-Abib, see [Ezek. 3:15](#)). What a horrible place to be on your birthday!

Ezekiel 1:1 Instructor's Translation

... the skies were opened, and I saw visions of *Elohim*.

"The skies were opened ..." Ezekiel is not transported into the skies (as he will be in [Ezek. 40:1-3](#)), but he is granted an apocalyptic vision of the divine throne room like the visions experienced by Moses and the elders ([Exod. 24:9-11](#)), Micaiah ben Imlah ([1 Kgs. 22:19-22](#)), and Isaiah ([Isa. 6:1-10](#)).

"Visions of *Elohim*" (מראות אלהים) could be interpreted as "a vision of *Elohim*," that is, a vision of the divine presence. However, this phrase is used two more times in Ezekiel. Once to describe his virtual tour of the Jerusalem temple ([Ezek. 8:1-3](#)), where he does see the divine presence, but primarily he is shown the idolatry happening in the temple. The second use of the phrase occurs with Ezekiel's final temple vision, ([Ezek. 40:1-3](#)), where he sees the divine glory ([Ezek. 43:1-11](#)), but is also shown many other things. "Visions of *Elohim*" is more likely an "attributive construct phrase," which means the second word describes an attribute of the first word. Ezekiel is allowed "divine vision" to see reality from a divine perspective.

Flow of the Vision and Ezekiel's Commission

The vision begins with a storm ([Ezek. 1:4](#)) and ends with Yahweh on his throne ([Ezek. 1:26-28](#)). These two points of the vision coordinate two key themes of Yahweh's presence from earlier Israelite traditions.

1. Yahweh's appearance at Sinai in cloud and storm ([Exod. 19-20](#); [Ps. 18:7-14](#), [Ps. 29](#)).
2. Yahweh's presence in the tabernacle/temple enthroned on a platform above the cherubim in light and glory ([Exod. 25:17-22](#), [40:34-48](#); [Lev. 9:23-24](#); [Isa. 6](#); [Ps. 99:1](#)).

The vision advances in three steps.

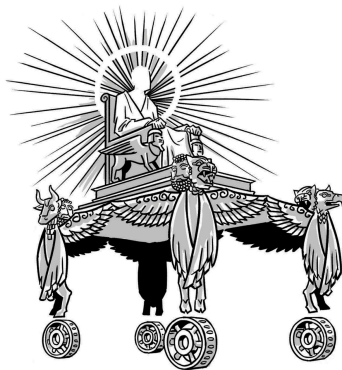
Step 1 (1:4-14): The Storm, the Four Creatures, and Their Appearance

Ezekiel first sees a storm cloud full of fire, from which emerge the four creatures. The appearance of Yahweh in "a storm" (סערה) cloud is a foundational motif in the Hebrew Bible, with its roots in the Eden and Sinai narratives.

In Eden ([Gen. 3:8-10](#)), after the humans act foolishly, the "voice/sound" (קול) of Yahweh appears "walking about" the garden with the "wind of the day" (רוח היום).

At Mount Sinai, Yahweh appears in a violent storm complete with sounds, lightning, and earthquake ([Exod. 19:16-19](#), [20:18-20](#)).

These appearances set the pattern for the rest of the Hebrew Bible, where Yahweh's appearance in the storm becomes a motif symbolizing the day of reckoning, either positive or negative. See the use of this Hebrew word סערה with similar associations in [2 Kings 2:1, 11](#); [Job 38:1, 40:6](#); [Isaiah 29:6](#); [Jeremiah 23:19](#); [Zechariah 9:14](#).



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Guardian creatures (called "cherubim" in [Ezek. 10:20](#)) attend Yahweh's presence (see [Gen. 3:24](#); [Isa. 6](#)), and now they are repurposed as throne-chariot bearers.

Each creature was common in ancient Near Eastern temple architecture. These hybrid creatures are a symbol of (1) all creatures of the land merged together into one "living creature," and (2) they are category-breaking creatures. They transcend the Bible's organizational categories of creatures into air, land, and sea creatures.

They are called by various titles in the Hebrew Bible (“the heavenly host” in 1 Kgs. 22:19-22; “*seraphim*” in Isa. 6:1-4; “*keruvim*” in Gen. 3:24; Ezek. 10; etc.) and function as guardians of the boundary between Heaven and Earth, specifically in locations that are heavy with Eden-symbolism (mountains, sacred trees, rivers).

In Ezekiel’s vision, they function as throne-bearers, similar to their role described in the phrase “Yahweh who sits enthroned over the *keruvim*” (1 Sam. 4:4; Isa. 37:16; Ps. 80:1, Ps. 99:1).

The fact that there are four creatures with faces pointed in the four directions of the compass is symbolic of the entire cosmos. The same symbol of four directions of the compass is used again in phrases like “the four winds” (Ezek. 37:9, 42:20; Zech. 2:6, 6:5; Dan. 8:8; 11:4).

The various creatures invite reflection on their unique traits and symbolic meaning: human (*imago dei*, wisdom), lion (strength), ox (fertility, agriculture), eagle (swift, mobile).

Step 2 (1:15-21): The Wheels Attached to the Creatures

The motif of Yahweh’s appearance in the storm, where he rides a chariot of *keruvim*, is known elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

Psalm 18:9-12 NASB

⁹ He bowed the heavens also, and came down with thick darkness under his feet.

¹⁰ **He rode** (רכב) **upon a cherub and flew**; and he sped upon the wings of the wind.

¹¹ He made darkness his hiding place, his canopy around him, darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.

¹² From the brightness before him passed his thick clouds, hailstones and coals of fire.

When David describes the ark of the covenant, first described in Exodus 25, he explicitly calls it a “chariot” (1 Chron. 28:18, מרכבה).

Exodus 25:17-22 Instructor's Translation

¹⁷ You shall make an atonement-lid of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide.

¹⁸ You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the atonement-lid. ¹⁹ Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the atonement-lid at its two ends.

²⁰ **The cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the atonement-lid with their wings** and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. ²¹ You shall put the atonement-lid on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you.

²² There I will meet with you; and from above the atonement-lid, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.

1 Chronicles 28:11, 18-19 Instructor's Translation

¹¹ Then David gave to his son Solomon the plan of the porch of the temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the atonement-lid.

¹⁸ ... also his plan for **the golden chariot of the cherubim** that spread their wings and covered the ark of the

covenant of the LORD.¹⁹ “All this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the LORD, all the work to be done according to the plan.”

The four wheels on four corners constitute a chariot; the vocabulary used is similar to the bronze wheeled stands in Solomon’s temple (see [1 Kgs. 7:27-37](#)).

Each wheel is described as a “wheel within a wheel” ([Ezek. 1:16](#)). This is not an ancient UFO sighting! The wheels are standard chariot mobile design. This phrase is either describing (1) an outer wheel with an inner wheel joining the spokes or (2) another wheel of same size perpendicular at 90 degrees to the first, creating an optical illusion symbolizing the throne-chariot’s ability to move in any direction without turning (see Assyrian lamassu statue for optical illusions to symbolize movement).

Further, it says “their rims were full of eyes” ([Ezek. 1:18](#)). The word for “eye” (Heb. *‘ayin* / עֵין) can refer to an actual eyeball, in which case this is a symbol for the creatures and wheels as “all-seeing” as the divine presence travels about the cosmos (see the image’s similar meaning in [Rev. 4:6](#)). The word can also mean “facet,” a shining side of a carved jewel or crafted item (see [Zech. 3:9](#)), in which case this is a description of the wheels as sparkling like a faceted jewel.

Ezekiel 1:20 Instructor's Translation

... the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

The *ruakh* is their animating energy. The creatures and even the wheels are “alive” with a divine energy because of their proximity to the divine presence. This repeated phrase emphasizes the harmonized and unified movement of the wheels and the creatures, even though they are not joined by an axle. This is a rich symbol of how vitalizing and animating the divine presence is, that even inanimate objects like wheels spring to life when they are in the proximity of the creator!

Step 3 (1:22-27): The Platform and Throne Above the Creatures

The platform that Ezekiel sees is called the “sky-dome” (Heb. *raqia’* / רַקִּיעַ), the solid partition that separates the waters above from the waters below in day two of [Genesis 1:6-8](#), which is otherwise called “the skies.”

The image of Yahweh sitting on top of the sky-dome that consists of the waters above is a core image of Yahweh’s sovereignty over the biblical cosmos.

Psalms 29:3, 10 Instructor's Translation

³ The voice of the LORD is **over the waters**; the *Elohim* of glory thunders, Yahweh is over many waters.

¹⁰ Yahweh sits enthroned **over the flood**; Yahweh is enthroned as King forever.

Exodus 24:9-11 NASB*

⁹ Then Moses went up [Mount Sinai] with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel,

¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel; and under his feet there appeared to be **a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the skies themselves**.¹¹ Yet he did not stretch out his hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.

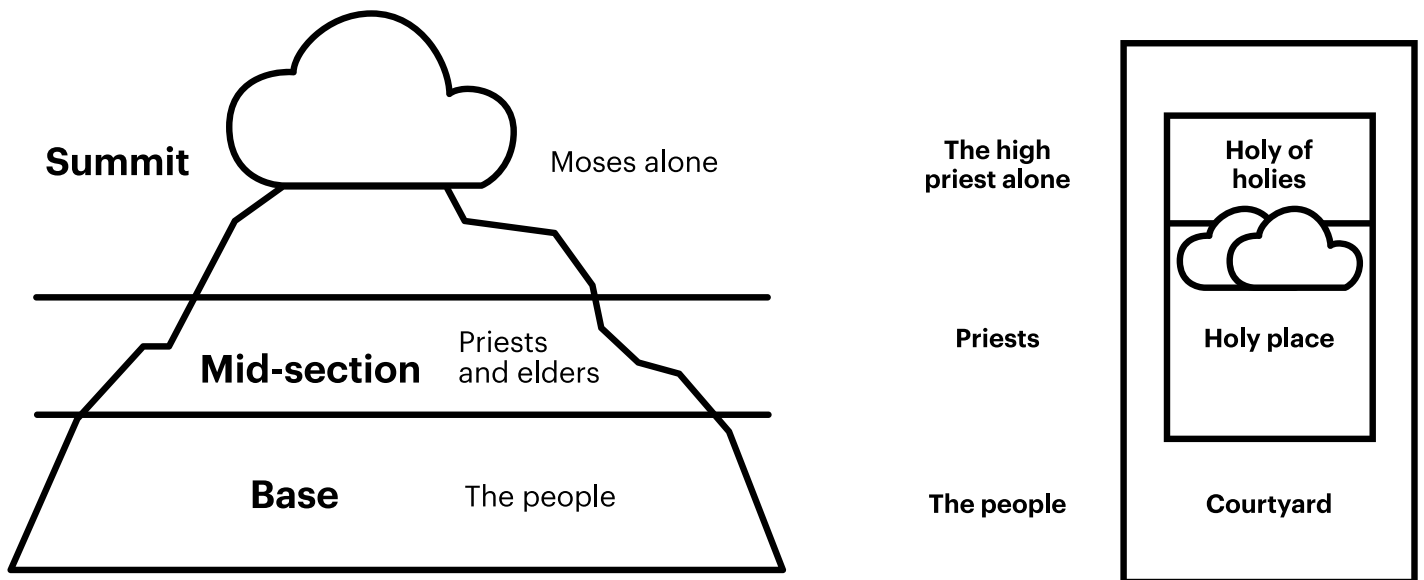
*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

These connections all depend on the foundational conception of reality in the Hebrew Bible: that the entire cosmos is a temple, and that Israel's holy spaces are a microcosmos—a symbolic condensation of the entire cosmos. The set of correspondences is first explored in the creation and Eden narratives of Genesis.

Tabernacle/Temple	Cosmic Geography in Genesis 1:1-2:3	Cosmic Geography in Genesis 2:4-3:24
Holy of holies	The skies	Cosmic mountain / The middle of the garden
Holy place Menorah/Palm trees Cherubim Priests	The land Fruit trees Animals Humans	The garden in Eden Fruit trees Cherubim Humans
Courtyard Bronze sea (<u>1 Kgs. 8:64</u>)	The waters	The land outside the garden

Cosmology of Genesis 1 and 2. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

And then on Mount Sinai, this three-tiered conception of the cosmos is also applied to the mountain.



Sinai and the Temple Reflect the Three-Tiered Cosmos. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel's description of the "God-mobile" uses symbols that are well-known from ancient Near Eastern temple iconography. And while his vision has adapted these symbols in a unique way, there is a strong, shared cultural framework that forms Ezekiel's visual imagination for the divine presence.

Ezekiel 1:28 Instructor's Translation

... this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh. ...

Glory (*kavod*): weight, significance, often the physical manifestation of significance (see [Exod. 33:18-23](#), [40:34-35](#); [Lev. 9:23-24](#)).

Notice that this temple-microcosmic imagery is similar to what Isaiah experiences in his prophetic call-vision of [Isaiah 6](#). Notice that instead of the temple *kavod* coming to Ezekiel, Isaiah is transported in a vision to the holy place looking up into the holy of holies, where he learns that “all the land is the fullness of his *kavod*” ([Isa. 6:3](#)).

Reflection Question

Ezekiel describes a vision of four living creatures and four wheels upholding a platform with a throne above. What does this composite image represent in the biblical imagination?

Session 6: Ezekiel Called as a Prophet

Key Takeaways

- Many biblical figures had dynamic encounters with God in prayer.
- Ezekiel is in exile outside of Eden, yet he has an encounter with the inside of Eden—the glory of Yahweh.
- Biblical characters face tests about eating or abstaining from food, recalling the test in the garden of Eden.
- Ezekiel passes his test and is sent as a prophet to the people.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 1:28b-3:9

Part 1

a 1:28b **And I heard** a voice **speaking**,
2:1 and he said to me:
“ **Son of a human** ,
b **stand on your feet**
c and I will **speak** with you.”
d ² And the Spirit/breath came into me,
c' when he **spoke** to me,
b' **and she stood me on my feet**
a' **and I heard** him **speaking** to me.

³ And he said to me:
“ **Son of a human** ,
I am sending you to **the sons** of Israel,
to **rebellious** nations **who have rebelled** against me;
they and **their fathers** have betrayed me until this very day.

⁴ And **the sons** who are hard of face and hard of heart,
I am sending you to them.
And you shall say to them,
‘Thus says the Lord Yahweh!’

⁵ And as for them, **whether they hear or whether they refuse** —

because **they are a rebellious** house—
then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.

⁶ And as for you **son of a human**,

a **do not be afraid of them,**
and do not be afraid of their words.

b Although they are thorns and barbs for you,
and you are sitting with scorpions,

a' **do not be afraid of their words,**
and do not be dismayed before them,

b' because they are a **rebellious** house.

⁷ And you shall **speak my words** to them,
whether they listen or whether they refuse,
because they are **rebellious**.

Part 2

⁸ Now you, son of a human,

A **listen to what I am speaking to you** ;
do not be **rebellious** like **that rebellious house**.
Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you."

⁹ Then I looked, and look:
a hand was extended to me;
and look, a **scroll** was in it.

¹⁰ And he spread **it** out before me,
and **it** was **written** on the front and back,

B and **written** on **it** were lamentations, mourning and woe.

^{3:1} And he said to me,
"Son of a human,
eat what you find;
eat this **scroll**,
and go, speak to **the house of Israel**."

² And **I opened my mouth**,
and **he made me eat** this **scroll**.

A' ³ And he said to me,
"Son of a human,
make your stomach eat,
and **fill your innards** with this **scroll which I am giving you**."

And **I ate** it,
and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

Part 3

A ⁴ And he said to me,
“Son of a human,
go to **the house of Israel**
and **speak with My words** to them.

B ⁵ For you are not being sent to a people of **deep of speech or heavy of tongue**,
but to **the house of Israel** you are being sent;
⁶ not to many peoples of **deep of speech or heavy of tongue**,
whose words you cannot understand.
Surely, had I sent you to them,
they would listen to you.

A' ⁷ But **the house of Israel** will not be willing to listen to you,
since they are not willing to listen to me,
because **the whole house of Israel** is **strong of forehead and hard of heart**.
⁸ Look, I have made **your face as strong as their faces**,
and **your forehead as hard as their foreheads**.
⁹ Like **diamond harder than flint I have made your forehead**;
do not be afraid of them,
and do not be dismayed before them,
for **they are a rebellious house.**”

Ezekiel 1:28b-3:9. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021)

Ezekiel Called To Speak to Rebellious Israel by Eating the Scroll

In [Ezekiel 2:2](#) (and [Ezek. 3:12-14](#)), the *ruakh* (Spirit) that animated the creatures ([Ezek. 1:12, 20, 21](#)) comes into Ezekiel and commissions him. Just as the living-beings were moved and driven by the *ruakh*, so now Ezekiel will be driven and moved as well. It's a powerful image of the prophet being seized by the divine will and word, whether or not he likes it.

In [Ezekiel 2:3](#), Ezekiel is depicted as a new Moses sent to a rebellious audience who will resist his message.

Exodus 3:9-10 NASB

⁹ Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ Therefore, come now, and **I will send you to Pharaoh**, so that you may bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.

Ezekiel 2:3-4 NASB

³ Then he said to me, "Son of man, **I am sending you** to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴ **"I am sending you** to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.'

The Test of Ezekiel's Obedience

Ezekiel eating the scroll ([Ezek. 2:8-3:3](#); see also [Jer. 15:16](#)) is commonly understood as Ezekiel symbolically "ingesting" his prophetic message so that he can go and announce it. But this interpretation confuses this scene with what follows, where he's commanded to take the divine word "into your heart ... and your ears" ([Ezek. 3:10](#)). This scene, in which Ezekiel internalizes the scroll of grieving, is Ezekiel's test (for this interpretation, see Margaret Odell, [Ezekiel](#), p. 44).

Ezekiel 2:8 Instructor's Translation

But you, son of a human,
hear what I am speaking to you;
do not be rebellious, like the rebellious house;
open your mouth and eat what I am giving to you.

Ezekiel's ordeal is clearly presented as a test that will set him apart from his rebellious contemporaries. To eat the divinely provided (and strange) food is to submit to the divine will and so separate himself from among the people.

This test finds a unique parallel with the testing ordeal of the adulterous wife in [Numbers 5:11-31](#).

Numbers 5:23-24 NASB

²³ 'The priest shall then **write these curses on a scroll**, and he shall wash them off into the **water of bitterness**. ²⁴ 'Then he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings a curse, so that the water which brings a curse will go into her and cause bitterness.

In this strange symbolic ordeal, the woman's guilt or innocence is established by her eating the words of a scroll of covenant curses. So here, Ezekiel is invited to eat the scroll of divine judgment. But his obedience brings about a surprising result. The lament scroll brings sweetness instead of bitterness.

This image is repeated in [Psalm 19:10](#) and [119:103](#), and makes us think this reflects the goodness of Ezekiel's personal encounter with Yahweh (note the reversal of this image in [Rev. 10:10](#)). But this sweet imagery is out of place here, as Ezekiel's experience is filled with fear, terror, and sorrow.

Israel is depicted as resistant, rebellious, and unable to listen to his message. The exile did not change their hearts; the exiled generation is perpetuating the same covenant rebellion of their fathers. The phrase "stiff of face and hard of heart" in [Ezekiel 2:4](#) and [3:7](#) echoes "stiff-necked" from [Exodus 32:9](#).

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 3:10-15

¹⁰ And he said to me,
“Son of a human,
all my spoken-words which I will speak to you,
take into your heart
and listen with your ears.

¹¹ **And walk (הלך), go (בוא) to the exiles,**
to the sons of your people,
and speak to them and say to them,
‘This is what Yahweh Elohim says ...’
whether they listen or not.”

a ¹² **And the ruakh lifted me up,**

b and I heard **the sound of a great quaking** behind me,

“Blessed be the glory of Yahweh from his place.”

¹³ And **the sound** of the wings of the living beings touching one another,
c and **the sound** of the wheels beside them,

b' and **the sound of a great quaking.**

a' ^{14a} **And the ruakh lifted me up and took me away;**

^{14b} **and I walked (הלך),** bitter, in the hot-anger of my *ruakh*,
and the hand of Yahweh was strong on me.

¹⁵ **And I went (בוא) to the exiles** at Tel-Aviv,
those lived beside the river Chebar,
and I sat there seven days, displaying shock, in their midst.

Ezekiel 3:10-15. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel Deposited Back Home—Really Worked Up

After Ezekiel’s commissioning is over, he hears one last command to go back to his community of exiles (that echoes the opening call in [Ezek. 2:1-8](#)). As he is “lifted up by the *ruakh*, he hears a sound/voice” (which he also heard back in [Ezek. 1:24-25](#)), that he describes in three ways.

1. A quaking of the land
2. An audible announcement of blessing and praise
3. The sound of the divine chariot moving

The second element above, the announcement of blessing on the divine presence, is fascinating. There is no preparatory context for this announcement, no mention of who says it to whom. It is, however, similar to a

doxology found in [Psalm 135:21](#).

Psalm 135:21 NASB*

Blessed be Yahweh **from Zion**, (מציון)
who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 3:12 NASB*

Blessed be the glory of Yahweh **from its place** (ממקומו).

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The idea that Yahweh receives praise “from Zion” implies an unmentioned group of those offering up the praise (i.e., from the inhabitants of Zion). The question, then, is whether “from its place” in [Ezekiel 3:12](#) means the same thing.

The phrase “from its place” could mean: (a) that the glorious presence of Yahweh is to receive blessing and praise that comes from its place (i.e., the temple, as in [Ps. 135:21](#)), or (b) that the glory of Yahweh is in fact still blessed, even though it is displaced from its proper home in the temple, “away from its place.”

Option (b) makes much more sense as a climactic conclusion to Ezekiel’s vision.

“... God’s glory is blessed wherever it is, even if it is not in the temple. The temple no longer exists [as a place of proper worship], but God’s glory can nevertheless be seen and praised. ... God can be praised here and now among the exiles in the same manner that he was once praised from Zion ... The once fixed place for God’s presence and appropriate praise in the temple has given way to the open in heaven.”

Schafer, Peter (2009). [The Origins of Jewish Mysticism](#). Princeton University Press. 49.

In contrast to the above approaches to [Ezekiel 3:12](#), many scholars note the oddity of the sudden doxology in context, because the noise is explicitly identified as the commotion caused by the wings and movements of the divine chariot (as in [Ezek. 1:24-25](#)). And so scholars follow the suggestion of Ferdinand Hitzig (*Der Prophet Ezechiel*, 1847) and Samuel David Luzzatto in emending the text in the following way: Instead of *baruk* (ברוך), “blessed be,” they proposed the text originally read *barum* (ברום), “when it rose.” And while the two words don’t look entirely similar in medieval square Hebrew font, they would have looked nearly identical in paleo Hebrew, in which Ezekiel would have written. Below is a comparison in Hebrew script from the 7th century Judean Lachish letters.

Blessed Be in Paleo Hebrew	When It Rose Up in Paleo Hebrew
“ Blessed be the glory of Yahweh from its place”	“ When the glory of Yahweh rose up from its place”
“blessed be” <i>baruk</i>	“when it rose up” <i>barum</i>

Baruk vs. Barum. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Baruk vs. Barum. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel sits stunned for seven days ([Ezek. 3:14-15](#)); exactly the number of days his ordination into the priesthood would have lasted ([Exod. 29:35](#)). Instead he is ordained for a very different kind of commission that disturbs him deeply.

Key Themes in Ezekiel 1-3

Yahweh's glory appears outside the Jerusalem temple, near a slave camp in Babylon (!). Two implications: (1) Yahweh has effectively abandoned Jerusalem and its temple; (2) Yahweh's glorious presence can be with his people anywhere because, as the vision makes symbolically clear, the entire cosmos is the temple of Yahweh.

"The God who appears to Ezekiel is ... the God of the cosmos, who is not confined to the boundaries of the temple. To be sure, the Jerusalem temple is not yet destroyed when Ezekiel sees his vision of God as ruler of the entire cosmos (in 592 B.C.E.), but it will be destroyed soon (in 586 B.C.E.), and it is one of the major tasks of the newly appointed prophet to announce this very thing. The vision anticipates what will happen soon, and its message is not only that God reveals himself outside the land of Israel, but that God reveals himself outside the temple. God does not need the temple ... just as he did not need the temple in the distant past ... The entire cosmos is his temple."

Schafer, Peter (2009). [The Origins of Jewish Mysticism](#). Princeton University Press. 50.

Yahweh has gone into exile with his people, and he has chosen to reveal himself to a remnant there, from which he will "resurrect" (as in [Ezek. 37](#)) a renewed covenant people. Yahweh declares that it is among the repentant exiles that he has become "a temporary/little sanctuary" (see [Ezek. 11:16](#)), and that from these exiles he will restore a new Israel that will experience the promises of renewal explored in Ezekiel 34-48 (see [Ezek. 11:17-20](#)).

"God himself has become a 'small sanctuary' to the people of Israel during their exile, when the temple is destroyed. God is no longer bound to the land of Israel or to its temple. Wherever he is, the temple is with him. To be sure, the temple will be rebuilt, and God will then return to it. But for the time being ... what better substitute could there be for the temple than God himself."

Schafer, Peter (2009). [The Origins of Jewish Mysticism](#). Princeton University Press. 51.

Ezekiel's contemporaries resist his message and find it unwelcome, and the problem is their hard hearts ([Ezek. 2:3-4](#), [3:7](#)). This first description of the source of Israel's rebellion is key to the message of the book.

By framing the exiles' resistance to Ezekiel's message in this way, the present generation of Israel is depicted on analogy to the wilderness generation and to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt in the Torah. Both characters are described as having hard and resistant hearts to the message of Yahweh.

Pharaoh	Exiles
<p>Exodus 7:13-14 ¹³ Yet Pharaoh's heart was hard (חזק + לב), and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. ¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hard (כבד + לב); he refuses to let the people go.</p>	<p>Ezekiel 2:4 I am sending you to them, sons who are stiff of face (קשי פנים) and hard of heart (הזקי לב), and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.'</p>
<p>Exodus 32:8-9 ⁸ "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'" ⁹ The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are a people stiff of neck (קשה ערף) .</p>	<p>Ezekiel 3:7 yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to me. Surely the whole house of Israel is hard of forehead (חזקי מצח) and stiff of heart (לב קשי) .</p>

Pharaoh's Hard Heart. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Notice how in 2:4 the descriptions of both Pharaoh and the wilderness Israelites are used to describe the exiles, but then in 3:7-8 the phrases are blended and combined, so that the exiles are truly a combination of Pharaoh and the generation of the golden calf.

This portrait of the exiles as similar to Israel in the wilderness, while clearly negative, is also hopeful. Because it was precisely the hard hearts of the wilderness generation that led Moses to hope in the reversal of their condition. If Israel is ever to be faithful to the covenant with Yahweh, it will result from a divine initiative of mercy.

Deuteronomy 30:1-2, 4-6 NASB*

¹ So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where Yahweh your *Elohim* has banished you, ² and you return to Yahweh your *Elohim* and you **listen to his voice with all your heart and being** according to all that I command you today, you and your sons ...

⁴ If your outcasts are at the ends of the land, from there Yahweh your *Elohim* will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. ⁵ Yahweh your *Elohim* will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and he will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. ⁶ Moreover Yahweh your *Elohim* **will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love Yahweh your *Elohim* with all your heart and with all your being, so that you may live.**

Ezekiel's prophetic experience is largely private and marked by symbolic actions and bizarre behavior: overwhelming vision (Ezek. 1), eating a funeral scroll (Ezek. 2:9-3:2), stunned into silence (Ezek. 3:14-15), recluse in his house (Ezek. 3:24-27).

Ezekiel's Eden in Exile



Ezekiel's Eden in Exile. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

What role do you think prayer and Scripture play in the lives of God's people? Do you see them as means of encountering God? Why or why not?

Session 7: Ezekiel the Watchman

Key Takeaways

- God appoints Ezekiel as a watchman but prevents him from being a mediator as he faces the impending destruction of Jerusalem.
- God's justice demands judgment for Israel's violence and unfaithfulness, but in his covenant he promises that blessing will come through Israel. God must lead his chosen people through death to bring them to resurrection hope on the other side.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 3:16-27

¹⁶ And it came about at the end of the seven days,
that **the spoken-word of Yahweh** came to me **saying** ,

¹⁷ "Son of Man, **I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel** ,
and when you hear a **word** from my mouth,
then you shall give them a **warning** from me."

a ¹⁸ When I **say** to **the wicked man** , 'You are going to **die** !'

b and you do not **warn** him

and you do not **speak** to **warn** the wicked from his wicked way in order to preserve his **life** ,

c then the wicked man will **die** in his guilt,
but his blood I shall require from you.

b' ¹⁹ But as for you, when you **warn** **the wicked man** ,

and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way,

c' he will **die** in his guilt

and you will deliver your own life .

a ²⁰ And when **the righteous man** turns from his righteousness and does evil,

b then I will place a stumbling block before him;

he will **die** , because you did not **warn** him,

c in his sin he will **die** ,

and his righteous deeds which he did, they will not be remembered,
and I shall require his blood from you.

b' ²¹ But as for you, when you **warn** him, **the righteous man** ,

that the righteous man should not sin,
and he does not sin,
c' he shall surely **live**, for he was **warned**;
and you will deliver your own life.

22 And **the hand of Yahweh was upon me** there
and he **said** to me,

"Get up, go out to the plain,
and there I will **speak** with you."

23 **And I got up and I went out to the plain,**
and behold there was **the glory of Yahweh**,
it was **standing** like **the glory** that I saw by the river Chebar,
and I fell on my face.

24a And **the spirit entered me**
and she **stood** me on my feet

24b and he **spoke** to me
and he **said** to me,

"Go, close yourself up inside your house.

25 And as for you, son of man,
look, **they will put cords on you**,
and they will bind you with them,
and you will not go out in their midst.

26 And I will make **your tongue cleave to your mouth**
and **you will be silent** and **you will not be a mediator for them**,
for they are a rebellious house.

27 And when I do **speak** to you,
I will open your mouth
and you will **say** to them,
'Thus says [the Lord] Yahweh.'
The one who hears, let him hear;
and the one who desists, let him desist,
for they are a rebellious house.

Ezekiel 3:16-27. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021)

Ezekiel's Prophetic Sign Acts

Like ancient street theater, the sign acts are a multimedia expression of the prophetic message (see 1 Kgs. 11:29-31; 2 Kgs. 13:14-19; Hos. 1-3; Isa. 20; Jer. 32; art of Banksy). The symbolic actions not only visually

reinforce the message, but also prefigure or guarantee the event being alluded to.

3:17-21: Ezekiel as Israel's Watchman (Connection to Ezek. 18, 33:7-9)

Ezekiel is like an army sentinel posted on the city walls looking for the approach of the enemy. The metaphor is profound and ironic.

Israel is in danger from an enemy—Yahweh himself (“a warning from/about me” [3:17](#), Babylon is just an agent, see also [Jer. 27](#)). Israel has been given a watchman, commissioned and posted by Yahweh himself (what enemy posts a sentinel in his target city?). Yahweh is both enemy and guardian of Israel. He wants to save Israel, but will not let their apostasy go unchecked.

3:16, 22-27: Ezekiel Bound in His House and Mute

The first paragraph ([Ezek. 3:16-27](#)) portrays Ezekiel's prophetic role among the people, and it's a bit of paradox. He is, first of all, a “watchman” (צפה), a sentinel guard on the city wall who is to warn the people of any approaching danger. This metaphor leads to the vocabulary of “warning” (הזהיר) in the following paragraph ([Ezek. 3:18-24](#)). This is a fairly straightforward description of the prophetic task, and the same image is used of other prophets as well ([Isa. 21:6](#), [52:8](#); [Mic. 7:7](#); [Hab. 2:2](#)).

In the literary design of the paragraph, Ezekiel's role as a watchman is set on analogy to the final unit in [Ezekiel 3:24b-27](#), where Ezekiel is bound up and unable to speak among the people.

16 And it came about at the end of the seven days,
that the **spoken-word** of Yahweh came to me **saying** ,
17 “Son of Man, **I have made you a watchman** **for the house of Israel** ,
and when you hear a **word** from my mouth,
then you shall give them a **warning** from me.”

3:24b And he **spoke** to me
and he **said** to me,
“**Go, close yourself up inside your house.**

25 And as for you, son of man,
look, **they will put cords on you** ,
and they will bind you with them,
and you will not go out in their midst.

26 And I will make **your tongue cleave to your mouth**
and **you will be silent** and **you will not be a mediator** **for them** ,
for they are a rebellious house.

27 And when I do **speak** to you,
I will open your mouth
and you will **say** to them,

'Thus says [the Lord] Yahweh:
The one who hears, let him hear;
and the one who desists, let him desist,
for the are a rebellious house."

Ezekiel 3:16-27. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021)

Ezekiel is bound with cords (3:25). This could refer (1) to the exiles' resistance to his message (cf. the persecution of Jeremiah, Jer. 20:1-2, 37-38). But this seems odd, because the elders of the Israelite exiles are regularly depicted as coming to visit Ezekiel (see 14:1, 20:1). This could (2) be connected to Yahweh's statement that he will "bind" (Ezek. 4:8) Ezekiel in the sign act about the siege of Jerusalem, where he will be tied up in house to carry the sins of Israel. This scene begins to look curiously like a combination of images from the *Aqedah* of Isaac (Gen. 22) and the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16).

This divinely imposed house arrest is explained in the following lines, as Ezekiel is to become "mute" (Ezek. 3:26, נִאֲלָם). This mute state will last for the next seven years (until Ezek. 33:21-24). Ezekiel will be unable to speak except for the prophetic oracles Yahweh gives him to speak.

Yahweh's goal in making his prophet mute is to prevent him from playing the role of a "mediator" or "advocate" (3:26, אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ). The "mediator" is a person who stands in between two parties in conflict and advocates for the interests of one or both.

Jacob and Laban

Genesis 31:36-37 NASB*

³⁶ Then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban; and Jacob said to Laban, "What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? ³⁷ Though you have felt through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my brothers and your brothers, that they may **mediate** between us two."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

David and the Men of Benjamin

1 Chronicles 12:16-17 NASB*

¹⁶ Then some of the sons of Benjamin and Judah came to the stronghold to David. ¹⁷ David went out to meet them, and said to them, "If you come peacefully to me to help me, my heart shall be united with you; but if to betray me to my adversaries, since there is no wrong in my hands, may the God of our fathers look on it and **advocate for me.**"

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Job and Elohim

Job 9:32-33 NASB*

³² For [*Elohim*] is not a man as I am that I may answer him, that we may go to court together. ³³ There is no **mediator** between us, who may lay his hand upon us both.

In situations of conflict, the mediator acts as a neutral party who represents the interests of both groups and tries to negotiate a settlement. This is precisely the “Moses-model” of the prophet who inserts himself between Yahweh and the people and advocates that Yahweh forgive the sins of the people.

- Noah on Mount Ararat making his sacrifice after the flood: [Genesis 8:20-23](#)
- Moses on Mount Sinai in the golden calf narrative: [Exodus 32-33](#)
- Aaron in the wilderness in the story of Korah’s rebellion: [Numbers 16-18](#)
- Samuel in the story of Israel’s idolatry with the ark: [1 Samuel 6-7](#)
- Isaiah in the Assyrian crisis of Hezekiah’s day: [2 Kings 18-20](#)
- Huldah in the story of Josiah’s covenant renewal: [2 Kings 22-23](#)
- Amos’ three acts of intercession: [Amos 7-8](#)

Amos 7:1-3 NASB

¹ Thus Yahweh *Elohim* showed me, and look, he was forming a locust-swarm when the spring crop began to sprout. And look, the spring crop was after the king’s mowing. ² And when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, I said,
“Lord Yahweh, please forgive!
How can Jacob endure,
for he is small?”

³ Yahweh changed his mind about this.
“It shall not be,” said Yahweh.

These stories present a moment of crisis and conflict between God and his people, and the mediator steps in and offers a sacrifice of surrender, advocating for the guilty party. And in all of these stories, Yahweh forgives.

Yahweh Prevents the Mediator

Yahweh prevents two prophets from playing the role of mediator, and they both happen to live in the same period during the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. While in exile, Ezekiel is told not to intercede for guilty Israel, and at the same time in Jerusalem, Jeremiah is given the same order from Yahweh.

Jeremiah 7:16 NASB*

¹⁶ As for you, **do not pray for this people,**
and **do not lift up cry** (רנה) **or prayer** (תפלה) **for them,**
and **do not intercede** (פגע) **with me;**
for I do not hear you.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Jeremiah 11:14 NASB

Therefore **do not pray for this people,**
nor lift up a cry or prayer for them;
for I will not listen when they call to me because of their disaster.

Jeremiah 14:11-12 NASB

¹¹ So the LORD said to me,

“Do not pray for the welfare of this people.

¹² When they fast, I am not going to listen to their cry;

and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I am not going to accept them.

Rather I am going to make an end of them by the sword, famine and pestilence.”

Uniquely, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are told not to intercede for Judah and Jerusalem because the ruin of Israel and the destruction of the city and temple are inevitable. But because Yahweh has a pattern of listening to the petition of his prophets, he orders them to simply stop interceding.

This portrait significantly nuances Ezekiel’s role. He is to warn Israel of the coming disaster, but he is not to intercede on behalf of Israel or portray any sense of hope on this side of the Babylonian onslaught. He is simply to announce its inevitable arrival, and only then will his mouth “open” to say something new. In the final line of [Ezekiel 3:27](#) is a small seed of hope that will blossom into the restoration poems of Ezekiel 34-48. But for now, it’s only bad news.

This entire scene sets the stage for Ezekiel’s sign acts in [Ezekiel 4:1-5:17](#): a mute, bound man shut up in his house, burning with emotion, acting out these strange symbolic stories to his fellow refugees.

Reflection Question

How do you understand Ezekiel’s role? What has God sent him to do or not do?

Session 8: Ezekiel's Sign Acts

Key Takeaways

- Prophets deliver their message in more than words. Their bodies and lives are the medium for the message.
- Ezekiel symbolically bears the guilt of the people, mirroring the scapegoat in Leviticus 16.
- Part of the prophetic calling of Jesus' followers is periodic, intentional self-denial to bear witness to the brokenness in the world.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 4:1-5:17

Sign #1: Brick City'

¹ **And as for you, Son of a human** ,
take for yourself a brick,
and set it before you,
and you will inscribe upon it a **city**, namely **Jerusalem**.

² And you will set up a **siege** against it,
and you will build a **siege-wall** against it
and you will pour out a **siege mound** against it
and you will set up camps against it
and you will place battering rams against it all around.

³ **And as for you** ,
take for yourself an iron plate
and you will set it as a wall of iron between you and between the city,
and you will set your face toward it
and it will be **under siege**,
and you will **besiege** it.
This is a sign to the house of Israel.

Sign #2: Lying Bound on the Side

⁴ **And as for you** ,
lay on your left side,
and you will place **the guilt of the house of Israel** upon it,
for the the number of days which you lie upon it, **you will bear their guilt**.

⁵ And **I will set for you the years** of **their guilt according to the number of days**:

three hundred and ninety days,

and **you will bear the guilt of the house of Israel.**

⁶ And you shall finish these,

then **you will lie a second time upon your right side,**

and **you will bear the guilt of the house of Judah for forty days;**

a day for each year I will set it for you.

⁷ And toward **the siege of Jerusalem** you will set your face

and your arm will be laid bare,

and you will prophesy against it.

⁸ And look, I will set cords upon you,

and **you will not turn from side to side** until you finish **the days of your siege.**

Sign #3: Eating Poop-Baked Bread

⁹ **And as for you ,**

take for yourself wheat and barley and beans and lentils and millet and spelt,

and you will put them into one pot

and you will make them into **bread**

for **the number of the days** which **you are lying on your side:**

three hundred and ninety days you will eat it.

¹⁰ And your **bread** which **you will eat,**

by the measure of a shekel, 20 shekels a day,

from time unto time **you will eat** it.

¹¹ And **you will drink** water by measure:

a sixth of a hin,

from time unto time **you will drink** it.

¹² And (as) cakes of barley **you will eat** it,

and you will bake it over piles of **human dung-balls** before their eyes.

¹³ And Yahweh said:

“In this way the sons of Israel **will eat,**

impure among the nations where I scatter them.”

¹⁴ And I said,

“Ack, Lord Yahweh!

Look, I have not become **impure,**

nor **have I eaten** what was **dead or torn by beasts** from my youth until now,

nor has **impure meat** entered my mouth!”

¹⁵ And he said to me,

“Look, I give you **cow’s dung instead of human dung-balls ,**

and you will make your bread over it.”

¹⁶ And he said to me,
“Son of a human,
look I am about to break the **supply of bread** in **Jerusalem**
and **they will eat bread** by measure and in anxiety,
and water **you will drink** by measure and in horror,
¹⁷ so that they might lack **bread** and water,
and they will be appalled at one another,
and will waste away in their guilt.

Sign #4: Shaving the Head and Beard

¹ And as for you, Son of a human,
take a sharp sword;
as a barber's razor take it for yourself,
and make it pass over your head and beard,
and take scales for weighing and divide it up.
² One third you will burn in the fire,
in the middle of the city as the days of the siege are fulfilled,
and you will take one third
and you will strike it with the sword all around the city,
and one third you will scatter to the wind,
and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.
³ And take a few in number from them,
and you will bind them in the edges of your robes,
⁴ and take again some of them,
and throw them into the fire,
and burn them in the fire;
from it a fire will go out to all the house of Israel.

Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
‘This is Jerusalem;
I have set her at the center of the nations,
and around her are the lands.
⁶ But she has rebelled against my ordinances more wickedly than the nations,
and against my statutes more than the lands around her,
for they have rejected my ordinances and have not walked in my statutes.’
⁷ Therefore, thus says Yahweh Elohim,
‘Because you have more turmoil than the nations around you,
and you have not walked in my statutes,
and you have not observed my ordinances,
even the ordinances of the nations around you, you haven't observed,’

⁸ therefore, thus says Yahweh Elohim,
‘Look, I, even I myself, am against you,
and I will perform judgments among you in the eyes of the nations,
⁹ and I will do among you what I have not done,
and the like of which I will never do again,
because of all your abominations.
¹⁰ Therefore, fathers will eat their sons among you,
and sons will eat their fathers;
for I will perform judgments on you,
and I will scatter all your remnant to every wind.

¹¹ ‘Therefore, as I live,’ declares Yahweh Elohim,
‘surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary
with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations,
therefore I will also withdraw,
and my eye will have no pity
and I will not spare.
¹² One third of you will die by plague,
and by plague they will come to an end among you;
and one third will fall by the sword around you,
and one third I will scatter to every wind,
and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.
¹³ And my anger will be finished,
and I will provide rest for my hot-anger,
and I will provide comfort for myself;
and they will know that I, Yahweh, have spoken in my passion,
when I have finished my anger among them.
¹⁴ And, I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations around you,
in the eyes of all who pass by,
¹⁵ and it will be a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror
for the nations around you,
when I perform judgments against you in anger, and in hot anger, and hot rebukes.
I, Yahweh, have spoken.
¹⁶ When I send against them the terrible arrows of famine,
which were for ruin,
which I sent to ruin you,
and I will add to the famine upon you,
and I will break your supply of bread,
¹⁷ and I will send famine and wild animals against you,
and they will bereave you of children;
plague and bloodshed also will pass through you,
and I will bring the sword on you.

I, Yahweh, have spoken.' ”

Ezekiel 4:1-5:17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The Sign Acts

Besieging the Brick City (4:1-3)

Ezekiel is to create a symbolic model of Jerusalem from a “brick” (לבנה), a recall of Babylonian bricks = big rectangle slab; see [Gen. 11:3](#)).

The scene symbolizes the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (see [2 Kgs. 24-25](#)); the “iron wall” symbolizes the separation between Yahweh and his people.

Laying on the Side (4:4-8)

Ezekiel becomes the suffering, prophetic priest and takes on the role of the scapegoat from the Day of Atonement (see [Lev. 16:21-22](#)), bearing the collective sin of Israel’s apostasy.

“390 years” for Israel (either the northern tribes or the whole of the 12 tribes) probably refers to the entire period of the temple’s existence (built by Solomon in the 970s-960s B.C.E.; see [1 Kgs. 6-8](#), roughly 390 years). Since this was the beginning of Israel’s international apostasy through the monarchy and of the temple’s defilement, it provides a temple period from Ezekiel’s day back to the origin of the temple.

“40 years” could be (1) overlapping with the 390 years of the northern tribes, using the symbolic number for “a generation,” that is, an entire generation of the exiles’ sin (compare to the wilderness generation in [Num. 14:33-35](#)). Or (2) it could be added to the 390 years resulting in 430 years, which from Ezekiel’s day would take the rebellion back to the period of David (note the number of 430 years for Israel’s exile in Egypt in [Exod. 12:40-41](#)). Or (3) it could be a reference to the wilderness generation as a symbol of exile itself as a form of judgment.

Eating Rations and Impure Bread (4:9-17)

The barley bread recipe communicates two layers of meaning:

1. Barley was a lower quality grain than wheat, and so characterized the diet of lower class groups (see Greenberg, [Ezekiel 1-20](#), p. 107). This makes sense, as it describes the type of bread one can make when a city is under siege, that is, when there are no higher quality goods available.
2. The mode of baking, over human poop, is an image of a besieged city at as well. People can’t go outside the town to poop, so the living (and baking) environments are defiled with excrement.

Ezekiel protests baking over human poop, as a sign of ritual impurity (see [Deut. 23:12-14](#)), whereas cooking over animal dung was more common.

Chopping the Hair and Beard (5:1-4)

Priests were prohibited from shaving their beards and hair ([Lev. 21:5](#); see also [Ezek. 44:20](#)), and it was a sign of extreme bereavement and mourning ([Isa. 15:2-3](#); [Jer. 16:6-7](#)). Ezekiel symbolically defiles his priesthood and enters into a state of public mourning.

“The hand that wields the sword is the hand of Yahweh, but the body being shaved is the house of Israel. The hacked body of Ezekiel is Israel—Israel being shorn of its priestly role among the nations, Israel being shattered in the grief of national defeat, Israel being shamed before those nations among whom she should have shone.”

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit](#). IVP Academic. 83-84.

Explanation of the Sign Acts

Israel's Covenant Election

In Ezekiel 5:5, “Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations” reflects Ezekiel’s theology of Israel’s role in Yahweh’s purposes for the nations ([Gen. 12:1-3](#); [Exod. 19:4-6](#); [Ps. 72](#)—Israel has utterly failed its mission).

Israel's Covenant Failure

Ezekiel 5:6-10 describes Israel's violation of Torah. “The laws and decrees” is a shorthand way of referring to all the commands of the Torah that embody the terms of the Sinai covenant (see [Deut. 4:6-8](#) and [Ps. 147:19-20](#)).

Ezekiel exploits the multiple nuances of the word “law” (*mishpat*).

- *mishpat* #1 = judicial acts that create a community of *tsedeq*
- *mishpat* #2 = standard/code of behavior
- *mishpat* #3 = acts of retributive judgment for the violation of *tsedeq*

Ezekiel 5:7-8 Instructor's Translation

You have not performed my *mishpat* (#1) you haven't even done like the *mishpat* (#2) of the nations around you. Therefore I am against you, and I will bring about *mishpat* (#3) in your midst before all the nations.

Israel is hyper-accountable for their apostasy because they have the Torah, yet they have failed in their priestly mission by behaving worse than the customs of the nations without Torah (see [Amos 3:1-2](#)).

The first mention of idolatry and defilement of the temple in Ezekiel 5:11 points forward to chapters 8-11.

Israel's Covenant Punishment

The covenant curses of [Leviticus 26](#) and [Deuteronomy 28](#) will fall on Israel.

- 5:10—cannibalism as a result of the siege = [Lev. 26:29](#)
- 5:10—“scatter you” = [Lev. 26:33](#)/[Deut. 28:64](#)
- 5:12—plague/famine = [Lev. 26:16](#)
- 5:12—open the sword = [Lev. 26:33](#)

- 5:14—public shame among the nations = Lev. 26:31
- 5:17—wild animals = Lev. 26:22

Israel's Covenant and the Nations

- 5:5—Nations were meant to see Israel's priestly witness to Yahweh
- 5:6-7—Nations provide a standard by which Israel is judged
- 5:8—Nations will witness Yahweh's justice visited on Israel
- 5:14-15—Nations will witness Israel's public shame

Israel's Covenant Hope

There is no hope mentioned in this passage, but the logic of the covenant in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 was always that covenant violation and punishment would be followed by covenant restoration.

Reflection Question

In what way is the biblical practice of fasting similar to prophetic sign acts?

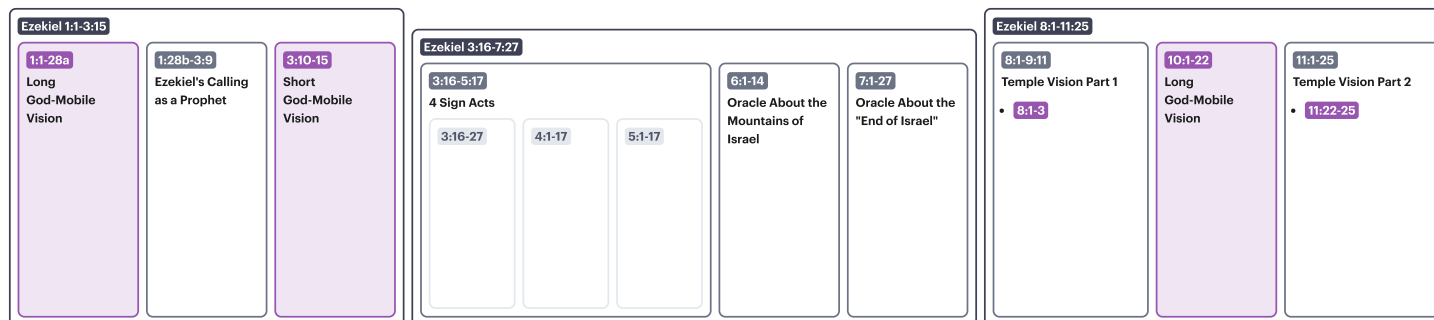
Session 9: Corrupted Temple Vision

Key Takeaways

- God shows Ezekiel a vision of the temple as an anti-Eden.
- The prophets saw a deep connection between idolatry on the one hand and violence and injustice on the other.
- Idolatry is a key theme throughout the Bible as humans choose whether they will accept their role as God's image or give allegiance to images of their own making.

Ezekiel 8-11: Vision of the Temple's Defilement and Jerusalem's Destruction

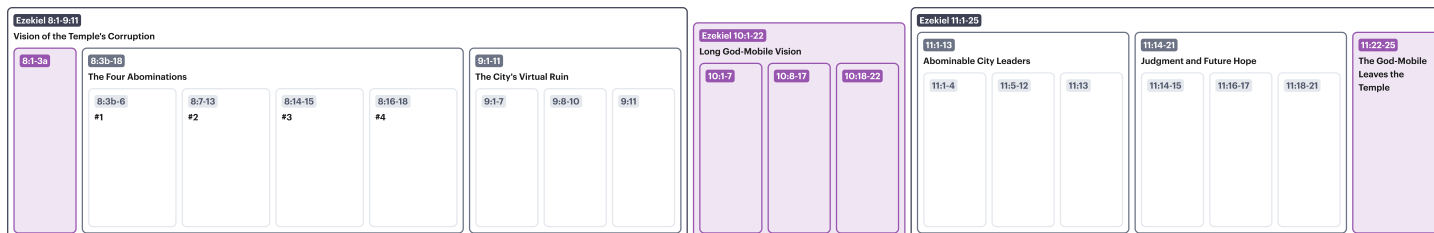
This large block of narrative and speeches brings the larger movement of Ezekiel 1:1-11:25 to a close. The literary design of this unit is fairly clear, as it opens and closes with a vision of the divine human on the throne of the god-mobile, and in the center is a long description of the god-mobile that matches the scene in [Ezekiel 1](#).



Ezekiel 1:1-11:25. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 8:1-11:25

When we examine the literary design of 8:1-11:25 more closely, we find it is a symmetrical arrangement of multiple visionary stories, where Ezekiel is touring the Jerusalem temple with "Spirit-empowered eyes" so that he can see the reality his contemporaries are unable to perceive.



Ezekiel 8:1-11:25. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

8:1 And it came about on the sixth year,
 in the sixth [month],
 on the fifth of the month,
 I was sitting in **my house**
 and **the elders of Judah** were sitting before me.
 And **the hand of lord Yahweh** came upon me there.

2 And **I saw** and look:
the likeness like **the appearance** of a human:
 from **the appearance** of his loins and downward, fire;
 and from his loins upward, like **the appearance** of light, like the flash of *hashmal*

3 And he sent out the form of a hand
 and he took me by the hair-lock of my head
 and **the Spirit/wind** lifted me between the land and the skies
and he brought me to Jerusalem in visions of Elohim,
 to the door of **the inner gate** which faces **North**,
 where there sat **the idol of jealousy which provokes jealousy**.

4 And look:
 there was the glory of the Elohim of Israel,
 like the appearance which I saw in the plain.

5 And he said to me,
 "Son of a human,
lift up your eyes toward the North."
 And **I lifted my eyes to the North**,
 and **look**: from the **North of the gate** was the altar,
 that **idol of jealousy** was by the entrance

6 And he said to me,
 "**Son of a human**,
do you see what they are doing?"

The **great abominations** that **the house of Israel** are doing here,
so that they become far away from my sanctuary?

And you will see still greater abominations. ”

7 **And he brought me to** the entrance of the court
and I saw and look: a hole in the wall.

8 And he said to me,
“Son of a human, dig now in the wall.”
And I dug in the wall and look: a hole.

9 And he said to me,
“Go, and see the terrible abominations which they are doing there.

10 And I went and I saw, and look:
every form of creeping animal and beast, a detestable thing,
and all the dung-balls of the house of Israel were inscribed upon the wall all around.

11 And seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel,
and Ya’azanyahu son of Shaphan was standing in their midst,
they were standing before them
and each had a censor in his hand,
and the fragrance of the cloud of the incense was rising.

12 And he said to me,
“**Do you see, Son of a human,**
what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark,
each in the chambers of his image?
For they are saying,
‘Yahweh isn’t watching us.
Yahweh has abandoned the land.’

13 And he said to me,
“**You will see still greater abominations that they are doing.** ”

14 **And he brought me to** the entrance of the gate of the house of Yahweh which faces North,
and look: there were the women sitting and weeping for Tammuz.

15 And he said to me,
“**Do you see, Son of a human?**
You will see still greater abominations than these. ”

16 **And he brought me to** the inner court of the house of Yahweh,
and look: at the entrance of the temple of Yahweh,
between the outer entry porch and between the altar
were about twenty-five men;

their backs were to the temple of Yahweh,
and their faces were to the East,
and they were bowing down to the East, toward the sun.

¹⁷ And he said to me,

“**Do you see, Son of a human,**

is it too small a thing for the house of Judah to do the abominations which they have done here?
for they have filled the land with violence,
and then they turned to provoke me?

And look, they are shoving the branch into their nose!”

¹⁸ And I too, I will act in hot-anger;

my eye will not show pity

and I will not show compassion

and they will call out in my hearing with a great voice,

but I will not hear them.”

Ezekiel 8:1-18. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Vision of the Abominations in the Temple

In Ezekiel 8:1-2, elders seek Ezekiel and he has a vision of the glory of Yahweh.

- The second date in the book is 592 B.C.E., 14 months after his first vision. This will validate his prophecies of Jerusalem’s destruction.
- The "elders" sit before Ezekiel on numerous occasions (8:1, 14:1-3, 20:1-3, 33:30-32), showing a combination of rejection and respect.
- The irony: The glory of Yahweh appears to Ezekiel in Babylon (where it “shouldn’t” be) and takes him on a tour of the temple (where it “should” be).

In Ezekiel 8:3-18, he has a vision of abominations in Jerusalem's temple.

- Ezekiel’s knowledge of the temple is demonstrated here due to his training, and his outraged vocabulary is explained here as well. He sees the tragedy and atrocity of Israel’s apostasy: “have you seen? ... you will see more” (Ezek. 8:6, 9, 13, 15, 17).
- Ezekiel is taken through four areas of the temple (getting closer to the holy of holies each time) to see the reality.

The Idol of Jealousy in the Outer Court (Ezek. 8:3-6)

This is likely a reference to the statue of Asherah erected by King Manasseh in the temple courts (see [2 Kgs. 21:3-7](#)). It was torn down by Josiah ([2 Kgs. 23:6](#)), but then restored afterwards (this is the worship of the “queen of heaven” mentioned in [Jer. 44:17-19](#)).

The chronicler’s account of Manasseh’s building of the statue incorporates Ezekiel’s description into the narration itself. The unique word “image” (סמל) is used only in these passages and in Deuteronomy 4:16, to which both Ezekiel 8 and 2 Chronicles 33 are hyperlinked.

2 Kings 21:7 NASB*

Then he set the **carved image** (פסל) of Asherah that he had made, in the house of Yahweh ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 8:5 NASB*

So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate was this **idol** (סמל) of jealousy (קנאה) at the entrance.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

2 Chronicles 33:7 NASB*

Then he put the **carved image** (פסל) of **the idol** (הסמל) which he had made in the house of *Elohim* ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The phrase “idol that causes jealousy” is a creative adaptation from the description of idols in Deuteronomy 4:16-18.

Deuteronomy 4:23-24 NASB*

²³ “So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of Yahweh your Elohim which he made with you, and make for yourselves an **image** (פסל) in the form of anything against which the Yahweh your Elohim has commanded you. ²⁴ “For the Yahweh your Elohim is a consuming fire, a **jealous** (קנא) **Elohim**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Animal Carvings (Ezek. 8:10)

Idolatrous images are carved into the wall of an unspecified temple chamber (converted storage room? See [1 Kgs. 6:5](#)). The description of the creatures is lifted right out of Deuteronomy 4:17-18 and seasoned with the vocabulary of the animal list from day five of Genesis 1.

Deuteronomy 4:16-18 NASB*

¹⁶ so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, **the likeness** (תבנית) of male or female, ¹⁷ the likeness (תבנית) of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness (תבנית) of any winged bird that flies in the sky, ¹⁸ **the likeness** (תבנית) of anything **that creeps** (רמש) on the ground, the likeness (תבנית) of any fish that is in the water below the earth.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 1:24 NASB*

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: **cattle** (בהמה) and **creeping things** (רמש) and beasts of the earth after their kind”; and it was so.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

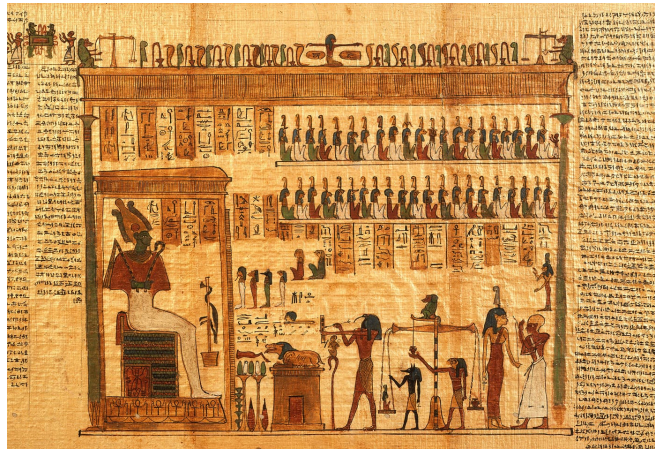
Ezekiel 8:10 NASB*

So I entered and looked, and behold, every **likeness** (תבנית) of **creeping things** (רמש) and **beasts** (בהמה) and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

There are 70 elders worshipping the animal carvings. The elders believe Yahweh has abandoned his people and so pray to other deities.

Walther Zimmerli has argued that these animal images have an Egyptian influence, which often depicted deities as snakes and beetles and reptiles ([Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24](#). Fortress Press. 240-241). For reference, see the image from the Egyptian Book of the Dead below.



Papyrus of Hunefer (1275 B.C.E.). [Wikimedia](#).

John Walton has also appealed to Babylonian influence, as their cosmic deities were often depicted as creatures. On this Babylonian stele, note the underworld creatures at the bottom (see Walton, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, vol. 4](#). 422).



Kudurru (1100s B.C.E.). Louvre Museum, CC0, via [Wikimedia](#).

Women in Ritual Mourning for Tammuz (Ezek. 8:14)

Tammuz (תמוז) is a Babylonian fertility deity (*dum-uzi* in Sumerian), whose annual death in the autumn is connected with the dying of all the crops. The ritual mourning for Tammuz in the fall (note the sixth month in [Ezek. 8:1](#) = July/August) summons him back to life in the spring.

Tammuz is an archetypal deity that merges with similar annual fertility deities in the ancient Near East. Osiris plays a similar role in Egyptian religion, Eshmun in Canaanite culture, and Adonis in Greek culture. The other main rituals connected to *dum-uzi* involves ritual sex between priestly leaders (be careful if you Google *dumuzi!*).

“In Sumerian times a complex mythology developed around this god. The literature is preoccupied especially with the death of Tammuz and his departure to the netherworld. As a result he loses his earthly kingship, his role as shepherd, and his virility. Whether an annual cycle commemorating the death and resurrection of this god, corresponding to the agricultural cycles, was celebrated in the ritual is debated. Western counterparts to Tammuz are often recognized in the Canaanite storm god Baal-Hadad and the Greek Adonis. Since this scene follows immediately after the elders’ assertion that Yahweh had abandoned the land, it appears that these women either have equated Yahweh with Tammuz as well, or they are expressing their grief at their own deity’s departure by adapting a Tammuz ritual (hence ‘the Tammuz’).”

Block, Daniel (1997). [The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)](#). Eerdmans. 295.

Worship of the Sun (Ezek. 8:16)

The worship of heavenly bodies by Israelites isn’t mentioned frequently in the Hebrew Bible, but the small of handful of texts make it clear what Ezekiel is referring to. The Judahite king Manasseh is said to have introduced an astral cult into the Jerusalem temple (see [2 Kgs. 21:5](#)), and it is prohibited again in [Deuteronomy 4](#).

2 Kings 21:5 NASB

For [Manasseh] built altars for all **the host of heaven** in the two courts of the house of the LORD.

2 Kings 23:11 NASB

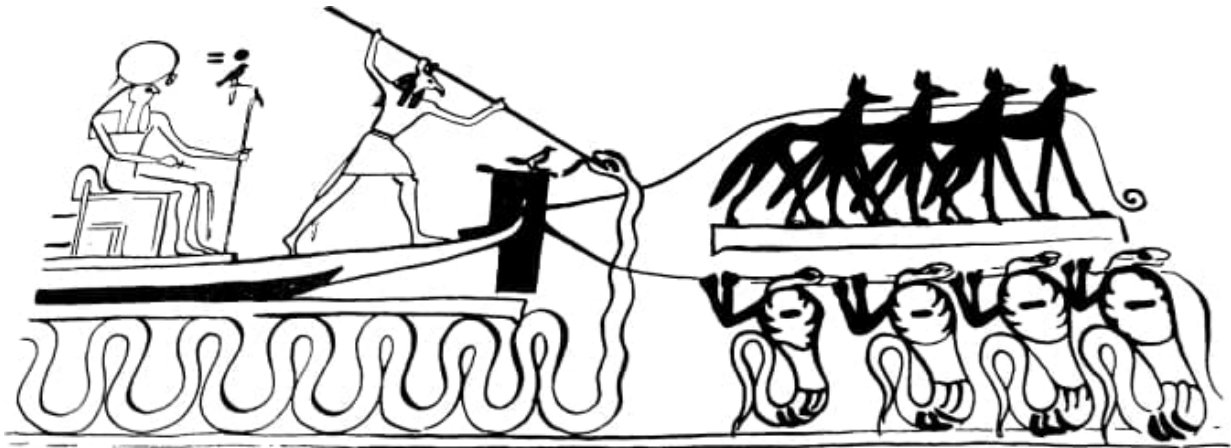
[Josiah] did away with the horses which the kings of Judah had given **to the sun**, at the entrance of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the official, which was in the precincts; and he burned **the chariots of the sun** with fire.

Deuteronomy 4:19 NASB

And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see **the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven**, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

The Hebrew word for “sun” is *shemesh* (שמש), and in both Akkadian and Ugaritic this is the proper name of the sun deity. In Egyptian culture, the sun deity was named Re, and he is often depicted as a celestial chariot rider who vanquishes the powers of darkness every morning when he rises.

The sun god Re is pulled through the underworld sea at night. The god Seth spears and defeats the death god Apophis (a snake), while the boat is pulled by subjugated night demons (jackals and snakes).



Keel, Othmar (1997). "Figure 55" (p. 55). *Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Eisenbrauns.

Misplaced Allegiance and Idolatry Results in Violence (Ezek. 8:17)

This passage, along with the following scene in [chapter 9](#), is riddled with language and allusions to the flood narrative in Genesis 6, and this final passage is the first clear echo.

Genesis 6:11 NASB*

Now the land became ruined in the eyes of *Elohim*, and **the land was filled with violent crime** (תמלא הארץ חמס).

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 8:17 NASB*

Is it too small a thing for the house of Judah to do these abominations, that **they also fill the land with violent crime** (מלאו את הארץ חמס)

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

It is crucially important to see the link between worship, allegiance to a divine patron, and social ethics in the Hebrew Bible. In Israel's polytheistic environment, there was no assumed connection between "religion and ethics" (to use our modern categories). The gods demanded worship and certain levels of allegiance, but Yahweh was unique in that he demanded generosity and justice for the lower class as an expression of allegiance to him.

Worship was tethered to justice in a fundamental way, to a degree that was unequaled in the ancient Near East.

Ancient deities were embodiments of social institutions and natural forces, many of whom were cruel or at least uncaring for the well-being of the poor. Worship of these gods did not involve the formation of a moral

sensibility. But Yahweh worship, rooted in a conviction that every human is an image of *Elohim*, was joined with ethics.

[Ezekiel 8:1-17](#) is a classic expression of this worldview. When people give their allegiance to deities and forces other than Yahweh, it's not long before the poor suffer. See [Amos 5:21-24](#) for a classic expression of this.

Vision of Jerusalem's Destruction by "The Destroyers"

Ezekiel's vision in [chapter 9](#) is the first occurrence in the Hebrew Bible of the motif of a visionary tour guided by a divine or angelic being. Later appearances of this motif are in Zechariah 1-6, Daniel 7-12, and, in the New Testament, the Revelation. [Ezekiel 9](#) depicts the coming Babylonian siege and destruction of Jerusalem as a divinely appointed event, with Babylon as the agent of Yahweh.

Seven angelic destroyers visit Yahweh's justice on Jerusalem. The faithful remnant is "marked" and spared judgment ([9:4](#)), while the idolaters are eliminated.

The language of "do not spare and show no pity" ([Ezek. 9:5](#)) recalls the same phrase from Yahweh's orders to destroy the Canaanites ([Deut. 7:16](#); [Josh. 11:20](#); [1 Sam. 15:3, 9, 15](#)). The tragic irony is that Israel has become thoroughly Canaanized, has defiled land and temple, and so suffers the same fate (see [Lev. 18:24-28](#)).

Yahweh's glory begins to shift position away from the holy of holies ([Ezek. 9:3](#), see [Ezek. 11:22-23](#)). Ezekiel intercedes on behalf of the remnant ([Ezek. 9:8](#)), but his answer doesn't come until [Ezekiel 11:14-21](#).

Vision of the Glory of Yahweh

In [chapter 10](#), the "fire" at the center of the chariot provides for the final burning of Jerusalem ([Ezek. 9:1-7](#)). Ezekiel realizes that the "living creatures" and "wheels" of his birthday vision are in fact "cherubim" who guard and transport the divine presence ([Ezek. 10:20](#) and [verses 9-15](#)).

Yahweh's presence moves to the entrance of the temple ([Ezek. 10:18-19](#)) and prepares for takeoff.

Accusation Against the Inhabitants Left in Jerusalem

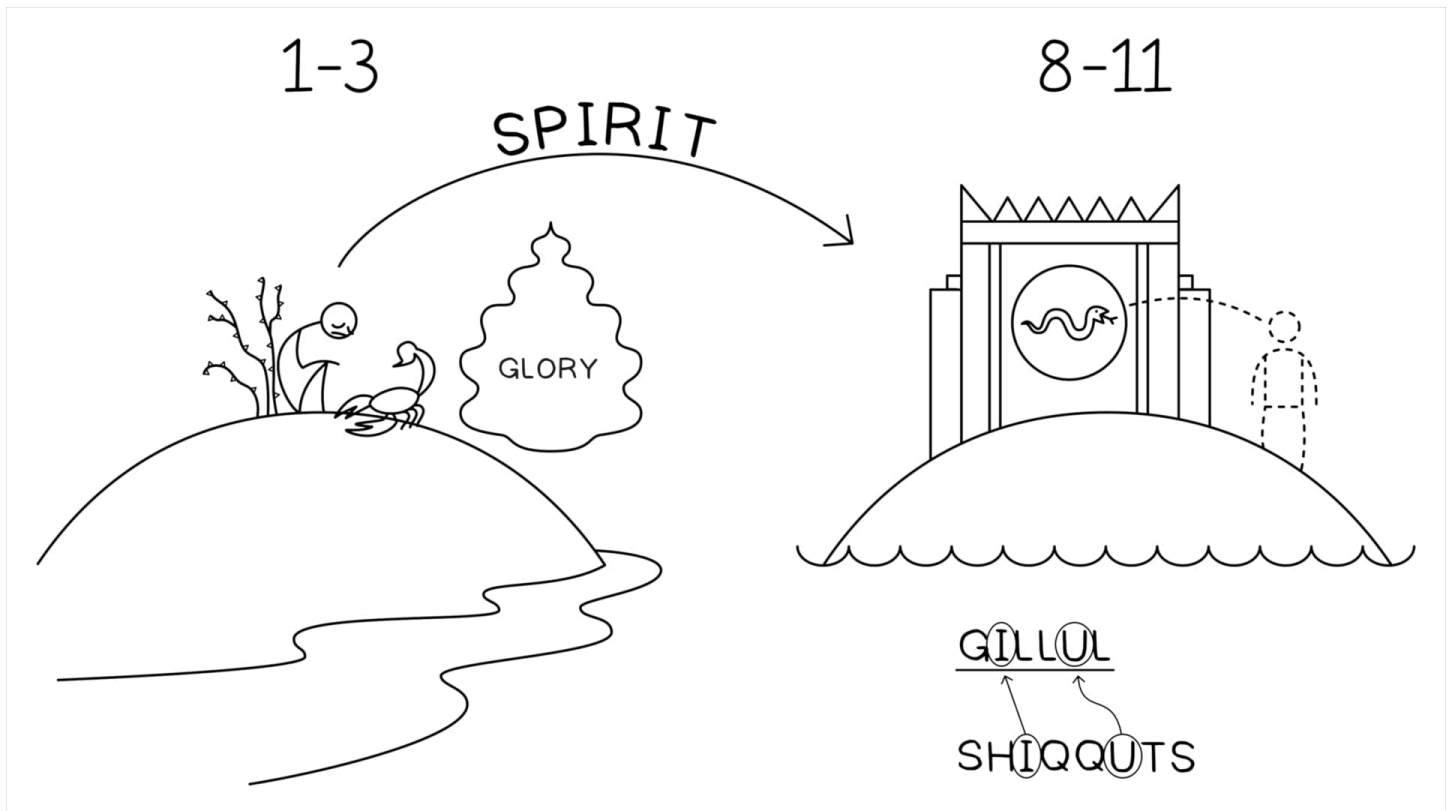
[Ezekiel 11:3](#) is unclear for several reasons.

The first part literally reads, "not in nearness is the building of houses." Possible interpretations include:

- A statement: The leaders think that there is no need to rebuild the city after the first Babylonian attack (likely because of arrogant complacency assuming the city's divine protection, as in [Jer. 14:13](#)).
- A question: "Isn't it near time to rebuild houses?" (i.e., there's nothing more to fear, the Babylonian threat is over, the ruling elite are all in exile and we can take all their leftover stuff!)

In the second half of the verse, "it is the pot" (i.e., Jerusalem is the pot) is an image of protection behind the iron walls. The line, "we are the meat" (i.e., Jerusalem's current inhabitants are choice meat) is about the status of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Choice meat was cooked in pots; lesser cuts were cooked on open coals. The implication is that the bad cuts have been removed from the pot (i.e., the exiled leaders).

Vision of Corrupt Temple



Vision of Corrupt Temple. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

Why is idolatry such a serious issue to God?



Module 3: Oracles Against Israel

SESSIONS 10-14

God brings his case against his unfaithful covenant partners. Explore the movement at the center of the Ezekiel scroll.

Session 10: False Prophets and the Coming Storm

Key Takeaways

- God is a sanctuary to the exiles in Babylon, but he has departed the sanctuary in Jerusalem.
- The prophets are meant to provide warning and guidance to help the people prepare for the coming storm. False prophets bring a message that serves only their own interest.
- The Bible gives us wisdom rather than step-by-step instruction. Humans have a responsibility to take up this wisdom and discern what to do.

Is There Any Hope for Jerusalem?

In [Ezekiel 11:15](#), Jerusalem's inhabitants say about Ezekiel and the exiles, "they are long gone, the city now belongs to us."

Yahweh's response comes in [Ezekiel 11:16-21](#). It's a dense statement of future hope that introduces vocabulary of restoration that will be unpacked more in [Ezekiel 18:31](#), [20:41-42](#), [28:25](#), and [36:23-28](#).

- 11:16: He has become their temporary sanctuary (a mobile temple, i.e., the *kavod* of chapters 1-3).
- 11:17-18: He will regather his people to the land and they will rid themselves of idols.
- 11:19-20: He will transform the hearts of the people ("new/unified heart, new S/spirit"?) so that they can truly obey the Torah and bring covenant renewal.
- 11:21: Israel will no longer give affection and allegiance to false gods.
- This statement forms a forward-facing link to the restoration chapters in Ezekiel 34-48.

Ezekiel 11:17-20

¹⁷ Therefore say, "Thus says the Lord God, '**I will gather you from the peoples** and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and **I will give you the land** of Israel.'"

Ezekiel 34-37

Ezekiel 34:13

I will bring them out **from the peoples and gather them from the countries** and **bring them to their own land**;

Ezekiel 36:24

For I will take you from the nations, **gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land**.

Yahweh's Response to Ezekiel and the Exiles. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel 11:17–20

Ezekiel 34-37

	<p>Ezekiel 37:21 Say to them, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;'"</p>
<p>¹⁸ When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it.</p>	<p>Ezekiel 37:23 They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions;</p>
<p>¹⁹ And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and do them.</p>	<p>Ezekiel 36:26–27 ²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.</p>
<p>Then they will be my people, and I shall be their God.</p>	<p>Ezekiel 36:28 You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be my people, and I will be your God.</p> <p>Ezekiel 37:23 And they will be my people, and I will be their God.</p>

Yahweh's Response to Ezekiel and the Exiles. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Glory of Yahweh Leaves Jerusalem to Head East

God's glory heads east over the Mount of Olives. Does it continue on to Babylon? Will it wait there to return? The text leaves the issue wide open.

Lifted Up

^a ²² And the cherubim **lifted up** (נשא) their wings,
and the wheels beside them,

Glory

b and **the glory of the Elohim of Israel** was over above them.

Went Up

c²³ And **the glory of Yahweh** **went up** (ויעל) from the middle of the city,
and it stood over the mountain which is east of the city.

Lifted Up

a²⁴ And **the Spirit** **lifted me up** (נשא),
and she brought me to Chaldea, to **the exiles**,

Spirit

b¹ in a **vision**, by **the Spirit of Elohim**,

Went Up

c¹ and the **vision** that I had seen **went up** (ויעל) from upon me,
²⁵ and I told **the exiles**, all the things that Yahweh had shown me.

Ezekiel 11:22-25. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Key Themes of Ezekiel 8-11

1. Idolatry and injustice continue unchecked in Jerusalem even after the first wave of exile, showing that Yahweh must visit complete judgment on the city (chapters 8-9).
2. The inhabitants left after the 597 B.C.E. exile have become arrogant and greedy after the ruling class was taken to Babylon (chapter 11).
3. Yahweh's presence in the temple is contingent on the people's covenant obedience (see Exod. 32-34), and so he leaves Jerusalem to be with the exiles in Babylon (chapters 10-11, especially 11:16, 22-23).
4. Yahweh has not abandoned his promises, and the renewal of the covenant will depend entirely on Yahweh's initiative to transform and heal the hearts of his people (11:14-21; notice there are no calls to repent, the future judgment is certain and so is the promise of hope). These promises point forward to the messianic, new covenant hope in chapters 34-37, but chapters 12-33 explore the immediate future of judgment on Jerusalem (chapters 12-24, 33) and the nations (chapters 25-32).

Literary Design of Ezekiel 12-33: Ezekiel's Warnings to Israel and the Nations



Ezekiel 12-33. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel 12-14 and 15-23: Prophecies of Woe Against Israel and Jerusalem

These chapters explore Yahweh's inevitable judgment on Jerusalem from many different angles and in a variety of literary forms. Some oracles are against the entire nation (chapters 15, 16, 18, 20), some are against the Jerusalem inhabitants specifically (chapters 19, 24), and others are against the royal leaders (chapters 12, 17, 19) or Israel's prophet-leaders (chapters 13-14).

The diverse literary forms of this material show a handful of tools in Ezekiel's rhetorical toolbox.

- Sign acts: 12:1-16 (enacting exile of the king), 21:23-32 (making two roads in the dirt), 24:15-27 (the death of Ezekiel's wife)
- Legal case studies: systematic use of "if ... then" scenarios to teach about the nature of Yahweh's justice and human behavior in 14:1-11 (sin and inquiring of Yahweh), 14:12-23 (transfer of merit between individuals), chapter 18 (transfer of merit/guilt between generations), and chapter 20 (studying Israel's history of covenant faithlessness)
- Parables: chapter 15 (Israel as a burnt stick), chapters 16 and 23 (Israel as prostitute), chapter 17 (Israel as vine and eagle), chapter 19 (Israel as lion and vine), chapter 22 (Israel as melted metal), chapter 24 (Israel as a unclean cooking pot)
- Funeral dirges and woes: chapter 13 (woe upon false prophets), chapter 19 (lament over rulers of Israel), chapter 22 (woe upon Jerusalem)

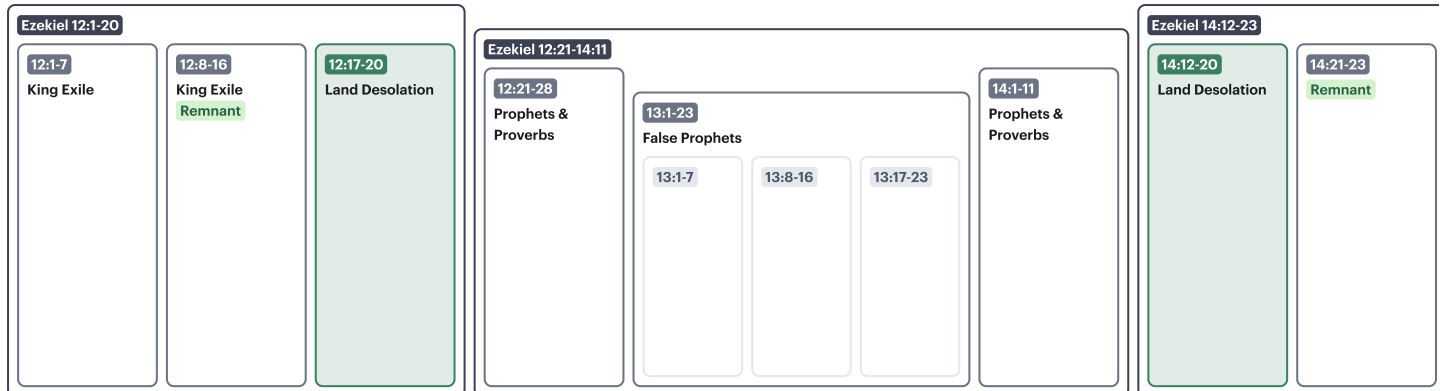
Within this large collection of diverse judgment oracles, we can discern a clear introduction, conclusion, and smaller groupings, along with a clear compositional strategy to end prophecies of judgment with hints of future hope that point forward to chapters 34-37.

1. Introduction/Conclusion: The sign acts of 12:1-16 and 24:15-17 are closely parallel in form and vocabulary and act as a clear frame around the entire collection.
2. Internal Groupings: There are smaller groupings of oracles arranged according to theme and content. 16 and 23 both depict Israel as a woman/women who has/have committed adultery and so broken the covenant. 17, 19, 21 are all oracles about the events leading up to the second invasion by Babylon. 18, 20, 22 are all focused on the sin and covenant offenses perpetrated by the entire nation of Israel.
3. Future Hope: Many oracles of judgment end with a ski jump launching the reader into the hope of the new covenant: 11:17-21, 14:11, 14:22-23, 16:59-63, 17:22-24, 18:30-32, 20:39-44, 28:25-26.

Key Themes of Ezekiel 12-23

- Irreversibility of judgment. There are virtually no calls to repent.
- Future restoration is related to shame and acknowledgment of sin 12:16.
- Ezekiel deconstructs Israel's epic national narrative and replaces it with a story of Israel's rebellion consistent from its origins: 16, 20, 23.
- Babylon is Yahweh's agent against Jerusalem (see Jeremiah).
- Yahweh holds each generation accountable for its own covenant violation: 14:12-23; 18; 33:10-20.

Ezekiel 12-14: Oracles Against Israel's Leaders



Ezekiel 12-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel 12:1-20

Oracle Against Jerusalem's King (= Zedekiah): He Will Be Captured in Another Wave of Defeat and Exile

12:1-7

- Ezekiel's sign act of "going into exile"

12:8-16

- The chief will go into exile, and Judah will be scattered
- **12:16** But a "remnant" (הותרתי) will survive the famine and plague, and will know that "I am Yahweh"

12:17-20

- The Babylonian siege is coming **and the land will become desolate** (ארץ + שממה)

Ezekiel 12:21-14:11

Oracles Against the Prophets and Prophetesses

12:21-28

- **12:21-25** Ezekiel mocked in **proverbs** (משל) as a false prophet announcing the distant future
- **12:26-28** Yahweh responds: the prophetic word is for here and now

13:1-23

- **13:1-7** The illegitimate prophets: their message and deception

- **13:8-16** A warning against the illegitimate prophets
- **13:17-23** The illegitimate prophetesses: their deception and downfall

14:1-11

- **14:1-5** Judah's elders and prophets are deceived by "idols in the heart"
- **14:6-8** Judah's idolators will become a **proverbial sign (משל)** of ruin
- **14:9-11** The elders and the prophets will bear their guilt

14:12-23

Oracles Against a Treacherous Judah

14:12-20

- The four-fold covenant curses: famine, wild animals, the sword, and plague
- **14:13** The land has "committed treachery" (ארץ + מעל מעל)
- **14:15-16** "the land becomes desolate" (שממה)

14:21-23

- The "remnant" (נותרה פלטה) will survive the famine and plague and will see and know that Yahweh is Lord

Ezekiel 12-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel as a Sign of Jerusalem's Future

[Ezekiel 12:1-20](#) introduces this section and is linked to the concluding sign act in [24:15-27](#).

In 12:1-16, Ezekiel acts out Zedekiah's capture (for the story, see [Jer. 39:1-7](#)).

Compositional Placement

This sign act is placed as an inclusio frame narrative with [24:1-17](#). In both units Ezekiel is commanded to engage in bizarre, symbolic behavior ([12:6](#) carry luggage through the city at night, [24:18](#) abstain from mourning for dead wife). In both Ezekiel is questioned by an audience as to the meaning of his behavior ([12:9](#) and [24:19](#) are very close in Hebrew). In both texts Ezekiel himself is described as a "sign for Israel" (*mophet*, [12:6, 11; 24:24](#)): [12:11](#) "just as I have done, so it will be done to them ..." and [24:21](#) "you all shall do just as I have done."

Intertextual Links

Ezekiel “digging in the wall” (חתר בקיר) in [12:5 and 7](#) links back to Ezekiel’s vision, where he dug through the wall to enter into the temple courts to see the idolatry there ([8:7-8](#)). Here Ezekiel is going the opposite direction, digging through the city wall to get out, as a prophetic sign of the king’s coming exile and capture.

The phrase, “I am making you a symbol (מופת) for them” ([12:6, 11](#)) is similar to [4:3](#) “this will be a sign (אות) for them,” referring to the model city.

The odd phrase “the prince is the burden” (הנשיא המשא) in [12:10](#) seems to be an oblique reference back to [12:6-7](#), where the people are the burden, which is a wordplay on the word “prophetic oracle” (משא).

In [12:15-16](#), “scattering ... dispersing ... and I will leave some remaining” echoes back to the grim hope of the return from exile in [6:8](#).

In [12:17-20](#), Ezekiel eats and drinks in fear, signifying the siege. These two sign acts point forward to the coming siege of the city for all inhabitants ([12:17-20](#)) and the final capture of its rebellious Davidic leadership ([12:1-16](#)).

Hyperlinks

In [12:18-19](#), the eating and drinking in fear and trembling echoes closely the language of Ezekiel’s sign acts from [4:16](#).

Ezekiel the True Prophet Against the False Prophets (Ezek. 12:21-14:11)

This section begins with [12:21-28](#), Yahweh disputes the people's parable about unfulfilled prophetic visions.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 13:1-16

¹ And the word of Yahweh came to me saying,

² “Son of a human,

prophesy against the **prophets** of Israel who **prophesy**,
and say to those who are **prophets** of their own minds,

‘Hear the word of Yahweh!

³ Thus says [the Lord] Yahweh,

“Woe to the foolish **prophets** who go after their own spirit,
even though they have seen nothing.

⁴ Your **prophets**, O Israel, are like foxes among ruins.

⁵ You have not gone up into the breached places,
so you could rebuild **the wall** for the house of Israel,
so it could stand in the battle.

⁶ **Their visions are empty**,
and **their divine-message is a lie**;

those who say, "Thus says Yahweh,"
but Yahweh did not send them;
yet they await the fulfillment of the word!
7 Aren't **the visions you see empty?**
Aren't **the divine messages you speak a lie,**
you who say, "Thus says Yahweh"
when I have not spoken?

8 Therefore, thus says the Lord Yahweh,
because **you have spoken what is empty,**
and **have visions about a lie,**
therefore, I am against you,
utterance of the Lord Yahweh.

9 And my hand will be against the prophets
the ones who have **visions that are empty and divine-messages that are a lie,**
they will not be among the inner-council of my people,
nor will they be written up in the registry of the house of Israel,
nor will they enter into the land of Israel,
and y'all will know that I am Yahweh .

10 Because, indeed, they have led astray my people,
saying "**Peace!**" **when there is no peace.**
And when one builds **a wall ,**
look, **they coat over it with thin-paint.**

11 Say to those who **coat over with thin-paint,** so that it falls,
when the **flooding rain** comes,
then I will produce **hailstones that will fall,**
and a **stormy wind will break out.**

12 And look, **the wall** falls down,
won't people say to you,
"Where is **the thin-coat you smeared on?**"

13 Therefore, thus says the Lord Yahweh,
"I will make the **stormy wind break out** in my anger,
and there will be **flooding rain** and **hailstones** in hot-anger, resulting in destruction.

14 And I will tear down **the wall** which **you coated over with thin-paint,**
and I will bring it to the ground,
and its foundation will be exposed,
and it will fall and you will be finished in its midst,
and y'all will know that I am Yahweh .

15 And I will bring my hot-anger to completion against **that wall ,**
and against those who **smear thin-paint** on it;
and I will say to you,
"There is **no wall ,**

and **those who coat it**, they are no more,
16 the **prophets** of Israel who **prophecy** to Jerusalem,
and who see **visions** for it, a **vision** about **peace**,
even though there is no peace,
utterance of [the Lord] Yahweh.

Ezekiel 13:1-16. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Accusation Against False Prophets and Their Visions

Ezekiel finds himself in the midst of a crisis because there are illegitimate prophets who, like himself, claim to be representing the will of Yahweh to the people of Israel.

Ezekiel 13:3-11 employs various images to describe the false prophets.

- “They follow their own spirit, but have encountered nothing” (13:3). They think their message represents Yahweh, but it’s actually rooted in their own desires and aims.
- “They are like foxes among the ruins” (13:4). Like a scavenger, they benefit from the instability and ruin brought upon others.
- “They don’t go up to the breaches in the wall or rebuild it” (13:5). They don’t actually engage in positive solutions to any of the crises or problems that are a sign of the coming ruin.
- “They claim divine authority” (13:6).
- “They say ‘Peace,’ when there is no peace.” (13:10a). They’re invested in the status quo, and truly believe that everything is going to be fine as long as we don’t let anyone else’s vision disturb our own.
- “They cover over the crumbling wall with paint” (13:10b-11). Their message and their solutions don’t address the real issues at stake; they are radically out of sync with the reality of the crisis.

God is going to unleash the flood so that the true state of the walls is exposed (13:12-17). In the larger context of Ezekiel 12-24, this is clearly a reference to the coming siege and destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon (see 33:21-24).

Notice how Jesus’ concluding movement in the Sermon the Mount is remarkably similar to the language and motifs of Ezekiel 13: “Watch out for false prophets” (Matt. 7:15), as well as the house on the sand that is destroyed by rivers, rain, and a windstorm (Matt. 7:24-27).

The chapter concludes (13:17-23) with an accusation against the prophetesses.

Reflection Question

How are the false prophets of Ezekiel’s day similar to those in Jesus’ time? How does this apply today?

Session 11: The Anti-Remnant

Key Takeaways

- Throughout the biblical story, God saves a righteous remnant to carry forward his plan to bless the world.
- Ezekiel 14 echoes vocabulary from the flood narrative of Genesis 6-8.
- Ezekiel 14 turns the righteous remnant theme on its head. God's covenant partners will pass through the death of exile. And even if there were a righteous representative, they would not deliver the city from destruction.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 14:1-11

Chapter 14 begins with judgment against idolatry and the deception of the prophets (see also [1 Kgs. 22](#)).

¹ And men from the elders of Israel came
and they sat before me,
² and the word of Yahweh came to me saying,
³ "Son of a human,
these men have set up their idols in their hearts
and they have set before themselves the stumbling block of their iniquity.
Should I be inquired of by them?
⁴ Therefore speak to them
and say to them,
'Thus says the Lord Yahweh:
Anyone from the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart,
and who sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before himself,
and then comes to the prophet,
I Yahweh myself will answer him because of it,
in view of his many idols,
⁵ in order to catch hold of the heart of the house of Israel,
who has stumbled away from me due to all of their idols.

⁶ Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says **[the Lord]** Yahweh, 'Repent, and turn back from your idols,
and turn your faces from all your abominations.

⁷ For any one of the house of Israel or from the sojourner who sojourns in Israel, who separates himself from me and sets up his idols in his heart and set his stumbling block of his iniquity before himself, and then goes to the prophet to inquire of me through him, I Yahweh will be brought to answer him myself.

⁸ And I will make him a sign and a parable, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people, and you will know that I am Yahweh.

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

¹⁰ And they shall bear their own guilt: like the guilt of the one who inquires, so shall be the guilt of the prophet.

¹¹ So that they can no longer lead astray the house of Israel from me, and they will no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions; and they will be to me a people, and I will be their God.

Ezekiel 14:1-11. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Key Interpretive Issues in Ezekiel 14:1-11

“[14:4—I Yahweh will impart him an answer ‘by myself.’] Instead of the ordinary form, the reflexive (Niph.) stem of the vb. is used here and v. 7 to bring out the special character of the answer: it will come direct from Jahveh to the enquirer, without any intermediary, and, as the context implies, it will take shape in deeds, not words. An enquirer who is divided in his allegiance can have no fellowship with Jahveh, and therefore no knowledge of His will conveyed by an inspired prophet.”

Cooke, G. A. (1970). [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Book of Ezekiel*](#). T. & T. Clark Limited, Ltd. 151.

Professional court prophets were taken in the first wave of the exile with Jehoiachin in 597 (see [Jer. 29:1, 15](#)). They clearly supported Jerusalem and its king, and they contradicted Ezekiel and Jeremiah’s message that Yahweh appointed the destruction by Babylon ([Jer. 27](#)). Here, Ezekiel challenges their claim to speak on behalf of Yahweh.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 14:12-23

¹² And the word of Yahweh came to me:

¹³ “Son of a human,
when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly,
and I stretch out my hand against it,
and I break its staff of bread,
and I send famine upon it,

and I cut off from it human and beast,
14 **even if these three men were in it,**
Noah, Daniel, and Job,
they would deliver, by their own righteousness, only their own lives,
declares Yahweh Elohim.

15 **If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land,**
and they make it childless,
and it becomes desolate,
so that no one may pass through because of the beasts,
16 **even if these three men were in it,**
as I live, declares Yahweh Elohim,
they would deliver neither sons nor daughters.
They alone would be delivered,
and the land would be desolate.

17 **Or if I bring a sword upon that land,**
and I say, "Let a sword pass through the land,"
and I cut off from it human and beast,
18 **if these three men were in it,**
as I live, declares Yahweh Elohim,
they would deliver neither sons nor daughters,
but they alone would be delivered.

19 **Or if I send a plague into that land,**
and pour out my hot anger upon it with blood,
to cut off from it man and beast,
20 **even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it,**
as I live, declares Yahweh Elohim,
they would deliver neither son nor daughter.
They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.

21 For thus says Yahweh Elohim:
How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment,
sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague,
to cut off from it human and beast!

22 But look, some **survivors** will be left as a **remnant** in it,
sons and daughters who will be brought out;
look, when they come out to you,
and you see their ways and their deeds,
then **you will be comforted** for the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem,
for all that I have brought upon it.

²³ **They will bring comfort** to you,
when you see their ways and their deeds,
and you shall know that I have not done without cause
all that I have done in it,
declares Yahweh Elohim.”

Ezekiel 14:12-23. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Jerusalem is Doomed: the Anti-Remnant

The exiles who have been separated from family and friends back in Jerusalem (see [14:22](#)) wonder if Yahweh might spare the entire city on account of a few righteous people (like he entertained with Abraham about Lot's family in Sodom, [Gen. 18](#)).

Ezekiel creates a hypothetical "righteous non-Israelite hall of fame" by naming Noah (see [Gen. 6:9](#)), Job ([Job 1:1, 8](#)), and Daniel (or perhaps, Dan'el, a famous Syrian king, father of Aqhat, renown for his wisdom and justice who is mentioned again in [Ezek. 28:3](#)).

By creating this hypothetical "land" that would not be saved by this righteous trio, Jerusalem is "worse than the nations" (see [Ezek. 5:6](#)), for Yahweh considered "salvation by association" for at least Sodom ([Gen. 18](#)).

The Remnant Revised

Any survivors that do make it to Babylon will prove they were not saved by their own virtuous character. Rather, they will show that Yahweh's judgment on Jerusalem was fully legitimate (v.23 the ironic "consolation" of [Isa. 40:1](#) here takes on a different meaning).

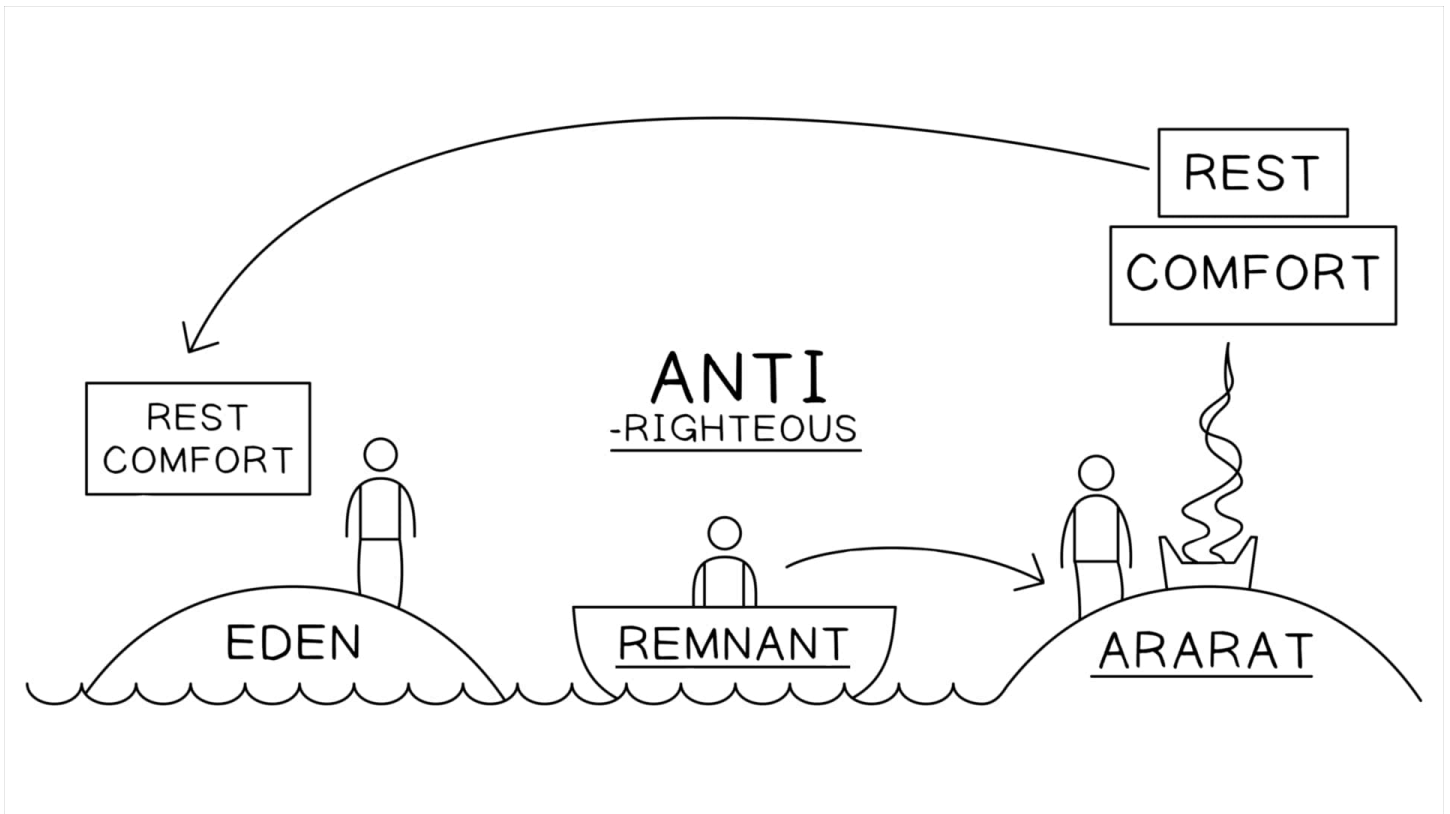
Literary Design

- 14:12: Introduction
- 14:13-20: Four Scenarios From [Leviticus 26](#): famine (14:13-14), wild animals (14:15-16), sword (14:17-18), and plague (14:19-20)
- 14:21-23: The Guilty Remnant

Compositional Location

The opening line uses a new phrase (14:13 "treacherously commit treachery" [למעל מעל](#), adopted from [Lev. 26:40](#)) to describe Israel's covenant rebellion. This phrase is next repeated at the conclusion of the following parable oracle ([15:1-8](#)) and acts as a frame around these two units. The point: Israel's treachery has both sealed Jerusalem's fate (14:12-23) and rendered them useless for the divine purpose (15:1-8).

The Anti-Remnant



The Anti-Remnant. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

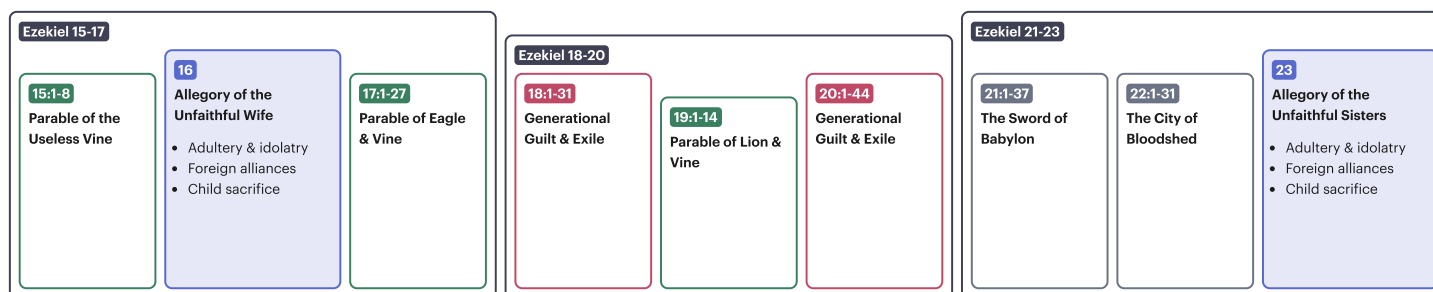
How does Ezekiel use the theme of the remnant to deliver God's message in this chapter?

Session 12: Israel the Unfaithful Wife

Key Takeaways

- Ezekiel engages in trash talk to equate Israel with their Canaanite neighbors.
- The Bible is for our good, but it doesn't always make us feel good.
- Difficult passages invite us to wrestle with God, seeking the blessing he has for us in the Bible.

Literary Design of Ezekiel 15-23: Oracles Against Israel



Ezekiel 15-23. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel 15-17

This is a meaningful compositional unit because all three chapters depict/retell the story of an Eden plant/human who fails to live up to its divinely given potential and is given over to the consequences.

Chapter 15

- A vine-tree (עץ הגפן) that cannot be used for work
- "Will it succeed at work?" (היצלח למלאכה, [15:4](#))
- "I will make the land desolate, because they have committed treachery" (מעלו מעל, [15:8](#))

Chapter 16

- A naked, helpless girl who is rescued, clothed, adorned, and married, but who selfishly turns to other lovers (many analogies to Adam and Eve)
- "Will she succeed to a royal-kingdom?" (ותצלחי למלוכה, [16:13](#))

Chapter 17

- The royal-seed (זרע המלוכה) of Judah is planted by Babylon to be a vine (גפן), but it turns its roots to another master (Egypt) for water to produce fruit.

- "Will it succeed?" (התצלה, [17:10](#))
- "And he rebelled by sending messengers (מלאכיו) to Egypt ... Will he succeed?" (היצלה, [17:15](#))
- "I will enter into judgment with him ... for his treachery which he committed" (מעל ... מעלו, [17:20](#)).

Parable of the Useless Vine

The parable is about piece of wood taken from a grape vine stock that cannot be used for any building, carving, or hanging purposes. And, if it is a burned piece of wood, then how much more useless is it for any of these purposes.

The rhetorical question, "Will it succeed at any work?" (היצלה למלאכה, [15:4](#)) is meant to invite the obvious answer, "No, it will not succeed."

The parable is quickly applied to "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" ([15:6](#)), who are going to be consumed by a "fire" which will result in the desolation of the land because of their treachery (הארץ שממה and מעלו מעל in [15:8](#) are link words back to [14:13](#) and [15-16](#)).

However, there is more to this parable. The image of the "tree-vine" (עץ הגפן) is not only an analogy to the royal-priestly humans in the Eden story (see the design of [Gen. 2:4-9](#)), but is an explicit metaphor for the royal line of David elsewhere in the Psalms and prophets.

In [15:3](#), "Can they take from it a peg to hang any items upon it?" mirrors [Isaiah 22:22-25](#), where the king from the house of David is a "peg" meant for "the hanging of items," that is, the royal house and its honor (see also [Ps. 80:14-17](#), where the vine is an image of the royal son of David).

Parable of Israel as the Lewd Prostitute

Ezekiel adopts the Torah and earlier prophets' metaphor of Israel's covenant faithlessness as marital infidelity and prostitution ([Exod. 34:15-16](#); [Deut. 31:16](#); [Hos. 1-3](#); [Jer. 2:20-25](#)). But he uniquely develops the images into a long (longest oracle among the prophets!) stomach-turning, shocking allegory that undermines Israel's entire view of its own history (*zarah/zenut*, "to have illicit sex as a prostitute" occurs 21x in this one chapter).

Ezekiel 16:1-14

- **16:1-5** Israel of Canaanite, Amorite, Hittite birth, an abandoned infant found
- **16:6-8** Yahweh rescues, clothes, and enters into a covenant with her
- **16:9-14** Yahweh provides her with clothes, food, and royal beauty

Ezekiel 16:15-43

16:15-22

- She takes her **beauty, clothes, and food, and children** and becomes a prostitute with idol gods

16:23-34

- She takes her **beauty, clothes, and food** and becomes a **prostitute** for the nations

16:35-43

- Yahweh gathers her lovers who take away her beauty, clothes, and food and publicly execute her as an adulterous **prostitute**

Ezekiel 16:44-63

- **16:44-47** **Israel of Amorite and Hittite birth**, with **Samaria** and **Sodom** as sisters
- **16:48-58** Israel's behavior makes **Sodom** and **Samaria** look righteous
- **16:59-63** Yahweh **will remember his covenant** and restore Israel, **Sodom**, and **Samaria**

Ezekiel 16:1-63. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

¹ And the word of Yahweh came to me saying,

² "Son of a human,
make known to Jerusalem its abominations.

³ And you will say,

'Thus says Yahweh Elohim to Jerusalem:

**Your origins and place of birth are from the land of the Canaanite;
your father was an Amorite,
and your mother was a Hittite.**

⁴ And as **for your birth,**

on the day you were born,
your navel string was not cut,
nor were you washed with water for cleansing,
nor were you rubbed with salt,
nor were you wrapped in cloth.

⁵ No eye had pity on you to do any of these things for you,
so as to have compassion on you,
and you were cast on the face of the ground,
when you were an object of loathing,

on the day you were born.

⁶ **And I passed you by,**

and I saw you kicking in your blood,
and I said to you in your blood, "Live!"
and I said to you in your blood, "Live!"

⁷ I made you great, like a plant of the field,
and you became great and grew up,

and you came into the best of ornaments,
your breasts became firm,
and your hair grew,
and you were naked and bare.

⁸ **And I passed you by** and I saw you and look,
your time was the time for love;
and I spread my garment over you,
and I covered your **nakedness**,
and **I swore an oath to you**,
and **I entered into a covenant** with you,
and you became mine,
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

⁹ And I washed you with water,
and I washed off your blood from upon you,
and I anointed you with **oil**,

¹⁰ and **I clothed you** with **embroidered clothing**,
and I furnished you with sandals of sea-cow skin,
and I bound you with **linen**,
and I covered you with **fine cloth**,

¹¹ and I set **ornaments** upon you,
and I set bracelets on your hands,
and a necklace on your neck,

¹² and I set a ring in your nose and an earring in your ear,
and a splendid crown on your head,

¹³ and you were adorned with gold and silver,
and your clothing was **linen** and **fine cloth** and **embroidered cloth**;
you ate **flour and honey and oil**,
and you became **extremely beautiful**,
and you prospered unto royalty.

¹⁴ And a name went out for you among the nations due to **your beauty**,
for it was perfect,
due to my splendor which I had placed upon you,
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

¹⁵ But you trusted in **your beauty**,
and you acted like a **prostitute** because of your name,
and you poured out your **prostitution** on every one who passed by,
it became his.

¹⁶ **And you took** some of your **clothes**,
and you made for yourself variegated high places,
and you played the **prostitute** with them.
Not coming things, nor will it be.

¹⁷ **And you took** your **beautiful items** of my gold and my silver which I gave you,
and you made for yourself male images,

and you played the **prostitute** with them.

18 **And you took** your **embroidered clothing**,
and you covered them,
and you set my **oil** and my incense before them,

19 and my bread which I gave you,
fine flour and oil and honey which I fed you,
so you set it before them as a pleasant aroma.

And so it was,
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

20 **And you took** your sons and your daughters whom you bore for me,
and you sacrificed them to them [i.e., the male images] for eating.

Were your **prostitution** too small a thing,

21 that you sacrificed my sons,
and that you gave them up,
so as to offer them up to them?

22 And with regard to all your abominations and your **prostitution**,
you did not remember the days of your youth,
when you were **naked and bare**,
when you were kicking in your blood.

23 And it came about after all your wickedness,
woe! woe to you,
utterance of Yahweh Elohim,

24 **that you built for yourself a ritual mound**,
and you made for yourself a high place in every square,

25 at the head of every street you built your high place,
and you made **your beauty** abominable,
and you spread your legs to every passerby,
and you multiplied your **prostitution**,

26 and you played the **prostitute** with the sons of Egypt,
your neighbors with large penises,
and you multiplied your **prostitution** so as to provoke me,

27 and look, I stretched out my hand against you,
and I withdrew your portion,
and I gave you to the appetite of your adversaries,
the sons of the Philistines,

who were ashamed because of your shameful conduct,
28 and you played the **prostitute** with the sons of Assyria,
because you were not satisfied,
and you played the **prostitute** with them,
and again you were not satisfied,

29 and you multiplied your **prostitution** with the land of trade, with the Chaldeans,
and again you were not satisfied.

30 How weak is your heart,
utterance of Yahweh Elohim,

while you do all these things,
the acts of a domineering **prostitute** .

31 **When you built your ritual mound at the head of every street ,
and you built your high place in every square ,**

then you were not like a **prostitute** ,
for (you) scoffed at the wages of a **prostitute** .

32 The adulteress woman takes strangers instead of her husband.

33 People give gifts to most **prostitutes** ,
but you give your gifts to all your lovers,
and you bribe them to come to you from all around in your **prostitution** .

34 And so you are the opposite of other women in your **prostitution** ,
for you were not sought as a **prostitution** ,
but when you give away a **prostitute's** wage and none is given to you,
you are the opposite.

35 Therefore O prostitute, hear the word of Yahweh:

36 Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"Because you poured out your sexual lewdness,
and you exposed your nakedness in your **prostitution**
to your lovers and to the idols of your abominations,
and according to the bloodshed of your sons which you gave over to them [i.e., the idols],

37 therefore, I am about to gather all your lovers to whom you were pleasing,
and everyone whom you loved,
everyone whom you hated,
and I will gather them against you from all around,
and I will expose your nakedness to them,
and they will see all your nakedness.

38 I will judge you by the customs of adulterous women,
and of those who shed blood,
and I will bring on you blood and anger and zeal.

39 And I will give you into their hands,
**and they will tear down your ritual mound ,
and they will demolish your high places ,**
and I will strip you of your clothes,
and they will take all the ornaments of **your beauty** ,
and I will leave you **naked and bare**.

40 And they will bring a crowd around,
and they will stone you with stones,
and will cut you up with their swords.

41 And they will burn your houses with fire,
and will execute judgments against you in the sight of many women,
and I will make you stop your **prostitution** ,
and you will no longer give away your **prostitute's** wages.

42 And I will give rest to my anger against you,
and my zeal will turn away from you,

and I will be calm and no longer be angry.

43 **Because you did not remember the days of your youth**,
and you troubled me with all these things,
and look, I myself will bring your way on your head,
utterance of Yahweh Elohim,
and you will not act lewdly in all your abominations.

44 Behold, everyone who tells parables about you will tell a parable saying,
“Like mother, like daughter.”

45 You are the daughter of your mother,
abhorring her husband and her children,
and you are **a sister of your sister**,
who abhorred their husbands and their children,
your mother was a Hittite,
and your father was an Amorite.

46 And **your older sister** was **Samaria**,
she and her children who dwell on your left,
and **your sister younger** than you on your right was **Sodom** and her children.

47 But you did not walk in their ways,
and you acted according to their abominations;
just a brief moment and you became more corrupt than they in all of your ways.

48 As I live, utterance of Yahweh Elohim,
Sodom and her children have not done as you and your children have done.

49 Look, this was the sin of **Sodom your sister**:
She and her children had pride, satiation with food, and careless relaxation,
and she did not assist the hand of the poor and needy.

50 But they became exalted,
and acted abominably before me,
and I removed them, just as I have seen.

51 And **Samaria** did not sin half as much as your sins,
but you made more abominations than they;
so **you have made your sisters appear more righteous**,
due to all the abominations you have done.

52 So you, carry your disgrace,
because you have interceded for **your sister** with your sins,
which you have made more abominable than they;

they are more righteous than you !
So you too, be ashamed and bear you disgrace,
because **you have made your sister appear righteous** .

53 And I will **restore their fortune**,
the fortune of **Sodom** and her children,
and the fortune of **Samaria** and her children,
and I will **restore your fortunes** along with them,

54 so that you may bear your disgrace,

and be disgraced of all that you did,
thereby become a source of comfort for them.

⁵⁵ And **your sister Sodom** and her children will **return to their former state**,
and **Samaria** and her children will **return to their former state**,
and you and your children will **return to your former state**.

⁵⁶ And **Sodom your sister** was not a report in your mouth in the day of your pride,
⁵⁷ before your wickedness was uncovered, now the reproach of Aram,
and all the daughters of the Philistines around who despise you, it's all around,
⁵⁸ You have borne your lewdness and your abominations,
utterance of Yahweh.

⁵⁹ For thus says Yahweh Elohim,
so I shall do to you just as you have done,
as you despised the oath so as to violate **the covenant** .

⁶⁰ But **I will remember my covenant with you** in the days of your youth,
and **I will make with you an eternal covenant** ;

⁶¹ and **you will remember** your ways and you will be disgraced,
when you receive **your sister** older and younger than you,
and I will give them to you as **sisters**,
but not from **your covenant** .

⁶² But **I will make my covenant with you**,
and you will know that I am Yahweh.

⁶³ In order that you may remember and be ashamed,
and never have again a gaping mouth because of your shame,
when I have made atonement for you,
for everything that you've done;
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

Ezekiel 16:1-63. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Revisionist Step #1 (Ezek. 16:1-14): Reimagining Israel's Beginnings

Ezekiel begins by reshaping Israel's "pagan" origins (see [Deut. 26:5-10](#); [Josh. 24:1-2](#)) into a racial slur that places Israel among the pagan nations it despised (Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites).

Israel is then envisioned as an unwanted and abandoned infant. Yahweh declares life to the nearly dead infant (link to [chapter 37](#)) and enters into a covenant betrothal ("spreading the garment" indicates betrothal, see also [Ruth 3:9](#)).

Israel's abundance and beauty is a complete and total gift from Yahweh, not an inherent possession.

Revisionist Step #2 (Ezek. 16:15-34): Reimagining Israel's Rise to Power

Israel forgot its existence was due solely to the generous gift of Yahweh and "you trusted in your beauty" (see [Deut. 8:17-18](#)).

“The temptation to make the gifts of God the objects of trust instead of trusting the giver himself is one that has never failed to snare God’s people through history ... In fact, the more gifted you are, the greater is this temptation.”

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [*The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*](#). IVP Academic. 136-137.

The “high places” in 16:16 refer to the hilltop shrines dedicated to Asherah the fertility goddess ([1 Kgs. 3:2-4](#), [12:31-32](#), [14:23](#)) where ritual sex was part of worship. Ezekiel exploits both images in his allegory.

Children who belong to Yahweh (as giver of life) were abusively given to the Canaanite gods (for historical references see [2 Kgs. 16:3](#), [17:16-17](#); [Jer. 32:35](#)). And Israel made political alliances with other nations (Egypt, Canaan, Babylon, verses 26-29).

Revisionist Step #3 (Ezek. 16:35-43): Reimagining the Exile

Ezekiel’s purpose is to get his listener to agree that a humiliating death is a fully warranted and deserved sentence for such behavior (marriage covenant violation, illicit prostitution, murder, arrogance).

The story ends as it began: naked, bloody, helpless.

Revisionist Step #4 (Ezek. 16:44-58): Reimagining Israel’s Tribal History

Later, in [Ezekiel 23](#), the prophet plays this allegory out in detail. In this reimagining, Samaria and Sodom are Jerusalem’s closest relatives.

Revisionist Step #5 (Ezek. 16:59-63): Reimagining Israel’s Future Hope

Yahweh gives a glimpse of future hope in covenant renewal. “I will remember my covenant with you” deliberately echoes [Genesis 8:1](#), [Exodus 2:23-24](#), and [Leviticus 26:43-45](#).

The phrase “eternal covenant” (also in [37:26](#)) is used in the Hebrew Bible to describe God’s covenant with creation ([Gen. 9:16](#)), with Abraham and his family ([Gen. 17:7, 13, 19](#); [Ps. 105:10](#)), the Sabbath ([Exod. 31:16](#)), the covenant with David ([2 Sam. 23:5](#); [Isa 55:3](#)), and the eschatological renewal of the covenant ([Isa. 61:8](#); [Jer. 32:40](#); [Ezek. 37:26](#)).

Other nations are included. Samaria and Sodom are “received as daughters even though they are not your covenant partners” (16:61).

Israel will have no grounds for defensive anger for the exile (= “no open mouth”). Through this process of judgment Yahweh will provide atonement/covering for all of Israel’s covenant violation.

Ezekiel 17: Parable of the Eagle and the Vine

A vine that is taken up by an eagle and planted by a river discovers another eagle and turns its attention toward it and withers as a result.

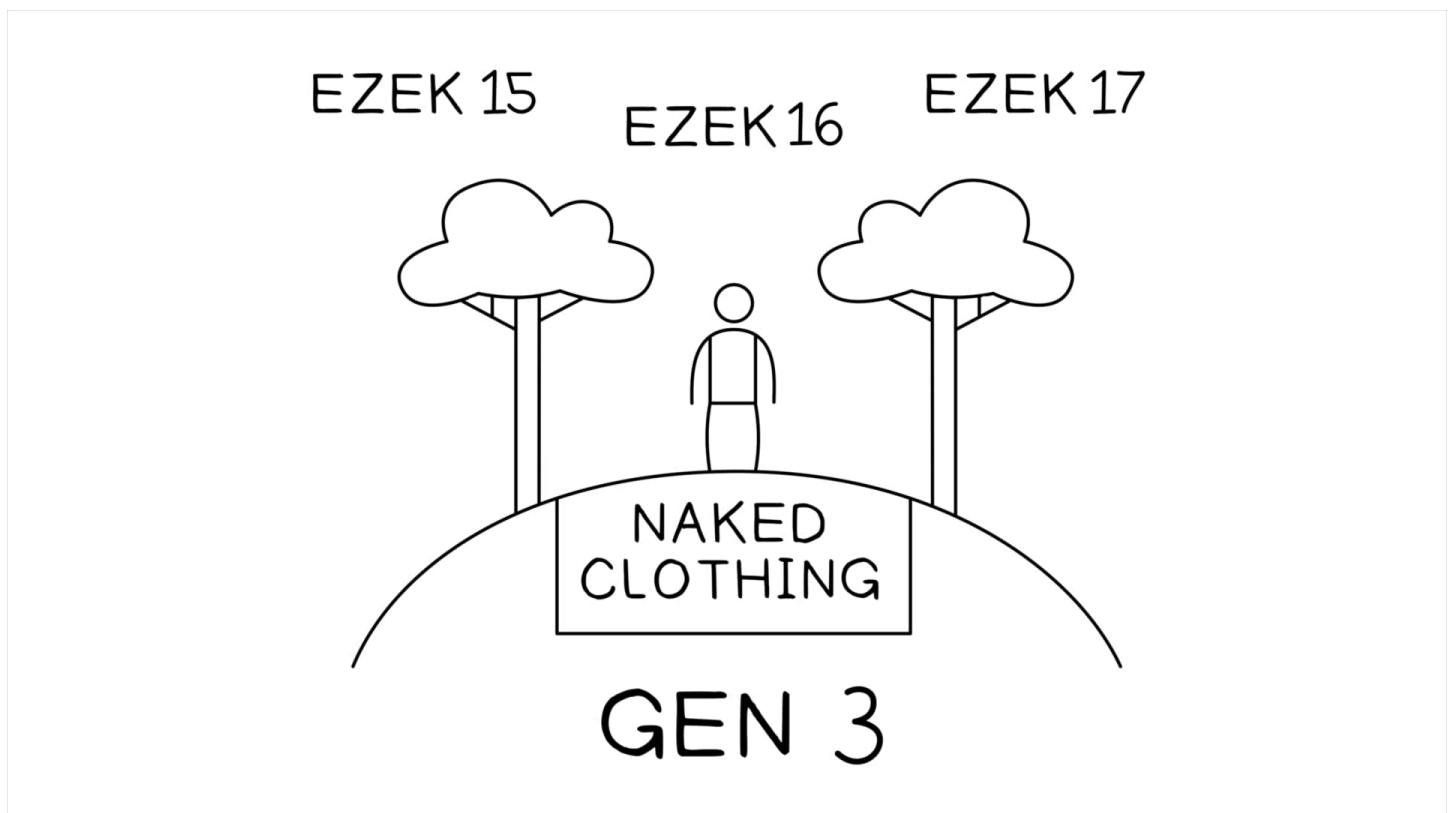
Application to Zedekiah's Rebellion

Babylon took King Jehoiachin into exile ([2 Kgs. 24:11-15](#)) and set up his uncle Zedekiah as a puppet-king ([2 Kgs. 24:17](#)). He secretly joined a rebel alliance with Israel's neighbors ([Jer. 27:1-7](#)), appealing to Egypt for assistance in resisting Babylon ([2 Kgs. 24:19](#) hints at this; see [Jer. 37:3-8](#)).

Future Hope for the Vine

Ezekiel now depicts Yahweh as the eagle and the vine as the royal line of David (a stock motif in the prophets, see [Isa. 11:1](#); [Jer. 23:5](#); [Zech. 3:8](#), [6:12](#)), that will be planted on a "high mountain" (link forward to [40:1-2](#)) and become a great tree bearing fruit and attracting creatures. This is the first word of hope for the line of David, and it points forward to the messianic promises of chapters 34-37.

Ezekiel 15-17 Mirrors Genesis 3



Ezekiel 15-17 Mirrors Genesis 3. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

What aspects of the parable in Ezekiel 16 are most challenging for you? How do you honor the difficulties yet continue to engage with Scripture?

Session 13: Eating Sour Grapes

Key Takeaways

- Ezekiel is not making an argument about personal responsibility. He's crafting a principle to address the blame-shifting attitude in the entire community.
- The remnant in Jerusalem is suffering the consequences of their own generation's unfaithfulness. Their suffering is not caused by the sins of their parents.
- The Israelites blaming their ancestors for their situation replays the blame-shifting theme of Genesis 3.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 18

Ezekiel 18:1-20

A Dispute About Generational Sin and Its Consequences

18:1-4

- The Proverb: Children suffer the consequences of their parents' sins
- Yahweh: The person who sins, that's the one who faces the consequences

18:5-17

Three Case Studies

- **5-9** Generation 1: A righteous father—he does good—he will live
- **10-13** Generation 2: A violent son—he does evil—he will die
- **14-17** Generation 3: A righteous grandson—he does good—he will live

18:18-20

- Israel's response: The son is suffering for his parent's sins?
- Yahweh: No, the person who sins, that's the one who faces the consequences.

Ezekiel 18:21-29

A Dispute About a Person's Own Sin and the Consequences

18:21-23

- Example 1: A wicked man who turns from his sins ... he will find life

18:24

- Example 2: A righteous man who turns away to evil ... he will die

18:25-29

- Israel's response: The way of Yahweh is not right!
- Yahweh brings consequences based on people's own choices

Ezekiel 18:30-32

Yahweh's Appeal to Israel: Turn to Me and Live!

- **18:30** Yahweh is rendering judgment on Israel based on these principles
- **18:31** So turn, Israel, and find life!
- **18:32** God's will is that people turn to him and find life.

Ezekiel 18:1-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

¹ And the word of Yahweh came to me, saying,

² " **What do y'all mean by proverb'ing this proverb about the land of Israel, saying ,**
' The fathers eat the sour grapes ,
but it's the children's teeth that stick to each other '?

³ "As I live," declares Yahweh Elohim,
"you will no longer proverb this proverb in Israel anymore.

⁴ Look, all living-beings belong to me;
the being of the father as well as the being of the son belong to me.

The living-being who sins, that's the one who will die .

Generation #1: A Righteous Father

⁵ So a man, if he is righteous,
and does what is just and right,

⁶ he does not eat at the mountain shrines,
or lift up his eyes to the dung-balls of the house of Israel,
or defile his neighbor's wife
or come on to his wife during her menstrual period,

⁷ or oppress another person,
but restores to the debtor his pledge,
does not commit robbery,
but gives his bread to the hungry
and covers the naked with clothing,

⁸ if he does not lend money on interest,
or take increase,
if he keeps his hand from iniquity
and renders true justice between every person,
⁹ if he walks in my statutes
and keeps my ordinances so as to practice true,
that one is righteous,
and **he will surely live** ;”
declares Yahweh Elohim.

Generation #2: A Wicked Son

¹⁰ “Now, he might have a violent son,
who sheds blood,
and who does any of these things to a brother,
¹¹ (though the brother himself did not do any of these things),
and he eats at the mountain shrines,
and he defiles his neighbor’s wife,
¹² he oppresses the poor and needy,
he commits robbery,
he does not restore a pledge,
but lifts up his eyes to the idols and commits abomination,
¹³ he lends money on interest
and he takes increase ... **will he live** ?
He will not live!
He has committed all these abominations,
he will surely be **put to death** ;
his blood will be on his own head.

Generation #3: A Righteous Grandson

¹⁴ Now look, he could have a son,
and the son sees all the sins that his father is doing,
and upon seeing, he does not do likewise.
¹⁵ He does not eat at the mountain shrines,
and he doesn’t lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel,
or defile his neighbor’s wife,
¹⁶ he doesn’t oppress anyone,
or keep a pledge,
or commit robbery,
but he gives his bread to the hungry,
and he covers the naked with clothing,
¹⁷ he keeps his hand from the poor,
he does not take interest or increase,

but practices my ordinances,
and he walks in my statutes;
he will not die for his father's iniquity;
he will surely live .

¹⁸ As for his father,
because he practiced extortion,
robbed his brother
and did what was not good among his people,
look, **he will die** for his iniquity.

¹⁹ **But y'all say ,**
Why should the son not carry the punishment for the father's iniquity? "

Well, the son practiced justice and righteousness,
and he has observed all My statutes and done them;
he shall surely live .

²⁰ **The living-being who sins, that's who will die.**

The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity,
nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity;
the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself,
and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

Example #1: A Wicked Man Who Turns

²¹ Now, if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed,
and if he observes all my statutes,
and practices justice and righteousness,
he will surely live ;

he will not die .

²² All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him;
because of his righteousness which he has practiced,
he will live .

²³ "Do I have any pleasure in the **death** of the wicked?"
declares Yahweh Elohim,
"Wouldn't I rather he turn from his ways and **live** ?

Example #2: A Righteous Man Who Turns

²⁴ Now, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness,
and commits iniquity according to all the abominations that a wicked man does,
will he live ?

All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered,
because for his treachery which he has committed,
and because of his sin which he has committed;
for these **he will die** .

25 **But y'all say ,**
'The way of Yahweh is not right .'
Listen now, O house of Israel !
Is it my way that's not right ?
Isn't it your ways that are not right ?

26 When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness,
and commits iniquity
and **dies** because of it,
it's for his iniquity that he has committed that **he will die** .

27 And when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed,
and he practices justice and righteousness,
he will **save his life** .

28 Because he saw and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed,
he will surely live ;
he will not die .

29 **But the house of Israel says ,**
'The way of Yahweh is not right .'
Are my ways not right, O house of Israel ?
Isn't it your ways that are not right ?

30 "Therefore, 'each according to his way,'
that's how I will bring justice on y'all you, O house of Israel,"
declares Yahweh Elohim.

"Repent and turn away from all your transgressions,
so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.

31 Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed,
and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!
For why should y'all **die** , O house of Israel?

32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who **dies** ,"
declares Yahweh Elohim.
"So then, turn back, and **find life** ."

Ezekiel 18:1-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Disputing the Parable About Generational Guilt

Ezekiel takes on the widespread ideas among exiled Israel that prevent them from fully owning their responsibility for Jerusalem's destruction and from seeing any reason to turn back to Yahweh for hope. These ideas are summarized in the "sayings" Ezekiel quotes and refutes.

In 18:1-20, Ezekiel challenges the idea of generational guilt. The people say, "The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." In 18:2, "set on edge" comes from the Septuagint's translation of the

same proverb quoted by Jeremiah in [Jeremiah 31:29](#) (or 38:29 in the Old Greek) as *αἰμωδιάω* “to become contracted, to be set on edge,” referring to the seizure of mouth muscles when eating really sour things.

The basic meaning of this proverb is that when children suffer, it's because of their parents' bad decisions. In Ezekiel's context, this proverb is saying that many Israelites are suffering in Babylonian exile, but it's the result of covenant violations of earlier generations (specifically Manasseh, see [1 Kgs. 21](#)). The implication is that Ezekiel's generation is not responsible for the disaster, even though they are suffering the consequences.

This is a blame-shifting mentality that blinds the exiles to their own contribution (chapters 8-11!) to their circumstances.

Yahweh's Response Through Ezekiel

Yahweh adopts a principle from Israel's criminal law: When an individual commits a crime, that individual is the one who should suffer the consequences, not another family member.

Deuteronomy 24:16 NIV

Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; **each will die for their own sin.**

What's fascinating is that Ezekiel takes this legal principle and applies it to a situation that is not a clear-cut criminal case. Rather, he applies it to Israel's communal experience of disaster and Babylonian exile. Ezekiel's contemporaries deny any responsibility for the situation, and so the argument presented in Ezekiel 18 is a rhetorical effort to persuade them otherwise.

To convince the Israelites that their own sins contributed to the disaster of the exile, he uses a legal principle and argues backwards.

- Premise: It's the guilty party that suffers for a crime.
- Premise: The present generation is suffering in Babylonian exile.
- Conclusion: The present generation is guilty of a crime.

This generation has perpetuated the same as their fathers. In 18:4, “... the individual human who sins, that is the one who will die,” implies that if the people are being “put to death” in exile (see the dry bones of [Ezek. 37](#)), it is for their own decisions. Yahweh's response is “Stop blame-shifting!”

Ezekiel's Case Study of Three Generations

Ezekiel extends the argument through a case study exploring God's response to people's righteousness, rebellion, and repentance. The case study tests three generations: a righteous father, a wicked son, and a righteous grandson who does not die for his father's sins.

The implication of this case study is that the exiles think they are the righteous grandson (generation #3), but Ezekiel is trying to show them they are the wicked son (generation #2)!

“Ezekiel addresses the question of his audience: if the present generation were righteous, they would not be suffering; since they are suffering, this must be because of their own sins. Ezekiel’s hearers cannot be the righteous sons of wicked fathers, as they suppose themselves to be ... Ezekiel is not concerned here with a theory of moral individualism in contrast to collective responsibility. He takes for granted the legal principle of ‘individual responsibility’ and he employs it in his three hypothetical cases, but the possibility of Yahweh judging individuals in isolation from their contemporaries is never considered. This is because the question at issue is a different one, namely, ‘Why did this national crisis happen,’ a crisis that is by definition, communal.”

Joyce, Paul (1989). [*Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*](#). Bloomsbury T&T Clark. 46.

The literary placement of chapter 18 between chapters 17 and 19 is surely intentional, as both of these poems trace the final generations of Judah’s kings (Josiah, Manasseh, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah) who display a case study in generational guilt (see 2 Kgs. 21-25).

The Exiles’ Response

In 18:19, the people reply, “What do you mean the child does not bear responsibility for the sin of the parent?!” This line is not a defense of this idea as a legal principle, as if the people are advocating that children should be held accountable for their parents’ actions. Rather, it’s a statement of shock, because in their current view of reality, they are the righteous grandson who is suffering because of the wicked father.

“Here the people are pictured as demanding that ‘the righteous son’ (with whom they identify themselves) should suffer for the iniquity of the father! This is indeed paradoxical, and can only be explained by supposing that Ezekiel is suggesting that such a demand is implied by his audience’s position stated in the earlier proverb. They have a vested interest in the correctness of the proverb. If it cannot be established that one generation suffers for the sins of previous generations, they will have to admit they are to blame for the current situation. They would prefer to go on believing in their own explanation for the disaster rather than admit responsibility ... The plea in v. 19 is a *reductio ad absurdum*, they would rather, it seems, that Yahweh be proven unjust than to admit that they themselves are guilty.”

Joyce, Paul (1989). [*Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*](#). Bloomsbury T&T Clark. 47-48.

It’s as if they say, “Our proverb and our experience show that we are suffering for our parents’ sin as we sit here in Babylon! What do you mean, Ezekiel, that the children are not responsible before God for the sin of their parents?!”

Ezekiel Challenges the Idea of Past Merit/Guilt

If Ezekiel’s first argument claims that guilt and consequences do not transfer generationally, he now takes another angle. Even in the span of one person’s lifetime, they are accountable for their posture toward Yahweh in the present moment, not for what happened in the past.

- Case study 1: A wicked man turns and does what is right, therefore he will live.
- Case study 2: A righteous man turns and does what is wrong, therefore he will die.

Ezekiel leads into his last point to the exiles in 18:21-24: The same choice that the son faced when he saw the behavior of his father (18:14) is the choice each person has when they reflect back on their own behavior

through the years. A person's past sins do not determine their destiny if they turn and change. And a person's past virtue does not vindicate them if they are presently making terrible decisions (18:24).

Israel thinks this cannot be right (18:25). They are not disputing the legitimacy of Ezekiel's argument as a legal principle, but as a description of their experience of sitting in exile. In their mindset, they are currently the righteous and innocent ones who do not deserve to be sitting in "death," that is, in Babylonian exile. But Ezekiel's argument (much like Job's friends) is that their suffering tells a different story. The very fact that they're in exile means they were, in the time of their defeat, in a state of rebellion against Yahweh.

Ezekiel's Conclusion

Ezekiel 18:30 Instructor's Translation

So then, each according to their own ways, that is how I will render justice for y'all, house of Israel.

This line is crucial, as it makes clear that even though Ezekiel's legal case studies have focused on individuals, he is not working out a theory of individual responsibility for its own sake. Rather, the case studies are analogies for thinking about the people of Israel's collective experience of defeat and exile by Babylon.

The word "each" (אִישׁ) refers back to the individual "man" (אִישׁ) of the cases studies in 18:2-29, which were clearly an image of entire Israelite generations.

Before we make the jump from the case studies to our own cultural contexts, we need to see how Ezekiel applied the case studies to his audience. This will give us guidance on how to apply his wisdom appropriately and in alignment with his own purposes.

Ezekiel 18 Reflections

In this chapter, Ezekiel is offering profound prophetic and pastoral insight.

Our Moral Choices Do Not Take Place in a Vacuum

Ezekiel is not arguing that people's moral decisions bear no relation to their parents' failures. Rather, he's arguing that when we've made choices that result in disaster, we should not try to shift responsibility to the failures of others. At the same time, it's very clear that Ezekiel's generation adopted the patterns of idolatry from their ancestors, and so perpetuate a generational failure that results in the exile.

Real Moral Choice and Change Is Possible

We can all choose our life path, and we constantly have to renew our choice. Our moral condition is not mechanically determined, locked into the consequences of our own or anyone else's past. God has given us real moral freedom and choice.

Our Moral Choices Have High Stakes: Life and Death

“At one level of Ezekiel’s language life and death refer to judicial sentencing: either someone is declared innocent and leaves the court alive, or is declared guilty and put to death. However, in the earlier chapters (Ezek 4-11), life and death meant literally that: many would physically die in the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet it was not so simple, since doubtless some who grieved over Israel’s sin were killed in the catastrophe, while some of the guilty idolaters survived physically but went off into the 'death' of exile, which reveals a yet further twist: those addressed in exile are among the 'dead' (as they say of themselves in 37:11), and yet they can be offered 'life' if they will repent. Later in the book, 'life' means the eschatological hope of return and blessing back in the promised land, which will be explored in chs. 34-37.”

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [*The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*](#). IVP Academic. 198-199.

Yahweh always wills that people find life through repentance and change (18:23, 32), but 18:31 raises a real problem (also raised by Moses in [Deut 30:1-10](#)): How can Israel make for itself a “new heart and spirit” when they clearly are incapable of doing so?

Ezekiel 19: Dirge Over the Lion and the Vine

Ezekiel picks up the traditional images from Genesis (especially [Gen. 49:8-12](#)) depicting the royal line as a lion (Gen. 49:9) and as a vine (see Gen. 49:11). He reverses the images of Gen 49 (lion captured, vine destroyed) and pronounces a funeral dirge over the Davidic line.

There is debate over the historical reference of the parable (does it refer to Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, or Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin?), but the theological claim of the poem is clear.

Three Generations of Righteous and Unrighteous

GEN 1: RIGHTEOUS DAD

— GEN 2: WICKED SON

GEN 3: RIGHTEOUS GRANDSON

Three Generations of Righteous and Unrighteous. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

Does God punish children for the sins of their parents? How does Ezekiel 18 inform your understanding of this?

Session 14: Israel's History Remixed

Key Takeaways

- Ezekiel's rhetoric intensifies as he remixes Israel's history to emphasize its true meaning.
- Israel is still in Egypt, enslaved to their idols, and God will bring them out into the wilderness of the nations. In exile they will be freed to worship Yahweh.
- The Jerusalem temple is often portrayed in a negative light, while the wilderness tabernacle is presented as the pinnacle of God's presence with his people.
- The flood and the wilderness are images of death and de-creation. They are both ways to characterize experiences that transform God's people and lead to God's new creation.

Translation and Literary Design of Exekiel 20:1-44

Ezekiel 20:1-5

- Israel's elders come to Ezekiel to **inquire of Yahweh**

Ezekiel 20:6-29

- **20:6-9** Generation 1: **Exodus generation in Egypt**, Yahweh swears to bring them to **the promised land**
- **20:10-17** Generation 2: **Exodus generation in the wilderness**, they reject Yahweh's statutes, judgments, and Sabbaths
- **20:18-26** Generation 3: **Children of Exodus generation in the wilderness**, they reject Yahweh's statutes, judgments, and Sabbaths
- **20:27-29** Generation 4: **Children of Exodus generation in the promised land**

Ezekiel 20:30-44

- **20:30-32** Israel has been defiled by **the idols it wanted to serve (שרת)**, "and you want to **inquire of me?!"**
- **20:33-38** Yahweh swears on oath to bring Israel back into the "wilderness of the nations," purify them and enter into a covenant with them
- **20:39-44** Israel can become **a servant (עבד) to its idols** until the day Yahweh restores them, then they will worship Yahweh in a restored temple

Ezekiel 20:1-44. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

¹ In the seventh year,
in the fifth month,
on the tenth day of the month,
some of **the elders** of Israel came to **inquire** of Yahweh,
and they sat before me.

² And the word of Yahweh came to me:

³ "Son of a human,
speak to **the elders** of Israel,
and say to them,
Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
Is it to **inquire** of me that you come?
As I live, declares Yahweh Elohim,
I will not be **inquired** of by you.

⁴ Will you judge them, son of a human,
will you judge them?
Let them know the abominations of **their fathers**,
^{5a} **and say to them,**
Thus says Yahweh Elohim:

#1: The Exodus Generation in Egypt

^{5b} On the day when I chose Israel,
I lifted my hand on oath to the seed of the house of Jacob,
making myself known to them in the land of Egypt;
I lifted my hand on oath to them, saying,
'I am Yahweh your Elohim.'

⁶ On that day **I lifted my hand on oath** to them,
that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt,
into a land that I had searched out for them,
a land flowing with milk and honey,
the most splendid of all lands.

⁷ And I said to them,
'Each of you cast away the detestable things of your eyes,
and do not make yourselves impure with the idols of Egypt;
I am Yahweh your Elohim.'

⁸ **But they rebelled against me**,
and they were not willing to listen to me.
None of them cast away the detestable things of their eyes,
nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.

**Then I said I would pour out my hot-anger upon them
and finish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.**

9 **But I acted for the sake of my name,**
that it should not be defiled in the eyes of the nations among whom they lived,
in whose eyes I made myself known to them,
by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

#2: The Exodus Generation in the Wilderness

10 So I led them out of the land of Egypt,
and I brought them into the wilderness,
11 and I gave them **my statutes**,
and I made known to them **my judgments**,
which, **if a person does them, he will have life**.
12 And also, I gave them **my Sabbaths**,
as a sign between me and them,
that they might know that I am Yahweh who makes them holy.
13 **But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness**.

They did not walk in **my statutes**,
and they rejected **my judgments**,
which, **if a person does them, he will have life**;
and **my Sabbaths** they defiled.
So I said I would pour out my hot-anger upon them in the wilderness,
to bring them to an end.

14 **But I acted for the sake of my name,**
so it wouldn't be defiled in the eyes of the nations,
in whose eyes I had brought them out.

15 And also **I lifted my hand on oath** to them in the wilderness,
that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them,
a land flowing with milk and honey,
the most splendid of all lands,

16 because they rejected **my judgments**,
and they did not walk in **my statutes**,
and they defiled **my Sabbaths**;
for their heart went after their idols.

17 **But, my eye had pity on them,**
and I did not destroy them or bring them to an end in the wilderness.

#3: The Children of the Exodus Generation

18 And I said to their children in the wilderness,
'Do not walk in the statutes of **your fathers**,
and don't keep their judgments,
and don't make yourselves impure with their idols,

19 I am Yahweh your Elohim;
walk in **my statutes**,

and keep **my judgments** and do them,
20 and treat **my Sabbaths** as holy,
that they may be a sign between me and you,
that you may know that I am Yahweh your Elohim.'

21 But the children rebelled against me.
They did not walk in **my statutes**,
and they did not keep **my judgments**, to do them,
which, **if a person does them, he will have life**;
they defiled **my Sabbaths**.

**So I said I would pour out my hot-anger upon them ,
and bring an end to my anger against them in the wilderness .**

22 But I turned back my hand,
and acted for the sake of my name,
so it wouldn't be defiled in the sight of the nations ,
in whose sight I had brought them out.

23 Moreover, **I lifted my hand on oath** to them in the wilderness,
that I would scatter them among the nations,
and disperse them through the lands,

24 because they did not keep **my judgments**,
and they rejected **my statutes**,
and defiled **my Sabbaths**,
and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols.

25 Moreover, I gave them **statutes** that were not good,
and **judgments by which they could not have life** ,

26 and I rendered them impure through their gifts,
as they offered up every firstborn,
so that I could devastate them.
so that they might know that I am Yahweh.

#4: The Generation That Entered the Promised Land

27 Therefore, son of a human,
speak to the house of Israel,
and say to them,

'Thus says Yahweh Elohim:
In this also **your fathers** blasphemed me,
by committing treachery against me.

28 For when I had brought them into the land,
which **I lifted my hand on oath** to give them,
and wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree,
and there they offered their sacrifices,
and there they presented the provocation of their offering;
and there they sent up their pleasing aromas,
and there they poured out their drink offerings.

29 And I said to them,
'What is the high place (Heb. *bamah*) to which you go?'
So its name is called "Bamah" to this day.

Ezekiel's Generation

30 Therefore say to the house of Israel,
Thus says Yahweh Elohim:
Will you make yourselves impure, in the way of **your fathers**,
and go prostituting after their detestable things?

31 When you present your gifts,
and offer up your children in fire,
you make yourselves impure with all your idols to this day.
And shall I be **inquired** of by you, O house of Israel?

As I live, declares Yahweh Elohim,
I will not be **inquired** of by you.

32 What comes up in your mind,
it will never happen—the thought,
'Let us be like the nations,
like the tribes of the countries,
and worship wood and stone.'

33 As I live, declares Yahweh Elohim,
surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,
and with hot-anger poured out,
I will become king over you.

34 I will bring you out from the peoples,
and I will gather you out of the lands where you are scattered,
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,
and with hot-anger poured out.

35 And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples,
and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face;

36 just as I entered into judgment with your fathers,
in the wilderness of the land of Egypt,
so I will enter into judgment with you,
declares Yahweh Elohim.

37 I will make you pass under the rod,
and I will bring you into **the bond of the covenant**,

38 I will purge out the rebels from among you,
and those who transgress against me.
I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn,
but they shall not enter the land of Israel.

Then you will know that I am Yahweh.

³⁹ As for you, O house of Israel,
thus says Yahweh Elohim:

Go, **let every one of you serve his idols**, now and hereafter,
if you will not listen to me;
but you will no longer defile my holy name,
with your gifts and your idols.

⁴⁰ For on my holy mountain,
the mountain height of Israel,
declares Yahweh Elohim,
there all the house of Israel, all of them,
they will serve me in the land.

There I will accept them,
and there I will require your contributions,
and the first of your gifts,
with all your sacred offerings.

⁴¹ With a pleasing aroma I will accept you,
when I bring you out from the peoples,
and when I gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered.
And I will display my holiness among you in the eyes of the nations.

⁴² And you will know that I am Yahweh,
when I bring you into the land of Israel,
the land that **I lifted my hand on oath** to give to your fathers.

⁴³ And there you will remember your ways and all your deeds,
with which you made yourselves impure,
and you will loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed.

⁴⁴ And you shall know that I am Yahweh,
when I deal with you for **my name's sake**,
not according to your evil ways,
nor according to your corrupt deeds,
O house of Israel,
declares Yahweh Elohim."

Ezekiel 20:1-44. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The History of Israel's Rebellion

The leaders of the exiled community come to Ezekiel to "seek Yahweh" as if the covenantal relationship is just fine. Ezekiel sets out to tell them things are not okay between them and Yahweh (see Isaiah's similar oracle in [Isa. 1:10-17](#)).

Ezekiel sets out to reframe Israel's entire history, retelling it as one long history of apostasy and covenant violation. Each step would have shocked and offended the elders who came to him.

Israel's Rebellion in Egypt (Ezek. 20:5-9)

Yahweh's "choice" of Israel is linked to the exodus, not Abraham (20:5). Israel's idolatry began during their long stay in Egypt, serving the gods of Egypt (20:8; see [Josh. 24:14](#) and [Exod. 12:12](#)). In the Torah, it began with the golden calf at Mount Sinai, but Ezekiel discerns that the roots go deeper. Yahweh's threat to destroy Israel is located before the exodus(!) (20:9; see also [Exod. 32:9-14](#)).

The Rebellion of the Exodus Generation (Ezek. 20:10-17)

Israel's rejection of Torah and Sabbath is linked to the Exodus generation (20:13), just as the Pentateuch describes.

The plural of "my Sabbaths" (20:12-13) indicates more than the weekly Sabbath (on which, see [Exod. 20:8-11](#), [Deut 5:12-15](#)), but all of Israel's calendar rhythms shaped by the number seven which give rest, freedom, and debt-forgiveness to the land and to people from all economic classes: weekly Sabbath, Sabbatical years for the land and slaves, Jubilee year (see [Lev. 23-25](#)). Israel's entire sacred calendar is a perpetual reenactment (a "sign") of Yahweh's gracious liberation from debt and slavery.

The Rebellion of the Second Wilderness Generation (Ezek. 20:18-26)

This is Ezekiel's retelling of the generation to whom Deuteronomy was addressed, the children of the Exodus generation. Their entry into the promised land took place under Yahweh's suspended judgment (20:21-22); the exile was warned of even before they entered the land (20:23).

"The exile, on this interpretation, was not some inexplicable surprise. It was simply Yahweh blowing the final whistle after a greatly extended period of injury time."

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit](#). IVP Academic. 160.

Ezekiel 20:25-26 Instructor's Translation

²⁵ And additionally I gave them statutes that were no good and laws by which they could not live; ²⁶ I defiled them through their gifts—the sacrifice of every firstborn—that I might fill them with horror so they would know that I am the LORD.

This line fits with the rhetoric of Ezekiel's sarcastic revision of Israel's entire history.

- He intentionally reverses the "life-giving" Torah of 20:11, 13, 21 into "no-good commands ... by which they could not find life" (20:25). In the flow of the chapter, this refers to Israel's inability to keep the Torah and so the life-giving Torah turns into a death-dealer (compare with the same view of Torah in [Rom. 7](#); I wonder where Paul got the idea).
- Ezekiel takes the sins of Israel from his recent memory and retrojects them into Israel's origins. He accuses the wilderness generation that was given the original "law of the firstborn" (the symbolic rite in [Exod. 13:12-15](#)) of Israel's later distortion of this law into a demand for child sacrifice (which did not happen until Ahaz and Manasseh; [2 Kgs. 21:6](#) and [23:10](#)).
- Ezekiel leaves clues that the giving of these "not-good laws" doesn't correspond to any actual historical moment at Sinai. [The word for "statutes" (*khuqqim*, masculine plural) in 20:25 departs from Ezekiel's normal usage (*khuqqot*, feminine plural); also, there is no record in the Hebrew Bible of child sacrifice

practiced before Canaanite influence on Israel during the monarchy.] The shock factor of verses 25-26 makes it clear that Ezekiel is attempting to scandalize and make his listener/reader pay attention.

- The bottom line is that Ezekiel is targeting the practice of child sacrifice by Ahaz and Manasseh in recent memory and their claim that it was the will of Yahweh. He sarcastically claims this horrible practice goes back to the Exodus generation, who thought idolatry was an acceptable practice. The entirety of verses 25-26 needs to be put in “scare-quotes” to mark its intentionally sarcastic and offensive tone.

Israel in the Land Until Exile (Ezek. 20:27-31)

Israel’s consistent idolatry and worship of Canaanite deities on the hilltop shrines (high places) is viewed as merely the latest manifestation of the nation’s enduring apostasy (20:28-31).

Ezekiel immediately shifts the blame from “your fathers” to “y’all,” that is, his audience in Babylonian exile.

Israel’s Future (Ezek. 20:32-44)

Yahweh will not allow Israel to serve idols (20:32), and he will exert his exodus-style power (the mighty hand and outstretched arm, see [Deut. 5:15](#)) to bring his kingdom to bear on his own rebellious people (20:33). He will take them on a “reverse exodus” out of the promised land and into the “wilderness of the nations” (20:35), i.e., exile to Babylon.

Exile will purify Israel of the rebellious (20:35-39) and bring them back to the land where they will offer acceptable worship in a restored temple in Jerusalem (20:40-41) and so restore Yahweh’s reputation among the nations (20:41-42).

This conclusion points forward to the oracles of hope in chapters 34 (sorting out the rebellious), 36 (enabling obedience and pure worship), and 40-48 (restoration of sacrificial offerings in the new Jerusalem).

Yahweh will do all this “for the sake of my reputation (name)” (20:44), which links back to this theme throughout the entire chapter (20:9, 14, 22).

Ezekiel's Revisionist History

“We must bear in mind the terrible task that Ezekiel faced and the rhetorical tools he chose to use. He was faced with the onslaught of the most traumatic catastrophe that had ever hit his people. And he was faced with people who were obsessed with a totally wrong interpretation of that catastrophe: that it was not really deserved at all, that Yahweh was being unfair, that it would soon be over and they would return to a Jerusalem that had yet again been delivered by Yahweh’s mighty power. The only way to counter such utter misconceptions was to shatter them ruthlessly on the hard rocks of reality, that their long history had been a ceaseless offense to Yahweh. Having seen the size of his task, we can then appreciate better his rhetorical method, which was to use deliberate parody, scathing allegory, grossly distorted caricature and overly schematic views of Israel’s history, all designed for maximum impact. Ezekiel was not writing a dispassionate chronicle of Old Testament history. He was embroiled in fierce argument with hostile or apathetic opponents. His rhetoric had to be strong and shocking enough to pierce through their armor-plated resistance.”

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [*The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*](#). IVP Academic. 166.

Ezekiel 21: Oracles About the Sword of Judgment

- 21:1-5: Parable of Yahweh’s fire in the Negev forests
- 21:6-12: Yahweh’s sword against the land
- 21:13-22: Song of the sword
- 21:23-37: Babylon’s sword against Jerusalem and its leaders
- 21:32: Within this prediction of Jerusalem’s inevitable destruction, Ezekiel brings up the messianic promise of [Genesis 49:10](#). The city will be destroyed with no messianic deliverer to interfere, until the future when “the one to whom justice belongs will come.”

Ezekiel 22: Accusation Against the City of Bloodshed

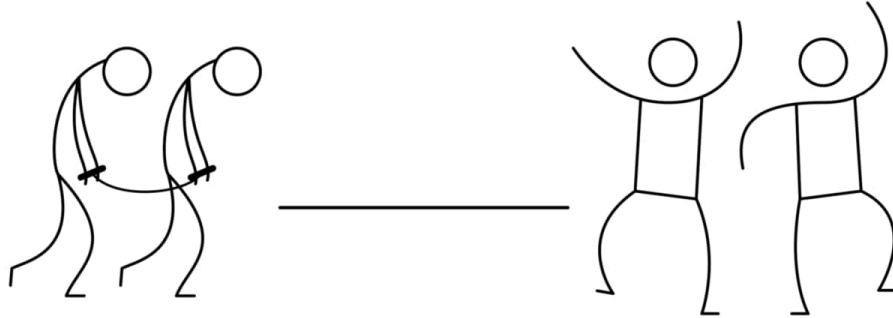
- 22:1-16: Accusation against the wicked city. Notice how Ezekiel weaves together his accusations about “religious” apostasy and “social justice” violations. In his mind these go together, as worship of the true God is distorted into idolatry, the most vulnerable of the land suffer the worst, and as the idols slowly dehumanize all parties.
- 22:17-22: Israel smelted and the dross removed
- 22:23-31: Accusation against the wicked land

Ezekiel 23: Parable of the Two Adulterous Sisters

Another allegory of Ezekiel’s depicts Israel as an unfaithful wife (see [Ezek. 16](#)). In this chapter, Ezekiel develops the images concerning the northern kingdom (i.e., Samaria, Oholah “her own tent”) and the southern kingdom (i.e., Jerusalem, Oholibah “my tent is with her”).

Slavery in Egypt to Wilderness Freedom

EXODUS



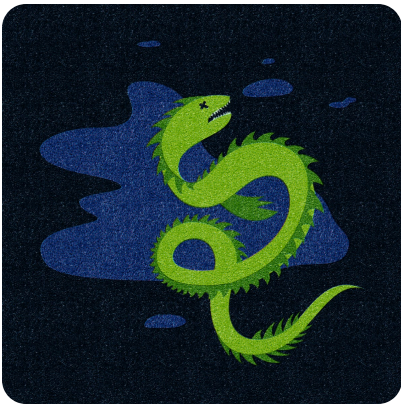
EGYPT
SLAVES

WILDERNESS
FREEDOM

Slavery in Egypt to Wilderness Freedom. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How does Ezekiel equate his generation to the exodus generation?



Module 4: Israel's Judgment Fulfilled

SESSIONS 15-18

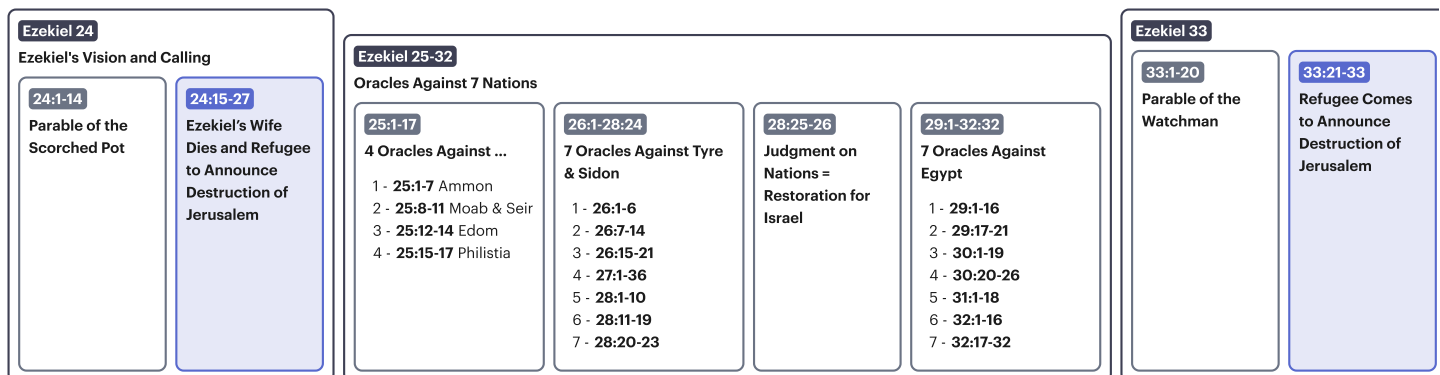
God's judgment against Israel comes to its fulfillment in the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

Session 15: The Destruction of the Temple

Key Takeaways

- Ezekiel 24 and 33 frame the oracles against the nations in 25-32. “Strike” in 24:16 is ambiguous, meaning either a sudden military defeat or a sudden plague.
- Like Aaron in Leviticus 10, the command for Ezekiel not to mourn is a call for him to maintain his role as a priest, wearing the turban and sandals representing new creation life instead of wearing the mourning clothes that reflect death.
- The loss of the beloved is a repeated element within the theme of the chosen one, building expectation that the messiah will suffer and die.

Literary Design of Ezekiel 24-33



Ezekiel 24-33. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Parable of the Scorched Pot (Ezek. 24:1-14)

Ezekiel 24:1-2 indicates that on this day in January 588 B.C.E., Babylon began its siege of Jerusalem that would last one and a half years (see 2 Kgs. 25:1-2).

Ezekiel uses the vivid parable of a filthy and defiled iron cauldron used for making stew, and how the temperature will be raised so high all the contents will be burned into a slag to clean the pot of its filth.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 24:15-27

Yahweh to Ezekiel

15 **And the spoken-word of Yahweh came to me saying ,**

16 Son of a human,

e behold, **I am going to take from you the desire of your eyes** with a strike;
and you will not mourn
and you will not weep
and your tears will not come.

¹⁷ Groan silently;
perform no mourning for **the dead**.
Bind on your turban upon you,
and put your shoes on your feet,
and do not cover your mustache,
and do not eat the bread of normal people.”

Ezekiel to the People

¹⁸ **And I spoke to the people in the morning** ,
and in the evening **my wife died** .
And in the morning **I did just as** I was commanded .

People to Ezekiel

¹⁹ **And the people said to me** ,
“Won’t you tell us,
what do these mean for us,
the things that you are doing ?”

Ezekiel to the People

²⁰ **And I said to them** ,
“ **The word of Yahweh came to me saying** ,
²¹ ‘Speak to the house of Israel,
“Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
‘**Look, I am going to defile my sacred space,**
the pride of your power (טָוֹ),
the desire of your eyes ,
and the delight of your soul ;
and your sons and your daughters whom you left,
they will fall by the sword.
²² **You will do just as I have done ;**
you will not cover your mustache,
and you will not eat the bread of normal people.
²³ **Your turbans will be on your heads,**
and your shoes on your feet.
You will not mourn,
and you will not weep,
but you will rot in your iniquities,
and you will groan to one another.
²⁴ **And so Ezekiel will be a sign to you ;**

according to **all that he has done, so you will do** when it comes;
then you will know that I am Yahweh Elohim.”

Yahweh to Ezekiel

25 As for you, son of a human,
won't it be on the day **when I take from them,**
their stronghold (מעוז),
the joy of their beauty,
the desire of their eyes,
and the burden of their soul, their sons and their daughters,

26 on that day, that the refugee will come to you with a report for your ears?

27 On that day your mouth will be opened for the refugee,
and you will speak and be mute no longer.

Thus you will be a sign to them,
and they will know that I am Yahweh.”

Ezekiel 24:15-27. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Sign Act: Ezekiel's Wife and the Destruction of the Temple

This short narrative unit has been broken up into three parts. Parts 1 and 3 are an opening and closing speech from Yahweh to Ezekiel (24:16-17 and 24:25-27). These speeches surround a short narrative dialogue between Ezekiel and the people that proceeds in three steps.

Ezekiel 24:16-17

Yahweh to Ezekiel

- “And the spoken-word of Yahweh came to me, ‘Son of a human...’”
- **“I am going to take desire of your eyes...”**

Ezekiel 24:18-24

Ezekiel & The People

- **18** “And I spoke to the people...”
“and **my wife** died.”
- **19** “And the people said to me...”
- **20-24** “And I said to them...”
“I am going to defile the desire of your eyes...”

Ezekiel 24:25-27

Yahweh to Ezekiel

- “And you, son of a human...”
- “On the day that **I take from them...the desire of their eyes...**”

Ezekiel 24:16-27. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

This literary design illuminates an ambiguity in Yahweh’s first words to Ezekiel in 24:16-17. It is not clear who or what exactly “the desire of your eyes” refers to when it is first mentioned.

When Ezekiel first hears this, it seems likely that he would understand it to refer to the Jerusalem temple. This is clearly what “the desire of your eyes” refers to later in 24:21 and 24:25.

The “Strike”

The word “strike” (Heb. *maggephah* מגפה, from *nagaph* נגף) is a metaphor, and can be used to refer to the plagues Yahweh sent upon Egypt (Exod. 9:14), to a sudden defeat in battle (1 Sam. 4:17; 2 Sam. 17:9, 18:7), or to a sudden outbreak of a disease (Num. 14:37; 16:48-50; 25:8-9, 18-19; 31:16; 1 Sam. 6:4; 2 Sam. 24:21, 25; Zech. 14:12, 15, 18; Ps. 106:29-30).

This ambiguity in the word *maggephah* allows the narrative to develop a dual meaning: “strike” as in defeat in battle or “plague” as in the outbreak of a disease.

The word “strike” also recalls the narrative pattern of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings of Israel, where this word refers to an act of severe divine judgment on human evil.

It seems likely that Ezekiel and the reader would understand the divine strike to refer to something in Jerusalem, that is, the ruin of the temple, the city, and the people.

No Public Mourning, but New Priestly Garments

Ezekiel is told that when this disaster happens, he is not to engage in public grieving that would defile his holy status as a priest. Yahweh’s instruction matches similar guidelines given to the priests in Leviticus 21:10-12, that even when their closest relative dies, they are not to change their clothes or deface their bodies (that is, take on ritual symbols of death).

The two lists of activities that Ezekiel and the people are to perform are arranged and coordinated in an important way.

and you will not mourn
and you will not weep,
and your tears will not come.

¹⁷ Groan silently;

perform no mourning for the dead .

Bind on your turban upon you,
and put your shoes on your feet,

and do not cover your mustache,
and do not eat the bread of normal people.”

22 y'all will not cover your mustaches,
and y'all will not eat the bread of normal people.

23 Y'all's turbans will be on your heads,
and y'all's shoes on your feet.

Y'all will not mourn,
and y'all will not weep,
but y'all will rot in your iniquities ,
and y'all will groan to one another.

Ezekiel 24:16-23. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Notice that the inner statements are identical, and that the similarity highlights the only difference: “you will rot in your iniquities,” which is set in parallelism with the phrase “perform mourning for the dead.”

Yahweh’s words to Ezekiel also mirror what Yahweh said to Aaron on the day that two of his sons violated the guidelines for behavior in the tabernacle, as they burst into the tent to offer incense that was not allowed (Lev. 10:1-7).

Not only is Ezekiel not to engage in public mourning, but he is to put on his priestly clothing as if he is preparing for liturgical duty (“put on your turban” recalls Exod. 39:27-28; see also Isa. 61:3 and Ezek. 44:18).

Based on the associations with the word “strike” and the prohibition to engage in public mourning, the first oracle given to Ezekiel would seem to be a preparation for a large-scale tragic event that will happen to Jerusalem. The shock of the following narrative, then, is that when Ezekiel awakes in the morning, it is not to the news of a destroyed Jerusalem temple. Rather, he finds out that his wife has died suddenly during the night.

The Loss of the Beloved

The death of Ezekiel’s wife fits into a narrative pattern in the Hebrew Bible where a person’s or a group’s failures finally catch up to them and become so grievous that Yahweh hands them over to their demise.

- Adam and Eve lose Abel, the son God favored, because of Cain’s jealous anger, though they receive Seth as a substitute (Gen. 4:1-10, 25-26).
- Abraham surrenders his “beloved” Isaac over to death, only to discover a last-moment substitute (Gen. 22).
- Rebekah surrenders her “beloved” Jacob over to exile, never to see him again (Gen. 28).
- Jacob surrenders his “beloved” Benjamin to descend down into Egypt and into prison, but Judah offers himself as a last-minute substitute (Gen. 43-45).

- Moses nearly loses his firstborn son in a nighttime plague, only to have his life saved through circumcision (Exod. 4:24-27).
- David loses his firstborn son with Bathsheba because of his moral failure of adultery and then murder (2 Sam. 11-12).
- Aaron loses his two firstborn sons because of their own failure in the tabernacle liturgy (Lev. 10:1-9). This example is important because Ezekiel's story has been closely modeled after Aaron's loss as well.

Leviticus 10:1-7 Instructor's Translation

¹ Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, they took their fire-censers, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them.

² And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

³ Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'"

And Aaron kept silent.

⁴ Moses called also to Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, "Come forward, carry your relatives away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp."

⁵ So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said.

⁶ Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar,

"Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes,

so that you will not die,

and so that he will not become angry against all the congregation.

But your brothers, the whole house of Israel,

they will weep about the burning which Yahweh has burned.

⁷ You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for Yahweh's anointing oil is upon you."

So they did according to the word of Moses.

Notice that the commands Yahweh gives to Aaron closely resemble those given to Ezekiel: both are silent instead of engaging in the customary mourning rituals and both are called not to weep in public.

Both priests are also called to put on (in Ezekiel's case) or to keep on (in Aaron's case) their symbolic priestly clothing, specifically the turban (a symbol of their royal-priestly status) and the sandals (a symbol of their readiness to walk into the temple).

Also significant is the reason that both priests are not to take upon themselves the clothing and practices of mourning for the dead. There is a great disaster looming, and Israel's priests are called to act as living symbols of the new humanity, a glowing and transformed human who can walk into and out of death and remain unharmed.

Ezekiel 24:26-27 serves an important role. A “refugee” from the destroyed Jerusalem is going to come, and the divine-dumbness of Ezekiel ([Ezek. 3:26](#)) will end. This is a compositional cue looking forward to chapter 33, the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., and Ezekiel’s transition to become a prophet of hope. The gap between this date and the coming of the refugee was two years (1.5 years of the siege + 6 months of waiting for the news), and this gap is registered in the compositional structure of the book, as chapters 25-32 fill the interval.

Compositional Links with Ezekiel 12:1-16

In both this unit and [12:1-16](#), Ezekiel is commanded to engage in bizarre, symbolic behavior (12:6 carry luggage through the city at night, 24:18 abstain from mourning for dead wife).

In both, Ezekiel is questioned by an audience about the meaning of his behavior (12:9 and 24:19 are very close in Hebrew).

Ezekiel himself is described as a “sign for Israel” (Heb. *mophet*, 12:6, 11; 24:24, 27): 12:11 “just as I have done, so it will be done to them,” and 24:21 “you all shall do just as I have done.”

Reflection Question

How does the death of Ezekiel’s wife connect to the theme of the loss of the beloved in the rest of the Bible?
How does this pattern point to Jesus?

Session 16: Oracles Against the Nations

Key Takeaways

- Israel is ethnically related to many of these surrounding nations. Their hostility pits brother against brother, reflecting the Cain and Abel story.
- The oracles are designed in two cycles of seven, connecting to Genesis 1 and 7 and the themes of de-creation and re-creation.
- Ezekiel portrays the king of Tyre as a cherub cast down from a place of honor in Eden, linking rebellious human kingdoms with the influence of rebellious spiritual beings.

Ezekiel 25-32: Oracles Against the Seven Nations Around Israel

This collection of oracles interrupts the prediction of a refugee coming from Jerusalem ([Ezek. 24:25-27](#)) and his arrival to announce the city's downfall ([Ezek. 33:21-23](#)). However, these oracles all date to precisely the time period between the death of Ezekiel's wife ([Ezek. 24:1](#), Jan. 588 B.C.E.) and the coming of the refugee three years later ([Ezek. 33:21](#), Jan. 585 B.C.E.). Moreover, this collection of materials shows all the signs of an intentional and elegant literary ordering. The 18 oracles are organized in a unique symmetry by a pattern of sevens and an even distribution of word amounts. There are oracles against seven nations, the final two (Tyre and Sidon together, then Egypt) receiving seven oracles each.

Located precisely in the middle of this material in terms of word count (nations 1-6 have 97 verses dedicated to them; nation 7 has 97 verses as well), we find a short oracle ([Ezek. 28:25-26](#)) directed not toward the nations, but rather toward Israel and its status among the nations after they are judged.

The center oracle of 28:25-26 has been deliberately placed as the fulcrum of this material, making it clear that Ezekiel's oracles against the nations are not primarily an expression of tribal hatred, but rather part of Ezekiel's rhetorical goal to pave a way for the oracles of hope that lie ahead in chapters 34-48. If Yahweh is against these nations around Israel, then by implication he is still for his covenant people. However, the Israel he is "for" is the purged and refined Israel that has come through the searing judgment of chapters 12-24.

Number of nations	1	2	3	4	5	6								7							
Nations	Ammon	Moab	Edom	Philistia	Tyre + Sidon			Israel Restored			Egypt										
Number of oracles	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	28:25-26			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Chapters	25	25	25	25	26	27	28							29	30	31	32				
Number of Verses				97 verses										97 verses							

Ezekiel 25-32 Design. Block, Daniel (1998). [The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)](#). Eerdmans.

Key Themes in the Oracles Against the Nations

Yahweh’s Providence Over Human Affairs

Yahweh is at work in the affairs and events of nations that do not involve Israel (Babylon, Tyre, and Egypt, see [Ezek. 29:17-20](#)). Yahweh oversees the affairs of nations to move forward his particular redemptive plan in and through Israel (Babylon becomes Yahweh’s unwitting tool, see [Ezek. 21:23-29](#)).

Yahweh Holds All Nations Accountable to Basic Standards of Justice

Ezekiel’s accusations are against the same behaviors for which he accuses Israel: violence, idolatry, and self-exaltation.

Yahweh’s Ultimate Goal Is To Make Himself Known to the Nations

The phrase, “they/you will know that I am Yahweh” occurs with greatest density in this section of the book (23x in these seven chapters), and is parallel to Israel’s coming to “know Yahweh” through judgment and restoration.

This theme is the only hint in Ezekiel of some redemptive future for the nations; Yahweh’s greatest concern is for his own reputation and status among the nations ([Ezek. 36:18-21](#)).

“We are dealing not merely with prophecies that were some kind of comfort to Israel in their loss and disorientation, but with actions of God on the stage of human history that were intended to be revelatory. People would see and know something about the living God through all that is spoken of here. The purpose of these oracles was not to fan Israelite nationalism, but to envisage the next stage of God’s long-term mission of being universally known among the nations of the world.”

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit](#). IVP Academic. 233.

Oracles Against Israel's Immediate Neighbors

Ezekiel 25 is a rapid succession of oracles against the nations surrounding Israel, going clockwise from the north: Ammon (25:1-7), Moab (25:8-11), Edom (25:12-14), and Philistia (25:15-17).

Three of these nations had kinship ties to Israel (Ammon and Moab being connected to Abraham through Lot, see [Gen. 19:30-38](#); Edom connected to Esau, see [Gen. 36](#)). All three had a history of conflict and uneasy alliance with Israel. However, in the time of Ezekiel, all four had banded together in rebellion against Babylon (see [Jer. 27](#)). When Babylon chose to sack Jerusalem as an example to others ([Ezek. 21:21-29](#) depicts Nebuchadnezzar's "coin-toss" about which capital city to destroy), all the "allies" turned on Jerusalem in mockery (Moab, Ammon, Philistia) or outright betrayal and violence (Edom, see [Obad. 1:14](#)).

These oracles, which have parallels in Jeremiah (Ammon, [Jer. 49:1-6](#); Moab, [Jer. 48:1-47](#); Edom, [Jer. 49:7-22](#); and Philistia, [Jer. 47:1-7](#)), emphasize that nations in such close proximity to the knowledge of Yahweh will face his justice for their betrayal and evil.

Seven Oracles Against Tyre and Sidon

Each oracle begins with the same exact expression: "thus says Lord Yahweh" ([Ezek. 26:1, 7, 15](#); [27:1](#); [28:1](#); [28:11](#); [28:20](#)).

Tyre was the trading and maritime capital of the Phoenicians and was a long-time trading partner with Israel on good terms ([1 Kgs. 5](#)). The city was a high-walled castle on a large island just off the coast of modern Lebanon, and its harbor boasted the largest fleet of trading ships in the ancient world. They traded as far as Spain, Britain, and Greece, and so Tyre was known as a center of opulent wealth. These oracles focus on the treachery of Tyre against Israel in the Babylonian period, as well as its heavy economic dominance and the social corruption that resulted.

#1 Tyre's Agenda for Jerusalem ([Ezek. 26:1-6](#))

Tyre sees Jerusalem's downfall as a chance for economic gain ([Ezek. 26:1-6](#)).

#2 Yahweh Brings Babylon Against Tyre ([Ezek. 26:7-14](#))

[Ezekiel 26:7-14](#): See the follow up to this prediction of the Babylonian siege on Tyre in [Ezekiel 29:17-21](#). The siege lasted 13 years and exhausted both parties until Babylon gave up.

#3 Tyre's Downfall Among the Nations ([Ezek. 26:15-21](#))

Tyre will become a byword among the princes of the coast ([Ezek. 26:15-21](#)).

#4 Funeral Lament for the Shipwreck of Tyre ([Ezek. 27:1-36](#))

In an elaborate metaphorical poem, Ezekiel depicts Tyre as a high-end trading ship (27:4-11) loaded with exotic goods from its distant trading allies. 27:12-25 lists Tyre's trading partners and their characteristic wares.

Ezekiel's knowledge of international trade is remarkable and builds up a portrait of wealth leading to arrogance and hubris.

In 27:26-27, the ship is rowed out to sea only to be swamped by a gigantic storm (driven by an "east wind," same as [Exod. 14:21!](#)). The ship sinks offshore in view of an international crowd of spectators and mourners (27:28-32) who begin to sing a lament on its behalf (27:33-36).

This chapter ([Ezek. 27:1-36](#)) was a major resource for John the visionary's description of the wealth and corruption of Babylon/Rome in [Revelation 18](#). The connection seems to have been triggered by Ezekiel's connection of great wealth leading to the grandiose divine self-exaltation of Tyre's leaders ([Ezek. 28:1-2, 6-9](#)) in a way similar to Isaiah's depiction of Babylon ([Isa. 47:7-11](#)).

#5 The Fall of Tyre's Arrogant Leader (Ezek. 28:1-10)

In [28:1-10](#), Ezekiel's focus turns from the nation to its king (Ethbaal III, named after Jezebel's father with whom Ahab made an alliance 200 years earlier, [1 Kgs. 16:31](#)).

He depicts the mindset of the king as deluded with dreams of divine status (28:1-2). While Egyptian kings commonly thought of themselves as divine, this was not a claim made by any known Canaanite leaders. Likely Ezekiel interprets the arrogant behavior of the king as a claim to act in the place of God, driven by his economic influence and dominance (28:3-5).

¹ And the word of Yahweh came to me, saying,

² "Son of a human,

say to the chief of Tyre,

'Thus says Lord Yahweh:

Because **your heart was raised high**,

and you said,

"I am El,

I sit in the seat of Elohim,

in **the heart** of the seas."

But **you are a human and not El**,

and **you have made your heart like the heart of Elohim.**

³ Look, are you more **wise** than Daniel?

Is there no hidden thing that overwhelms you?

⁴ By your **wisdom** and understanding you have made wealth for yourself,
and you have made gold and silver for your treasuries,

⁵ By your great **wisdom**, with your trade you have increased your wealth,
and **your heart is raised high** because of your wealth.

⁶ Therefore, thus says Lord Yahweh:

Because **you have set your heart like the heart of Elohim**,

⁷ for that reason I am about to bring upon you violent foreign nations,
and they will unsheathe their swords against the beauty of your wisdom,
and they will defile your radiance.

⁸ They will make you go down to the pit,
and you will die the death of the slain,
in the heart of the seas.

⁹ Will you really say

“**I am an Elohim**”

before your those who execute you?

So **you are a human and not El**,

in the hand of those who slay you.

¹⁰ You will die the death of the uncircumcised at the hand of foreigners,
for I have spoken.

Utterance of Lord Yahweh!

Ezekiel 28:1-10. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

#6 An Edenic Analogy for Tyre's Fallen Leader (Ezek. 28:11-19)

In 28:11-19, the metaphors of the king's divine claim (28:1-2) are developed into a full-blown metaphorical vision (typical of Ezekiel) using Israelite (and perhaps other Mesopotamian) traditions of the primeval origins of humanity.

There are two alternate versions of this oracle preserved in the textual witnesses, each asserting different things about the king, both related to the main themes of the Eden narrative in Genesis 2-3.

Ezekiel 28:12-19 in the Hebrew Text Underneath the Septuagint

Differences are marked with italics, and additions are bracketed in bold.

Ezekiel 28:12-19 Instructor's Translation

And the word of Yahweh came to me, saying:

¹² Son of a human,

take up a funeral song about the king of Tyre,

and you shall say to him,

'Thus says Lord Yahweh,

You were a proportioned seal,

and complete in beauty.

¹³ You were in Eden, the garden of *Elohim*,

every precious stone was your covering,

ruby, topaz, and emerald,

turquoise, sapphire, and jasper

carnelian, agate, and amethyst

[chrysolite, beryl, and onyx]

and settings and your mountings

were a work of gold

in the day you were created.

¹⁴ *With* the cherub I set you;
you were in the holy mountain of *Elohim*,
in the midst of the stones of fire.

¹⁵ You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created,
until iniquity was found in you.

¹⁶ Due to the abundance of your trade,
your midst was filled with violence
and you sinned,
so I defiled you from the mountain of *Elohim*,
and *the cherub banished you*
from the midst of the fiery stones.

¹⁷ Your heart was raised high due to your beauty,
you corrupted your wisdom with your radiance,
[because of your many sins]
I cast you down to the ground,
I give you over to kings, to look upon you.

¹⁸ Because of your great iniquities
in the wickedness of your trade,
you defiled your sanctuaries,
so I bring out fire from your midst,
it consumes you
and I will set you in the dust of the land,
in the eyes of all who see you.

¹⁹ All who know you among the peoples,
they will be appalled at you,
you will be an object of horror
and you will be no more.

Ezekiel 28:12-19 in the Masoretic Text

Differences are marked with italics, and additions are bracketed in bold.

Ezekiel 28:12-19 Instructor's Translation

And the word of Yahweh came to me, saying:

¹² Son of a human,
take up a funeral song about the king of Tyre,
and you shall say to him,
'Thus says Lord Yahweh,
You were a proportioned seal,
[full of wisdom],
and complete in beauty.

¹³ You were in Eden, the garden of *Elohim*,
every precious stone was your covering,

ruby, topaz, and jasper,
chrysolite, beryl, and jasper
sapphire, turquoise, and emerald
 and settings and your mountings
 were a work of gold
 in the day you were created **[they were prepared]**.
 14 You are the cherub I set you **[the outstretched one who covers]**;
[and] you were in the holy mountain of *Elohim*,
 in the midst of the stones of fire **[you walked about]**.
 15 You were blameless in your ways
 from the day you were created,
 until iniquity was found in you.
 16 Due to the abundance of your trade,
 your midst was filled with violence
 and you sinned,
 so I defiled you from the mountain of *Elohim*,
 and I banished you, **[covering]** cherub
 from the midst of the fiery stones.
 17 Your heart was raised high due to your beauty,
 you corrupted your wisdom with your radiance,
 I cast you down to the ground,
 I give you over to kings, to look upon you.
 18 Because of your great iniquities
 in the wickedness of your trade,
 you defiled your sanctuaries,
 so I bring out fire from your midst,
 it consumes you
 and I will set you in the dust of the land,
 in the eyes of all who see you.
 19 All who know you among the peoples,
 they will be appalled at you,
 you will be an object of horror
 and you will be no more.

Challenging Interpretive Issues in Ezekiel 28:11-19

Who is being addressed?

The king of Tyre is the explicit addressee in 28:12 and also in the preceding oracle of [28:1-10](#), where he is called “chief of Tyre” (נגיד צר).

Ezekiel regularly uses allegorical and metaphorical portrayals of kings in order to more fully communicate their failures and the threat they pose to the cosmic order.

- In [28:1-10](#), [chapter 17](#), and [chapter 19](#), the final kings of Judah are lions and vines.

- In chapter 29, Pharaoh is a sea-dragon (*tannin*, תנין), and in chapter 32, he is compared to a lion and a sea-dragon.
- In chapter 31, Pharaoh is likened to Assyria, who is portrayed as a cosmic tree of the garden of Eden.

The Core Metaphors at Work

The version represented by the Septuagint depicts the king of Tyre as an Adam figure, the primal royal-priest in the garden of Eden who was made to perfectly represent the creator (“proportioned seal” is a metaphor for the image of Elohim in Gen. 1:26-28).

The jewels listed in 28:13 are clearly drawn from the high-priestly breastplate. The Septuagint text has 12 of the 12 gemstones worn by Israel’s high priest, the Masoretic text has only 9 of the 12 (see Exod. 28:17-20).

The link between the high priest (who was a royal figure with a crown) and the Eden *’adam* is built on the core biblical theme of humans as the representative image of *Elohim*. The priest is an image of ideal humanity, working in the ritual garden and representing humanity before God and representing God’s rule and presence in creation. Notice that elsewhere in Ezekiel, both Eden and the temple are associated with high mountains, an eternal river, and abundant life (see Ezek. 40:1-3, 47:1-12; Joel 3:17-18; Zech. 14:8; Ps. 46:4).

While the family of Israel was selected from among the nations to be Yahweh’s unique and special royal priesthood (see Exod. 19:4-6), the Hebrew Bible operates on the assumption that all humans, especially human rulers, are called to be images of *Elohim* as they rule and bear responsibility for the well-being of others. This is the foundation from which the Hebrew prophets accuse and hold the leaders of others nations accountable for their war crimes (see Amos 1-2; Isa. 10; Hab. 1-2; Obad. 1; Nah. 1-3).

This similarity between the human (*’adam*) royal priests of Genesis 1-2, their failure in Genesis 3, and all other leading characters in the Hebrew Bible (especially kings, priests, and prophets) is fundamental to the communication strategy of the biblical story. It makes all the sense in the world that the king of Tyre would be likened to humanity in Eden.

Who or What is “The Cherub”?

In the Masoretic version of Ezekiel’s oracle, the Eden figure being compared to the king of Tyre is not the human, it is “the cherub,” a heavenly hybrid-figure elsewhere associated with guarding access to the divine presence in the garden (Gen. 3:24) and in the tabernacle and temple (Exod. 25:18-22 and 1 Kgs. 6:23-28). The cherub was appointed to patrol the garden (“walk about” / הַתְּהַלֵּךְ is precisely what the presence of Yahweh does in Gen. 3:8) and its treasures (“fiery stones” = brilliant and shiny gemstones, like those listed in Gen. 2:12).

The Hebrew text reflected in the Septuagint does not identify the figure with the cherub, but rather as someone else who is “with” the cherub in the garden, i.e., the primal image-bearing human. This link of the king of Tyre as *’adam* makes clear the original royal connotations of the *imago dei* (Gen. 1:26, “let them rule”).

Let’s look at the difference between the two versions.

- In the Masoretic version, the king is compared to a guardian angel-cherub who rebels against Yahweh and is banished. This fits precisely the depiction of the snake in Genesis 3.

- In the Septuagint version, the comparison is with Adam's rebellion and expulsion from the garden by a cherub.

What Is the Accusation?

In both versions, the fundamental sin of the royal figure is pride (taken from the preceding oracle in [Ezek. 28:1-10](#)), and a desire to be not just the image of *Elohim*, but to rule as an *elohim* in the divine seat of power (see 28:2).

The Hebrew text underneath the Septuagint version makes good sense, as it aligns with the humans' desire to take from the forbidden tree so that "they could become *elohim*" (see [Gen. 3:5](#)). While pride is not highlighted in the Eden narrative, it's not hard to see how it could be inferred from the narrative details, resulting in their expulsion out of the garden-temple by the guardian cherubim ([Gen. 3:24](#)).

The additions made to the oracle that resulted in the Masoretic version portray the arrogance of the king of Tyre as having an even more devious and primal origin. He is not simply another rebellious human replaying the folly of Adam and Eve. Rather, he is being driven by the dark spiritual forces that inspired that original rebellion, and who have been at work in and through human kings throughout the biblical narrative. It is that figure who was also expelled from the garden (in Ezekiel's retelling) and who is loose in the world continuing to deceive human leaders.

Rebel Adam or Rebel Cherub

It is likely that the shift in referent from the 'adam (Septuagint) to the rebel cherub (Masoretic text) took place when the book of Ezekiel was eventually integrated into the larger collection of the Torah and Prophets. Ezekiel 28 was then coordinated with many other similar passages in the Hebrew Bible that depict foreign kings as diabolical and inspired by the same spiritual powers at work in [Genesis 3](#).

- The seed of the snake, Cain's city, and Lemek: [Genesis 3:15](#) made it clear that the following narrative would feature characters who are the "seed" of the snake. This puzzling image is filled out by the narrative analogies at work in [Genesis 3](#) and [4](#). There, "sin" is an animal-like force (see [Gen. 4:7](#)) driving Cain's jealous anger. And in seven generations, it leads to Cain's city and the violent Lemek. *Lemek* is not a proper name in Hebrew, but the word "king" with the first two letters reversed (*melek/lemek*, מלך/למך)!
- Nimrod and Babylon: If Cain's building of his city that leads to Lemek is the first depiction of kings and cities in the Bible, then Nimrod and the establishment of Babylon is the second. Nimrod is explicitly described as one of the violent warriors, a *nephilim/gibborim* (see [Gen. 6:4](#) and [10:8-12](#)), and the founder of Babylon. The following narrative about Babylon is about humans seeking to make a name for themselves by ascending into the skies with a ritual tower (see [Gen. 11:1-10](#)).
- Babylon and the rebel divine council: Moses reflects back on the scattering of Babylon, and he sees another layer to that rebellion against Yahweh's authority. He depicts it as the rebellion of the heavenly host, which results in the nations being handed over to authority of dark spiritual powers (see [Deut. 32:7-10](#) and [Ps. 82](#)).
- Egypt and the rebel powers: In [Exodus 12:12](#), it becomes clear that the ten plagues were in fact an offensive not just against Pharaoh, but also against "the *elohim* of Egypt."
- Babylon, the snake, and the nations: In the prophets, this fundamental likeness between the snake and arrogant foreign kings is explored in multiple ways. In [Isaiah 14](#), the king of Babylon is metaphorically

portrayed as a rebel star (i.e., one of the “host of heaven”) who refuses to acknowledge the superior status of the sun. Isaiah draws upon ancient astrological themes as an analogy to describe the king of Babylon’s pride in storming the ancient world.

Isaiah 10:5-15 (Assyria) Instructor's Translation

⁵ Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger
and the staff in whose hands is my indignation,

⁶ I send it against a godless nation
and commission it against the people of my fury
to capture booty and to seize plunder,
and to trample them down like mud in the streets.

⁷ Yet [Assyria] does not intend it in this way,
nor does it plan such a thing in its heart.
Rather, its purpose is to destroy and to cut off many nations.

⁸ For it says,
“Are not my princes all kings?

...

¹⁰ Just as my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols,
whose graven images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria,

¹¹ won’t I do to Jerusalem and her images what I did to Samaria and her idols?”

...

¹³ For he has said,
**“By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did this,
for I have understanding;**

Indeed, I removed the boundaries of the peoples,
and I plundered their treasures,

and like a valiant warrior I brought down their inhabitants,

¹⁴ and my hand reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest,
and as one gathers abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth;
and there was not one that flapped its wing or opened its beak or chirped.”

¹⁵ Should the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it?
Should the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it?
That would be like a club wielding those who lift it,
Or like a rod lifting him who is not wood.

Isaiah 14:12-15 (Babylon) Instructor's Translation

¹² How you have fallen from the skies,
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!
You have been cut down to the land,
you who have weakened the nations!

¹³ **But you said in your heart,
'I will ascend to the skies;**

**I will raise my throne above the stars of Elohim,
and I will sit on the mount of assembly,
in the recesses of the north;**

**14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.'**

¹⁵ On the contrary, you will be thrust down to Sheol,
to the recesses of the pit.

Obadiah 1:3-4 (Edom) NASB

³ "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you,
you who live in the clefts of the rock,
in the high exaltation of your dwelling place,
you who say in your heart,

'Who will bring me down to earth?'

⁴ **Though you build high like the eagle,
though you set your nest among the stars,
from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD.**

The Expulsion of the Snake or the Human?

The Masoretic text version of Ezekiel reflects a perspective on the Eden narrative that was implicit in [Isaiah 14](#) and Genesis 1-3. In Genesis 1, the rulers above (the host of heaven) are installed as God's delegated rulers of the skies, while humans are appointed as rulers below in the land. Human and spiritual powers are analogous to each other, each in their respective realms. Eden, however, is a merging of the two realms, as a place where Heaven and Earth are one (thus the equation of Eden with a "holy mountain" in [Ezek. 28:14](#)). We're told that the garden was populated with humanity, animals, but also spiritual beings, as there are *keruvim* posted at the exit gate to Eden. It is interesting that whenever these hybrid heavenly guardians are described, they are always different variations of animals, usually a mixing of land and sky creatures ([Exod. 25](#); [Isa. 6](#); [Ezek. 1](#)). It seems likely, then, that Ezekiel understood the snake to be a rebel *keruv*, and the Masoretic text version of Ezekiel supplies the backstory.

In other words, the Masoretic text of Ezekiel assumes that the traditions we encounter in Genesis 2-3 tell not only of the rebellion and exile of humanity from the garden, but also of the rebellion and exile of a spiritual being who deceived God's royal priests. The fall of Satan story stands right before us in Genesis 3, and Ezekiel compares the king of Tyre to the hubris and fall of that spiritual being.

#7 Oracle Against Sidon (Ezek. 28:20-23)

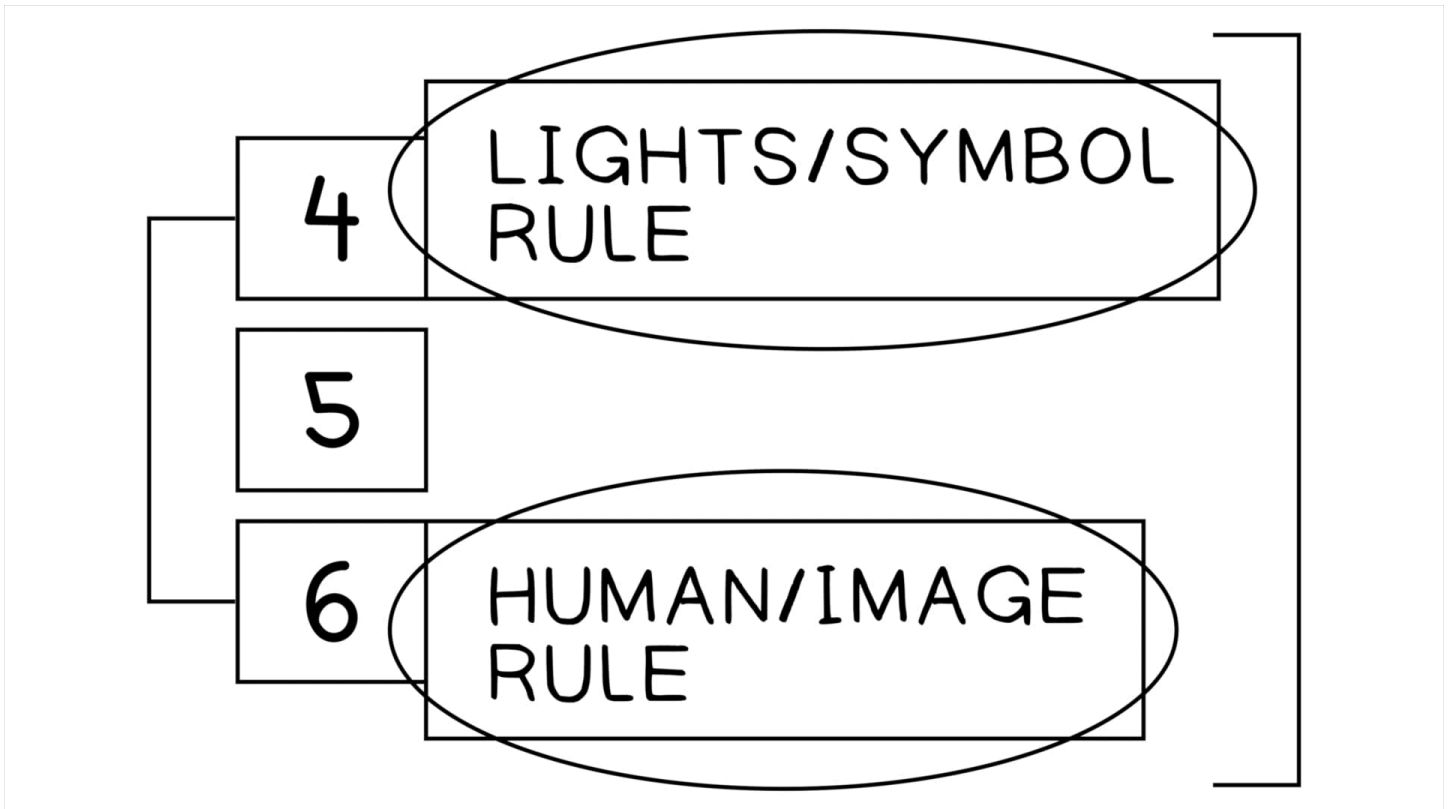
This series of oracles concludes with the condemnation of Sidon.

Judgment on the Nations, Restoration for Israel (Ezek. 28:24-26)

This little oracle is a brilliant compositional placement that coordinates all the promises of hope in chapters 1-24 with chapters 34-48 and links them with the judgment of the nations.

Yahweh's judgment on the nations is coordinated with Israel's future hope. A return to the land of Israel to live in peace links forward to chapters 46-48, and the vindication of Yahweh's name among the nations links forward to chapter 36.

Human and Spiritual Rulers in Genesis 1



Human and Spiritual Rulers in Genesis 1. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How do the biblical authors understand the conflict between Israel and the surrounding nations?

Session 17: Egypt as Eden Tree, Sea Monster, and Nephilim

Key Takeaways

- Ezekiel carefully combines images and vocabulary from the first six chapters of Genesis to condemn Egypt as a force of both human and spiritual rebellion.
- Egypt is depicted as a beautiful giant tree that is torn down for its arrogance and as a chaotic sea monster that is caught and brought on land to be defeated.
- Genesis 3 tells two fall stories, one of human failure and one of a rebellious spiritual being. Ezekiel reflects on both realities when he uses Eden imagery in the oracle against Egypt.

Seven Oracles Against Egypt (Ezek. 29:1-32:32)

In the years before the fall of Jerusalem, Israel turned to Egypt for support and help against Babylon because it was the only political power that posed any kind of threat to Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah tried to compel the Jerusalemites to reject Egypt's help (unsuccessfully, see [Jer. 37:4-10](#)), and here Ezekiel sets himself to the same task by showing that Egypt is an arrogant, helpless ally against Yahweh's appointed servant Babylon.

#1 The Fall of the Sea-Monster (Ezek. 29:1-16)

Ezekiel uses a traditional image from Canaanite mythology: the great sea-dragon who represents all forces opposed to Yahweh and who is slain and destroyed when Yahweh brings his justice. This backstory is echoed in [Psalm 74:13-14](#), [89:9-10](#), [Isaiah 27:1](#), [51:9](#), and [Job 7:12](#). This figure is also named "Rahab" and was a common prophetic image for Egypt, see [Isaiah 30:7](#). Pharaoh is reduced to the image of a crocodile (common in the Nile) captured and left to rot in the desert.

#2 Egypt Will Fall in Place of Tyre (Ezek. 29:17-21)

Ezekiel had predicted that Tyre would be besieged and destroyed by Babylon (chapters 26-28, dated to 586 B.C.E.). As it turned out, Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre was prolonged for 13 years (cross-reference with Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.4), and he was never able to overcome the city's defense. Babylon and Tyre reached some kind of settlement, and Tyre did acquiesce to Babylonian authority after this point, but Ezekiel's prophecy of the city's destruction was not fulfilled exactly as he predicted.

Does this make Ezekiel a false prophet? Some apparently thought so (see [Ezek. 12:23-28](#)). But in this oracle (dated 15 years after chapters 26-28), Yahweh adjusts his previous word through Ezekiel: Egypt will be conquered by Babylon in place of Tyre and serve as a reward for the failed siege. Yahweh has freedom over his word to change how it may be fulfilled. This highlights two aspects of Ezekiel's prophecies that are key to consider.

1. Ezekiel's prophetic and poetic style employs a high degree of hyperbole, stereotyped phraseology, and intense rhetoric, all designed for maximum communicative impact. We should be wary of demanding too literal a fulfillment of his prophecies; Yahweh himself says so!
2. Biblical prophecy always has a contingent element so that predictions made in seemingly absolute terms may be adjusted if circumstances change or people respond in appropriate ways (Jon. 3 is a classic example).

"This little passage serves as a warning that even in Ezekiel's own day it was clear that there need not always be a literal fulfillment of the predictions he had made with his artistic poetic rhetoric. The fact that a prediction did not quickly 'come true' in literal terms did not mean that the prophetic word lost all authenticity or relevance. It is ironic that Ezekiel's prophecies have suffered under the labors of those determined to take some of his later visions with utter literalism. Such people use Ezekiel's words to predict all kinds of 'end times' scenarios, and their forecasts have manifestly failed to materialize as predicted (though not before they made a great deal of money!)."

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [*The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*](#). IVP Academic. 249-250.

"God is aware that the oracles against Tyre have not been fulfilled as originally delivered. But he will not be held captive even by his own word ... In their concern for the literal fulfillment of Ezekiel's predictions, his audience had overlooked the primary function of his preaching: to persuade them to repent of their sins and to acknowledge Yahweh, and to submit to his claims on their lives. Prophetic proclamation is more than fortune-telling; it is rhetorically charged with exuberance, passion, hyperbole, figurative language, and whatever means it will take to evoke a response in the hearer. Preoccupation with the fulfillment of predictions has a tendency to deafen hearers to the primary message of God and his agent in any age."

Block, Daniel (1998). [*The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans.

#3 The Day of Yahweh Against Egypt (Ezek. 30:1-19)

Ezekiel 30:1-19 announces the day of the Lord coming against Egypt in the form of a lament for the astonishing downfall of Egypt and her allies.

#4 Egypt Broken by Babylon (Ezek. 30:20-26)

Ezekiel contrasts the broken arm of Pharaoh with the strengthened arm of the king of Babylon.

#5 The Fall of the Cosmic Tree—Pharaoh's Demise (Ezek. 31:1-18)

The comparison with Assyria in 31:3 is odd if the entire oracle is about Egypt. The poem is either (1) comparing Egypt's imminent downfall with Assyria's rise and fall or, (2) the poem is a scribal error that resulted in the change from "Cypress" to "Assyria," which would make sense of the concluding statement in 31:18.

The cosmic tree motif is another image Ezekiel takes up from his Mesopotamian cultural heritage (see Block's discussion of ancient Sumerian, Babylonian, and Ugaritic cosmic tree myths). Daniel 4 is the closest biblical

parallel (Jesus drew on both in his parables of the kingdom in [Mark 4:30-32](#)), and Ezekiel links the tree to the garden in [Genesis 2](#).

¹ In the eleventh year,
in the third month,
on the first of the month,
the word of Yahweh came to me saying,

² "Son of human,
say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his hordes,
'Whom are you like in your greatness?

³ Look, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon,
with beautiful branches and forest shade,
and tall of height,
and its top was among the clouds.

⁴ The waters made it grow big,
the deep-water made it high.
With its rivers it continually went all around its planting place,
and it sent out its channels to all the trees of the field.

⁵ Therefore its height was taller than all the trees of the field,
and its boughs became many,
and its branches long,
because of many waters as it spread them out.

⁶ All the birds of the heavens nested in its boughs,
and under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth,
and all the many nations lived under its shade.

⁷ And it was beautiful in its greatness,
in the length of its branches;
for its roots extended to many waters.

⁸ The cedars in Elohim's garden could not match it;
the cypress could not compare with its boughs,
and the plane trees could not match its branches,
no tree in Elohim's garden could compare with it in its beauty,

⁹ I made it beautiful with the multitude of its branches,
and all the trees of Eden, which were in the garden of Elohim, were jealous of it.

¹⁰ Therefore thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"Because it is tall in height,
and has set its top among the clouds,
and its heart is lifted up in its height,
¹¹ so I will give it into the hand of the mighty one among the nations;
he will thoroughly deal with it.

According to its wickedness I have banished it.

¹² Foreign tyrants of the nations have cut it down and left it;
on the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen,
and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land,
and all the peoples of the land have gone down from its shade and left it.

¹³ On its fallen-form all the birds of the heavens will dwell,
and all the beasts of the field will be on its fallen branches,

¹⁴ so that all the trees by the waters may not be grow tall in their height,
nor set their top among the clouds,
nor their well-watered mighty ones stand up in their height.

For they have all been given over to death,
to the land underneath, among the sons of humanity, with those who go down to the pit.”

¹⁵ Thus says Yahweh God,

“On the day it went down to Sheol I caused mourning;
I closed the deep over it,
and held back its rivers,
and its many waters were stopped up,
and I made Lebanon lament for it,
and all the trees of the field wilted away on account of it.

¹⁶ I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall,
when I made it go down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit;
and all the well-watered trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon,
they were comforted in the land underneath.

¹⁷ They also went down with it to Sheol to those slain by the sword;
and those who were its strength lived under its shade among the nations.

¹⁸ To which of the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness?
Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the land underneath;
you will lie down in the midst of the uncircumcised,
with those who were slain by the sword.

This is Pharaoh and all his hordes!”
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.”

Ezekiel 31:1-18. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

#6 A Dirge Over Pharaoh—The Great Sea Monster is Slain (32:1-16)

¹ And it came about in the twelfth year,
on the twelfth of the month,
on the first of the month,
the word of Yahweh came to me, saying:

² “Son of a human,
lift up a funeral poem for Pharaoh, king of Egypt,

and say to him,

'You compared yourself to a young lion of the nations,
but you are like a sea-monster;
and you gushed forth in your rivers,
and you muddied the waters with your feet,
and you stomped their rivers.'

³ This is what Yahweh Elohim says,

'Now I will spread my net over you,
with a company of many peoples,
and they will lift you up in my net,
⁴ and I will leave you on the land,
and I will hurl you on the open field,
and I will cause all the birds of the skies to dwell on you,
and I will satisfy the beasts of the whole earth with you,

⁵ I will set your flesh on the mountains,
and I will fill the valleys with your refuse,
⁶ and I will also make the land drink the flow of your blood,
unto the mountains,
and the ravines will be full of you.

⁷ And when I extinguish you,
I will cover the skies,
and I will darken their stars;
I will cover the sun with a cloud,
and the moon will not give its light.

⁸ All the shining lights in the skies I will darken over you,
and will set darkness on your land;
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

⁹ I will provoke the hearts of many peoples,
when I bring about your breaking among the nations,
into lands which you have not known,
¹⁰ and I will make many peoples appalled at you,
and their kings will shudder a shuddering at you,
when I make my sword fly before them,
and they will tremble every moment,
every man for his own life,
on the day of your fall."

¹¹ For thus says the Lord God,

"The sword of the king of Babylon will come upon you.

12 With the swords of the **mighty warriors** I will cause your horde to **fall** ;
all of them are tyrants of the nations,
and they will devastate the pride of Egypt,
and all its hordes will be destroyed,
13 and I will also destroy all its cattle from beside many waters,
and the foot of human will not stomp them anymore,
and the hoofs of beasts will not muddy them.
14 Then I will make their waters settle,
and will cause their rivers to run like oil,"
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.
15 "When I make the land of Egypt a desolation,
and the land is desolate from what fills it,
when I strike all those who live in it,
and they will know that I am Yahweh.

16 This is a funeral poem and they will chant it,
the daughters of the nations shall chant it,
over Egypt and over all her hordes they will chant it,"
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

Ezekiel 32:1-16. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

#7 Pharaoh's Descent to the Netherworld (32:17-32)

17 In the twelfth year,
on the fifteenth of the month,
the word of Yahweh came to me saying,
18 "Son of man, wail for the hordes of Egypt,
and bring it down, her and the daughters of the powerful nations,
to the land underneath, with those who go down to the pit;
19 Whom do you surpass in beauty?
Go down and make your bed with the uncircumcised.
20 They **will fall** in the midst of those who are slain by the sword.
She is given over to the sword;
they have drawn her and all her hordes away.
21 The strong among the **mighty warriors** will speak of him and his helpers from the midst of Sheol,
'They have gone down,
the uncircumcised lie still,
slain by the sword.'
22 **Assyria** is there and all her company;
her graves are round about her.
All of them are slain, **fallen** by the sword,
23 whose graves are set in the remotest parts of the pit,

and her company is round about her grave.
All of them are slain, **fallen** by the sword,
who spread terror in the land of the living.

24 **Elam** is there and all her hordes around her grave;
all of them slain, **fallen** by the sword,
who went down uncircumcised to the land underneath,
who instilled their terror in the land of the living,
and bore their disgrace with those who went down to the pit.

25 Among the slain they have made a bed for her,
with all her horde around her is her grave,
they are all uncircumcised, slain by the sword,
for their terror was instilled in the land of the living,
and they bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit;
they were put in the midst of the slain.

26 **Meshech, Tubal** and all their hordes are there; their graves surround them.
All of them were slain by the sword, uncircumcised,
for they instilled their terror in the land of the living.

27 Nor do they lie down beside the **mighty warriors**, **fallen** among the uncircumcised,
who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war,
and whose swords were laid under their heads;
but their guilt was upon their bones,
for the terror of these **mighty warriors** was once in the land of the living.

28 But in the midst of the uncircumcised you will be broken,
and you will lie with those slain by the sword.

29 **Edom** is there, its kings and all its chiefs,
who for all their might are laid with those slain by the sword;
they will lie with the uncircumcised,
and with those who go down to the pit.

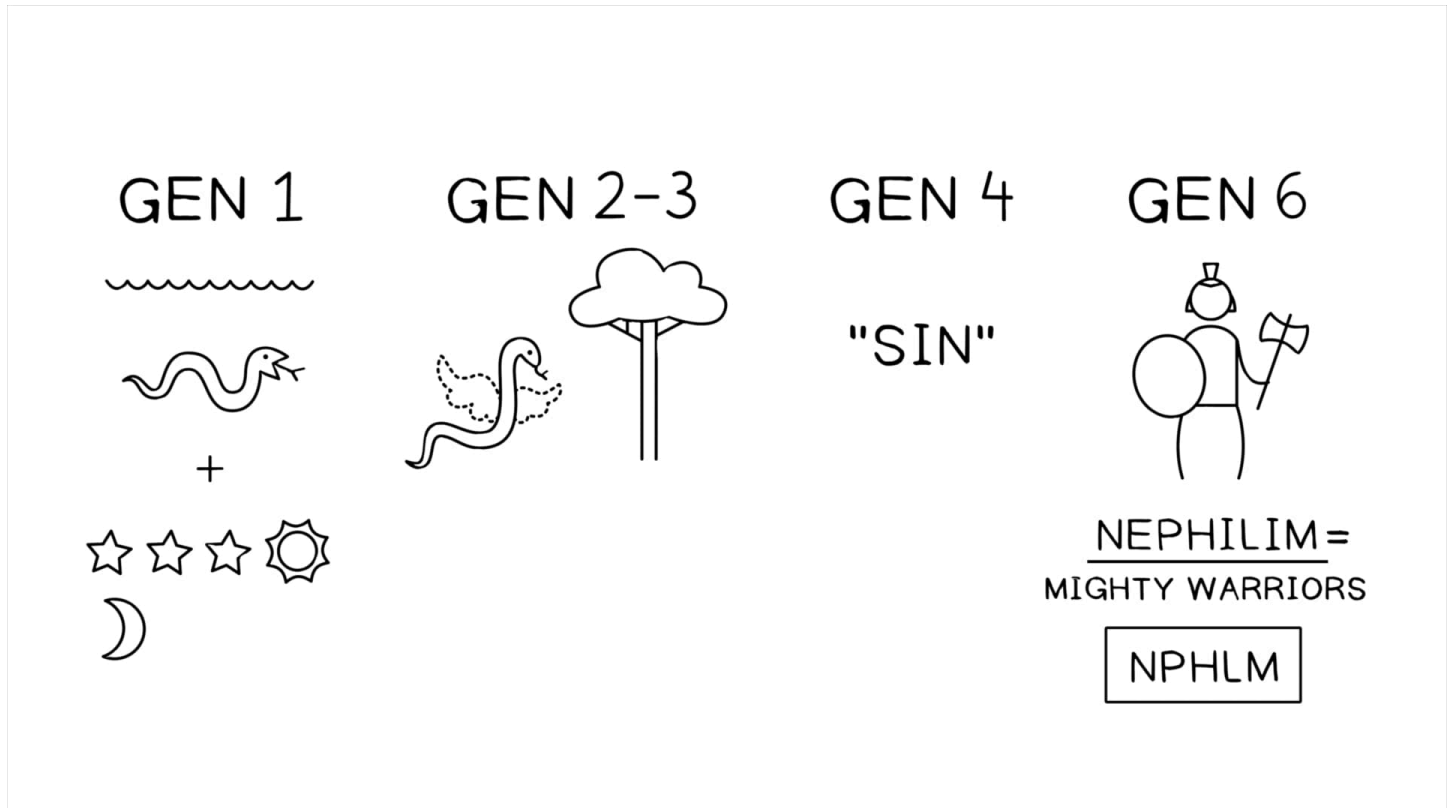
30 There are the **chiefs of the north**, all of them,
and all the **Sidonians**,
who in spite of the terror resulting from their might,
in shame went down with the slain,
so they lay down uncircumcised with those slain by the sword,
and they bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit.

31 These Pharaoh will see,
and he will be comforted for all his hordes,
those slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his army,"
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

32 "Though I instilled a terror of him in the land of the living, yet he will be made to lie down among the uncircumcised, along with those slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his hordes," utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

Ezekiel 32:17-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Images of Spiritual Rebellion in Genesis 1-6



Images of Spiritual Rebellion in Genesis 1-6. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How do you understand the relationship between corrupt human empires and rebellious spiritual beings?

Session 18: From Judgment to Hope

Key Takeaways

- Ezekiel 33 revisits key phrases and themes from all parts of the book so far.
- The culmination of judgment against Israel comes in the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.
- In the biblical story, genuine prophets usually have a different view of the circumstances from those invested in maintaining the status quo such as kings or priests, etc.

Literary Design of Ezekiel 33

This chapter is a crucial transitional section that functions as a bridge between Ezekiel's oracles of judgment in chapters 1-32 and his oracles of hope in chapters 34-48. The news of Jerusalem's fall is at the center of the chapter (Ezek. 33:21-22), and there is a symmetrical ordering of material around verses 21-22 focusing on Ezekiel's status as a true prophet (his predictions came true), and how Israel still needs to listen to the prophetic word and respond.

- A—33:1-11
- B—33:12-20
- C—33:21-22
- B'—33:23-29
- A'—33:30-33

Ezekiel's Role as a Watchman to Israel (Ezek. 33:1-9)

This section repeats 3:17-21, and the two sections act as a frame around the beginning and end of Ezekiel's oracles of judgment. The difference is that 3:17-21 was a private word to Ezekiel, while 33:1-9 is the prophet making public what he has been trying to do for the last seven years.

Looking back, Ezekiel has been trying to get their attention through every means possible. Ezekiel acted faithfully as a watchman, he warned the exiles and Jerusalem of the coming judgment, and their blood is no longer on his hands.

Looking forward, he will function as a watchman for years to come, only his message will change dramatically to one of hope (chapters 34-48).

Yahweh's Will for the Righteous and Wicked (Ezek. 33:10-20)

33:10 shows the first sign of Ezekiel's message being effective! But he's done too good a job. The exiles own their role in the city's destruction, but to the point of hopelessness.

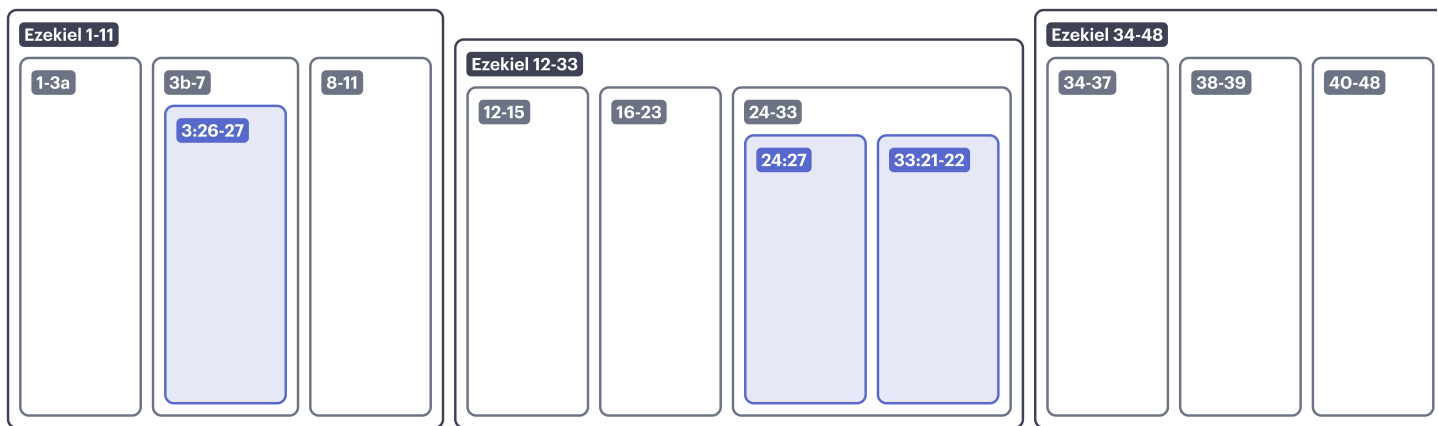
33:11-20 repeats the message from chapter 18, but this time with a receptive audience. The message becomes a reminder of how the exiles are not locked into judgment from their past sins. They can repent, they can change, and Yahweh will honor their change of heart if they respond to his message.

Messenger With News of Jerusalem’s Destruction (Ezek. 33:21-22)

In January 585 B.C.E., Ezekiel is vindicated as a true prophet when a survivor (surely among a larger group of exiles) from Jerusalem comes bearing news of the city’s destruction.

This passage is the fulfillment of the divine promise in 24:27, and it also links back to 3:26-27 where God promised to remove the divinely imposed inability to speak. This signals a new season in Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry, which still has 12 more years (40:1 dates to 573 B.C.E.) as he begins to deliver a message of hope.

Notice how the macro-design of Ezekiel makes clear that we have reached a major transition in the book’s flow of thought.



Ezekiel 1-48. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Ezekiel 3:24-27 NASB*

²⁴ ... Go, shut yourself up in your house. ²⁵ As for you, son of man, they will put ropes on you and bind you with them so that you cannot go out among them. ²⁶ Moreover, **I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be mute** and cannot be a mediator, for they are a rebellious house. ²⁷ But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 24:26-27 NASB*

²⁶ that on that day the refugee will come to you with information for your ears. ²⁷ On that day **your mouth will be opened** to the refugee, and **you will speak and be mute no longer**. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 33:21-22 NASB*

²¹ Now in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month, the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, "The city has been struck down." ²² Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the refugees came. **And he opened my mouth at the time they came to me in the morning; so my mouth was opened and I was no longer mute.**

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

False Hopes of the Survivors in Jerusalem (Ezek. 33:23-29)

Ezekiel learns of survivors in Jerusalem (33:24; see 2 Kgs. 25:12) who believe their survival is a sign of divine choice (like Abraham), and the empty cities and lands of Israel are a divine gift as an inheritance for a new Israel (also like Abraham, see Isa. 51:2 for the same analogy used to make a positive point).

Ezekiel uses language from chapter 18 to describe their evil behavior, matching the language used in 33:10-20.

Ezekiel challenges this view, accusing them of the same lack of self-awareness as the exiles: The future of God's promises lay with the exiles, not with the ruined survivors in Jerusalem (the same message was expressed by Jer. 24 about the good and bad figs).

Ezekiel's Prophetic Word Still Not Taken to Heart (Ezek. 33:30-33)

Just as Ezekiel was warned at the beginning about the opposition he would face (chapters 2-3), so now as his reputation soars as a true prophet (he is the talk of the town, 33:30), he is warned of the opposite response: flattery.

People will flock to hear him, give him lip service, but the reality is that their hearts are as selfish as ever, and their behavior remains unchanged (33:31). Ezekiel must resist the urge to become an entertainer (33:32) and remain faithful to his call as a true prophet (33:33).

Reflection Question

Ezekiel 33 revisits themes from all over the first part of the book. How would you summarize the key themes of this chapter?



Module 5: Israel's Renewal and Restoration

SESSIONS 19-24

The Ezekiel scroll transitions from oracles of judgment to visions of hope. Watch as God gives Ezekiel a glimpse of restoration for his covenant partners.

Session 19: Israel's Shepherd

Key Takeaways

- The biblical authors develop shepherding as a metaphor for leadership throughout the biblical story.
- Israel's kings are condemned as bad shepherds who feed on the flock.
- Yahweh declares he will shepherd the people himself, but he also announces that his servant David will shepherd them too, further expanding the portrait of messianic hope.

Ezekiel 34-48: Israel's Restoration in the Messianic Kingdom

"If Israel's rebellion had meant the destruction of all the great realities through which their relationship with God was expressed and embodied, then the restoration of Israel must involve the restoration of those same realities in a new world order that Yahweh would bring about after the purging of Israel in exile. The chapters that follow outline God's work of restoration at every level of his relationship with Israel."

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [*The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*](#). IVP Academic. 228.

Ezekiel's vision of the restoration is "a future which is dependent not upon man's ability to respond but upon God's willingness to act. The possibility of a response from Israel—however improbable—is not wholly excluded. But at the same time it is expressed in such a way that the response is really no matter of human endeavor but entirely of divine grace. For the stress laid in these passages is the will of God that men should live rather than that they should die."

Ackroyd, Peter R. (1968). [*Exile and Restoration*](#). Westminster John Knox Press. 228.

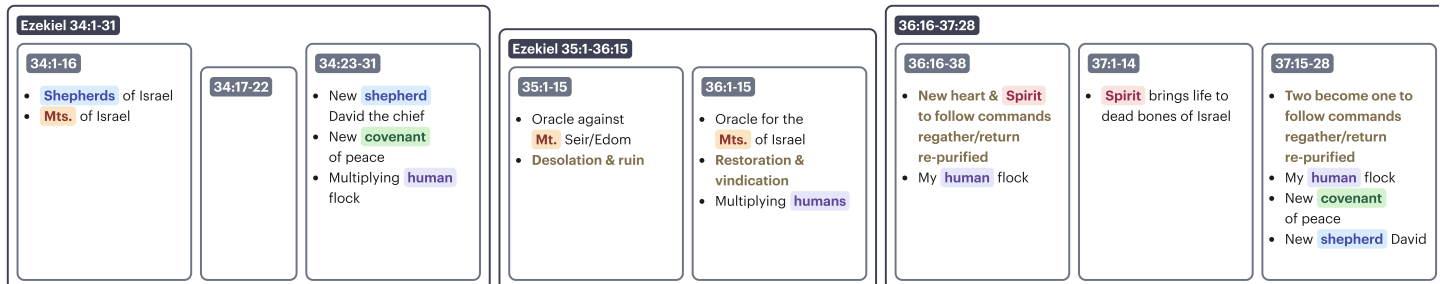
The themes of these chapters pick up the many hints of future restoration Ezekiel has made earlier in the book ([Ezek. 6:8-10](#), [11:17-20](#), [16:53-63](#), [17:22-24](#), [20:39-44](#), [28:24-26](#)). They also follow the logic of the great covenant statement in [Leviticus 26:40-45](#), which held out hope that after bearing the curses of covenant violation, Israel could always repent and turn back to Yahweh, who would renew the covenant (see also [Deut. 4:25-31](#), [30:1-10](#)).

The compositional structure of Ezekiel's oracles of hope shows a systematic restoration of all that was lost in the exile.

1. Restoration of Yahweh as Israel's kingship through the messianic shepherd-king (34)
2. Restoration of Yahweh's land as a place for Israel (35:1-36:15)
3. Restoration of Yahweh's honor (36:16-38)
4. Restoration of Yahweh's covenant people (37)
5. Restoration of Yahweh's rule over all nations (38-39)
6. Restoration of Yahweh's presence among his people (40-46)

7. Restoration of Yahweh's presence in the land (47-48)

Literary Design of Ezekiel 34-37



Ezekiel 34-37. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 34

¹ And the word of Yahweh came to me saying,

² "Son of man, prophesy against **the shepherds of Israel!**

Prophesy and say to them, to **the shepherds,**

'Thus says Yahweh Elohim,

Woe, **shepherds of Israel** who have been **shepherding/feeding** themselves!

Should not **the shepherds feed** **the flock** ?

³ You **feed on** the fat,

and you clothe yourselves with the wool,

you slaughter the fat sheep

you don't **feed** **the flock** .

⁴ **Those who are sick you have not strengthened,**

and the diseased you have not healed,

and the broken you have not bound up,

and the scattered you have not brought back,

and the lost you have not searched for,

but with force and with severity you have ruled them.

⁵ And so they were **scattered** for lack of a **shepherd,**

and **they became** **food** for every beast of the field

and they were **scattered** .

⁶ **My flock** went astray on all the mountains and on every high hill;

and **my flock** was **scattered** over all the face of the land,

and there was **no one to search or seek** for them."

⁷ Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh:

⁸ "As I live," declares Yahweh Elohim,

"surely because **my flock** **has become** **plunder,**

and **my flock** **has become** **food** for all the beasts of the field for lack of a **shepherd**,
and my **shepherds did not search** for **my flock** ,
but rather the **shepherds fed** themselves
and they did not **feed** **my flock** .

⁹ Therefore, you **shepherds**, hear the word of Yahweh:

¹⁰ 'Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
Behold, I am against the **shepherds**,
and I will seek **my flock** from their hand,
and I will make them stop from **feeding** **the flock** ,
and the shepherds will not **feed** themselves anymore,
and I will deliver **my flock** from their mouth,
so that **they will not be** **food** for them."

¹¹ For thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"Look, **I myself will search** for **my flock** and seek them out,
¹² like a **shepherd seeks** for his herd,
on a day when he is among his flock who are spread out,
and I will seek for **my flock** ,
and **I will deliver them** from all the places to which they were **scattered**
on a day of clouds and gloomy darkness,
¹³ and I will bring them out from the peoples
and I will gather them from the lands,
and bring them to their own land;
and I will **feed** them on **the mountains of Israel** ,
by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land.
¹⁴ I will **feed** them in a good **feeding-pastures**,
and their grazing ground will be on **the mountains of Israel** .
There they will lie down on good grazing ground,
and they will feed in rich **feeding-pasture** on **the mountains of Israel** .

¹⁵ I will **feed** **my flock** ,
and I will have them lie down,"
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

¹⁶ "**The lost I will seek,**
the scattered I will return back,
the broken I will bind up,
the sick I will strengthen,
but the fat and the strong I will destroy.
I will **feed** them with **judgment** .

¹⁷ As for you, **my flock** ,"
thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"Look, **I will judge** **between one sheep and another sheep**,
between the rams and the male goats.

18 Is it a small thing for you that you should **feed** in **the good feeding-pasture**,
and that **you tread down with your feet** the rest of your **feeding pastures**,
and that **you drink** of the clear waters,
and that **you must muddy the rest with your feet** ?

19 and that **my flock** must **feed** on what **you tread down with your feet** ,
and that **they must drink** what **you muddy with your feet** ?!"

20 Therefore, thus says Yahweh Elohim to them,
"Look, I, even **I, will judge** **between the fat sheep and the lean sheep**.

21 Because with your side and with shoulder you push others aside,
and you thrust at all the weak with your horns,
until you have scattered them abroad,

22 so **I will deliver my flock** ,
and they will no longer be plunder,
and **I will judge** **between one sheep and another sheep**.

23 **And I will establish over them** one **shepherd**,
and he will **feed** them,
namely, **my servant David** ,
he will **feed** them himself,
and he will be their **shepherd**,

24 **and I, Yahweh, will be their Elohim** ,
and **my servant David** will be chief among them.
I Yahweh have spoken.

25 **I will make a covenant of peace** with them,
and I will stop **harmful animals from the land** ,
so they may live securely in the wilderness,
and so they can sleep in the woods.

26 and I will give them and all around my hill a **blessing** ,
and I will cause **rain** to come down in its season,
and they will be **rains** of **blessing** .

27 and the tree of the field will give its fruit,
and the land will give its increase,
and they will be secure on their land.

And they will know that I am Yahweh,
when I break the bars of their yoke,
and **when I deliver them** from the hand of those who enslaved them.

28 and they will **no longer be a plunder** **for the nations** ,
and **the animals of the land** will not **eat** them,

but they will live securely,
and no one will make them afraid.

29 **I will establish for them** a place of planting for a name,
and they will not again be victims of famine in the land,
and they will **not carry the reproach of the nations** anymore,
30 and they will know that **I, Yahweh their Elohim**, am with them,
and that they, the house of Israel, are my people,”
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.
31 “And as for you, my flock,
the flock of my pasture,
you are humans,
and I am your Elohim,”
utterance of Yahweh Elohim.

Ezekiel 34:1-31. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Judgment on Israel’s Shepherds

Ezekiel addresses Israel’s shepherd-leaders in [34:1-16](#). Shepherd is a key royal metaphor used of Israel’s rulers ([2 Sam. 5:2](#), [7:7](#)) and of Yahweh as king ([Hos. 4:16](#); [Mic. 7:14](#)). Ezekiel seems to have picked up Jeremiah’s similar accusation ([Jer. 23:1-6](#)) and developed it. Israel’s kings have failed and abused their position (see their portrayal in 1-2 Kgs.), so Yahweh will remove them and personally come to restore and rule his people.

Judgement Between the Sheep and the Goats

In [Ezekiel 34:17-22](#), Israel’s leaders have become resistant to the purposes of their God, and so they have become God’s enemy. The imagery of feeding and drinking and robbing from the poor fits with the more detailed social critique of Israel’s leaders found in the other prophets like [Amos 5-6](#) or [Micah 3-5](#).

Notice how this scene became a foundational metaphor for Jesus in his critique of Israel’s leaders who rejected his disciples and their message of the Kingdom of God ([Matt. 25:31-46](#)).

Israel’s Bad Goats and the New Shepherd

Ezekiel extends the shepherd metaphor throughout the next section ([Ezek. 34:23-31](#)).

The messianic king is set over the people in 34:23-24. He is “one shepherd” (see the reunion of the covenant people in [37:15-28](#)), “my servant” (see [Isa. 40-55](#)), “a ruler/prince” (Heb. *nasi*). The word “king” (Heb. *melek*) is mostly avoided in Ezekiel to distinguish this messianic figure from the recent sons of David who utterly failed.

Expanding the theme in 34:25-29, Ezekiel recalls the covenantal blessings from [Leviticus 26:3-13](#) and [Deuteronomy 28:1-14](#). Ezekiel quotes the classic covenantal formula (34:24, 30) and sees a renewal of the covenant.

Notice the interplay of Yahweh's personal action and that of the messianic king in this chapter. Yahweh will "tend as shepherd" (34:14) and be a "shepherd in the midst of his flock" (34:12). Messiah will "tend as shepherd" (34:23) and be a "ruler in the midst of them" (34:24).

The vocabulary used of Yahweh's shepherding activity seems to have influenced Jesus' view of his own mission. Yahweh "saves" and "gathers" the scattered sheep (34:13), "leads them to good pasture" (34:14), "causes them to lie down" (34:15), and "seeks the lost, restores the scattered, binds up the broken, strengthens the weak" (34:16). Compare this to [Matthew 9:36](#), [10:6](#), [25:31-33](#); [Luke 15:3-7](#), [19:9](#); and [John 10](#).

Tale of Two Mountains: Judgment on Mount Seir, Salvation for Mountains of Israel

[Ezekiel 35:1-36:15](#) has been edited together as a single literary unit consisting of two contrasting panels (35:1 governs the whole section and parallels 36:1). Both panels focus on the desolation of the mountains of Israel, the resulting public shame, and their restoration due to Yahweh's mercy.

Oracle Against Mount Seir (Ezek. 35:1-15)

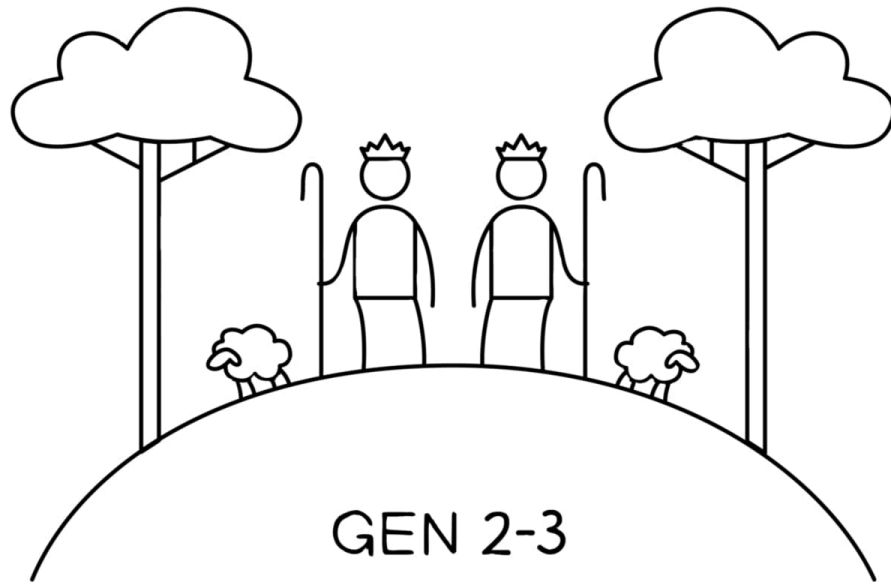
The Edomites (who inhabited the mountains of Seir) took advantage of the vacuum created by the Babylonian exile by quickly plundering the remains of Israel (35:10, 36:2; [Obad. 1:8-14](#); [Ps. 137:7](#)). Therefore, the mountains of Edom will suffer the same fate as the mountains of Israel under the covenant curses (35:3-4 echo [6:14](#)).

Oracle to the Mountains of Israel (Ezek. 36:1-15)

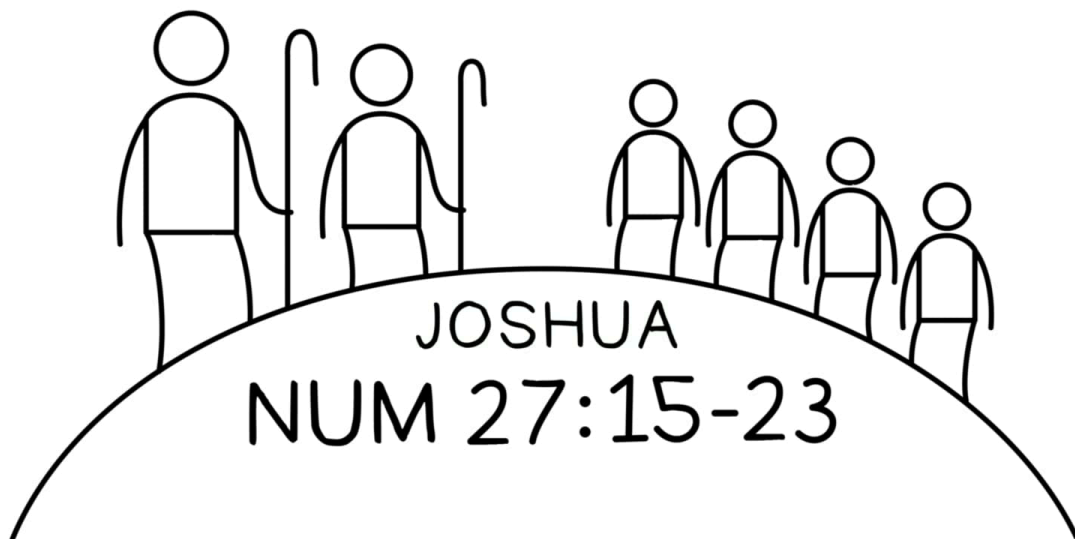
In a reversal of [chapter 6](#), Ezekiel announces restoration for the mountains of Israel as a sign to the rest of the world. There is likely a wordplay at work in 36:5 in which Edom is linked with all nations (the Hebrew consonants of Edom are the same as the word "humanity," אדם).

The vocabulary of this restoration is all drawn from the covenant blessings of Leviticus 26:3-10, but this begs the question, How will Israel change and become obedient to the covenant to experience its blessings, given their pattern of failure? The next section answers this question.

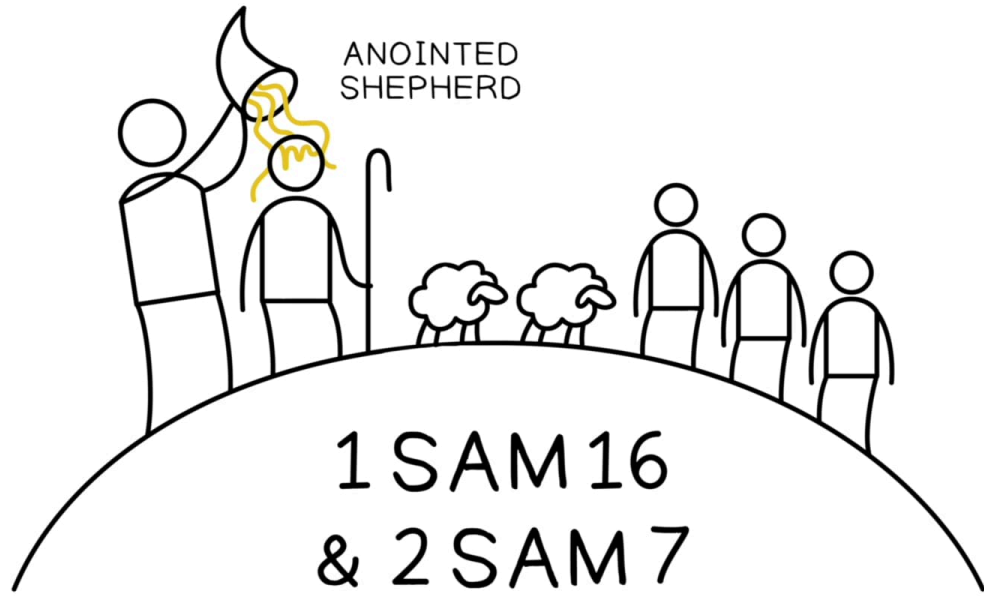
Shepherds Caring for God's People



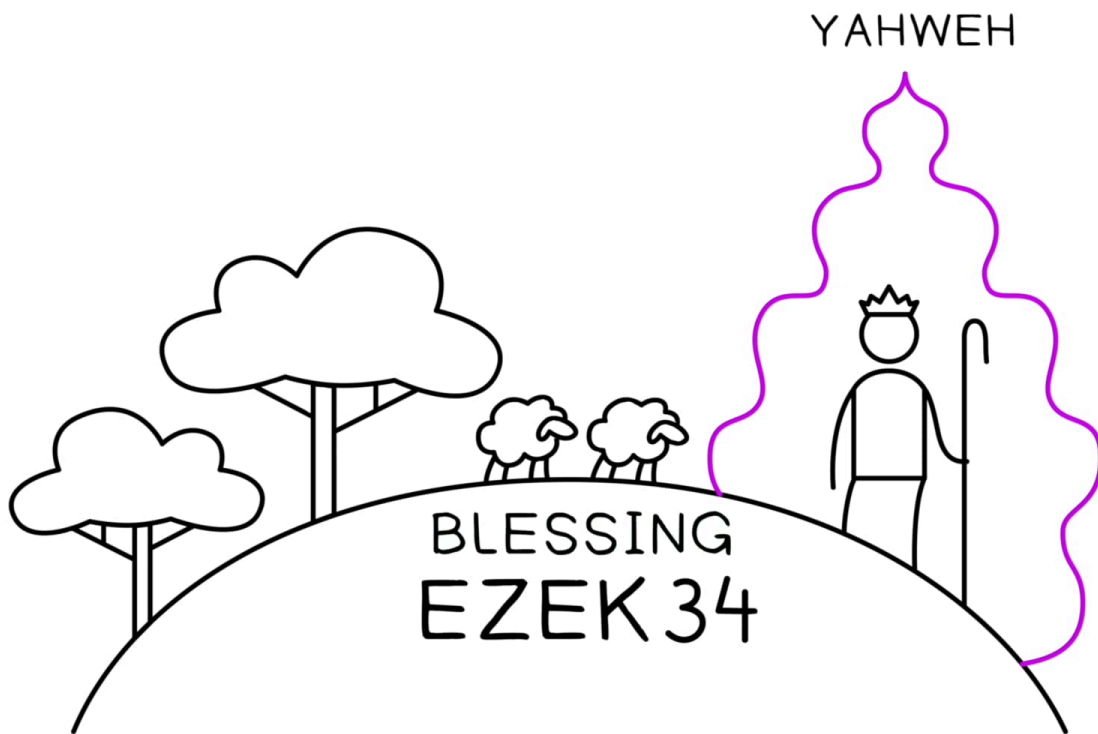
Shepherds Caring for God's People 1. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).



Shepherds Caring for God's People 2. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).



Shepherds Caring for God's People 3. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).



Shepherds Caring for God's People 4. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

What significance do you find in the interplay between God's action and human partnership when God says both "I will" shepherd the flock and "my servant David ... will tend them" (Ezek. 34:11-24)?

Session 20: New Heart, New Spirit

Key Takeaways

- Defiling or profaning something is to take something holy and treat it as though it is common.
- Israel's violence and injustice have profaned God's holy name, making it appear to the nations that Yahweh is unjust and powerless.
- God will restore Israel and give the people a new heart and his own Spirit. By doing this, he will demonstrate his character to the world.
- God accomplishes his purposes by enabling his human partners to participate in God's own life by his Spirit.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 36:16-38

16 Then the word of Yahweh came to me saying,
17 "Son of a human,
the house of Israel was living in their own land,
and they made it **impure** through their ways and their deeds;
like the **impurity** of **menstrual blood**, so their ways were before me,
18 and I poured out on them my hot-anger,
because of the **blood** which they had spilled on the land,
and because they had made it **impure** with their dung-balls.
19 And I scattered them among **the nations**,
and they were dispersed throughout **the lands**.
According to their ways and their deeds I judged them.

20 "And they went to the nations where they went,
and they **profaned my holy name**,
because it was said of them,
'These are the people of Yahweh,
yet they have come out of his land.'
21 But I had concern for **my holy name**,
which the house of Israel had **profaned**
among the nations where they went.

22 Therefore say to the house of Israel,
'Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act,
but for the sake of my holy name which you have profaned
among the nations where you went.
23 I will demonstrate the holiness of my great name,
which has been profaned among the nations,
which you have profaned in their midst,
and the nations will know that I am Yahweh,"
declares Yahweh Elohim,
"when I demonstrate myself as holy among you in their eyes.

24 And I will take you from the nations,
and I will gather you from all the lands,
and I will bring you into your own land.

25 And I will sprinkle pure water on you,
and you will be purified from all your impurities,
and I will purify you from all your idols,

26 and I will give you a new heart,
and a new spirit I will put within you,
and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh,
and I will give you a heart of flesh.

27 and my Spirit I will put within you,
and I will make it so that you will walk in my statutes,
and you will keep and do what I decide,
28 you will live in the land that I gave to your fathers,
and you will be my people,
and I will be your Elohim.

29 And I will rescue you from all your impurities,
and I will call for the grain and multiply it,
and I will not bring a famine on you,
30 and I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field,
so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.

31 And you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good,
and you will despise yourselves before your face for your iniquities and your abominations,

32 I am not doing this for your sake,"

declares Yahweh Elohim,
"Let that be known to you!
Be ashamed and humiliated for your ways, O house of Israel!"

33 Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"On the day that I **purify** you from all your iniquities,
I will cause the cities to **be inhabited** ,
and the **waste places** will **be rebuilt** ,
34 and the **desolate** land will **be worked** ,
instead of being a **desolation** in the eyes of all who pass by,

35 **and they will say** ,
'This **desolate** land has become like **the garden of Eden** ,
and the **wasted, desolate** and **torn down cities** are fortified and **inhabited** .'
36 **and the nations** that are remaining round about you,
they will know that I, Yahweh,
I have rebuilt the **torn down** places,
I have planted what was **desolate** .
I, Yahweh, have spoken and will do it."

37 Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them:
I will make them **multiply** like a **flock** of humans,
38 like a **flock** of **holy ones** ,
like a **flock** at Jerusalem during her appointed times,
so will the **wasted cities** **be filled** with **flocks** of humans.
And they will know that I am Yahweh.""

Ezekiel 36:16-38. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Restoration for the Failed Covenant Partners

This is a retelling of the story of Israel's fall into exile, but from Yahweh's perspective and highlighting the effect Israel's exile had on his reputation among the nations.

Yahweh's "holy name" and reputation was "defiled" by Israel's apostasy and exile (Ezek. 36:20-21). The fate of nations was popularly linked to the fate of their national deity (see the same logic from the lips of an Assyrian commander in 2 Kgs. 18:33-35). Israel's exile meant Yahweh was perceived as merely a tribal god who lost to Marduk and couldn't defend his people (remember Moses' appeal to the same logic in Exod. 32:12; Num. 14:16).

Yahweh will restore Israel to "hallow" his name (Ezek. 36:22-24). Restoration from exile will not depend on the quality of Israel's repentance. Rather, it will be purely driven by Yahweh's desire to be known truly among the

nations as the creator and redeemer God of all nations (note Jesus' allusion to this line in the Lord's prayer in [Matt. 6:9](#)).

The restoration is a multifaceted divine response to Israel's fate (themes drawn from [Deut. 30](#)).

- Ezekiel 36:24: restoration to the promised land
- Ezekiel 36:25: ceremonial cleansing from moral impurity (borrowing language from [Num. 19](#), the ceremony of the red heifer)

A New Heart and Spirit

In [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#), God says he will give his people a new heart and spirit. "Heart" (Heb. *lev*) is the center of will and emotion, and "spirit" (Heb. *ruakh*) is the animating life energy, which is then qualified as "my Spirit in you" which will enable Israel to obey the terms of the covenant (from [Lev. 26:3](#); the theme here is entirely drawn from [Deut. 30:1-10](#) and explored later by Paul in [Rom. 7-8](#)).

Ezekiel expresses a theme that echoes in other literature from the period of exile.

Jeremiah 31:18-19 NASB

I have surely heard Ephraim grieving, "You have chastised me, and I was chastised, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may turn back, for you are the LORD my God. For after I turned back, I repented."

Jeremiah 32:38-40 NASB

They shall be my people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from me.

Lamentations 5:21 NASB

Restore us to you, O LORD, that we may be restored; Renew our days as of old ...

"God will no longer gamble with Israel as he did in old times, and Israel rebelled against him; in the future—no more experiments! God will put his spirit into them, he will alter their hearts (their minds) and make it impossible for them to be anything but obedient to his rules and his commandments. The declaration abandons all hope that Israel, in her present condition, can achieve the ideals of covenant relationship originally intended by Yahweh. The status quo can be altered only by direct divine intervention."

Greenberg, Moshe (1995). "Three Conceptions of Torah in the Hebrew Bible." [Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought](#). Jewish Publication Society.

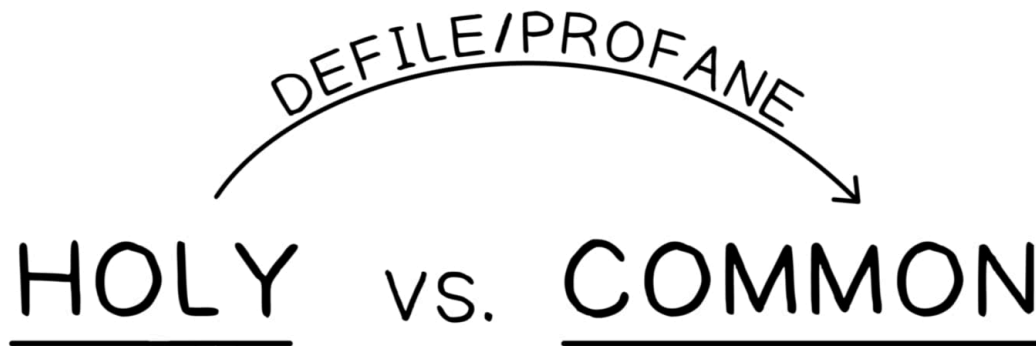
In [36:28-30](#), Ezekiel takes the covenant restoration blessings from [Leviticus 26:42-45](#) and turns them into promises of future hope.

Shame and Hope

While Yahweh has removed the public disgrace of Israel among the nations (36:15 Heb. *kelimmah* = public dishonor), Israel before the exile was unable to experience guilt-shame for its covenant faithlessness (for more on this motif see Jer. 3:3, 6:15, 8:12; Heb. *bosh* and *qut*, same as used in 36:31-32). Paradoxically, Yahweh's salvation will instill a proper moral awareness that can feel healthy guilt for wrongdoing (similar to Paul's self-awareness in 1 Tim. 1:15).

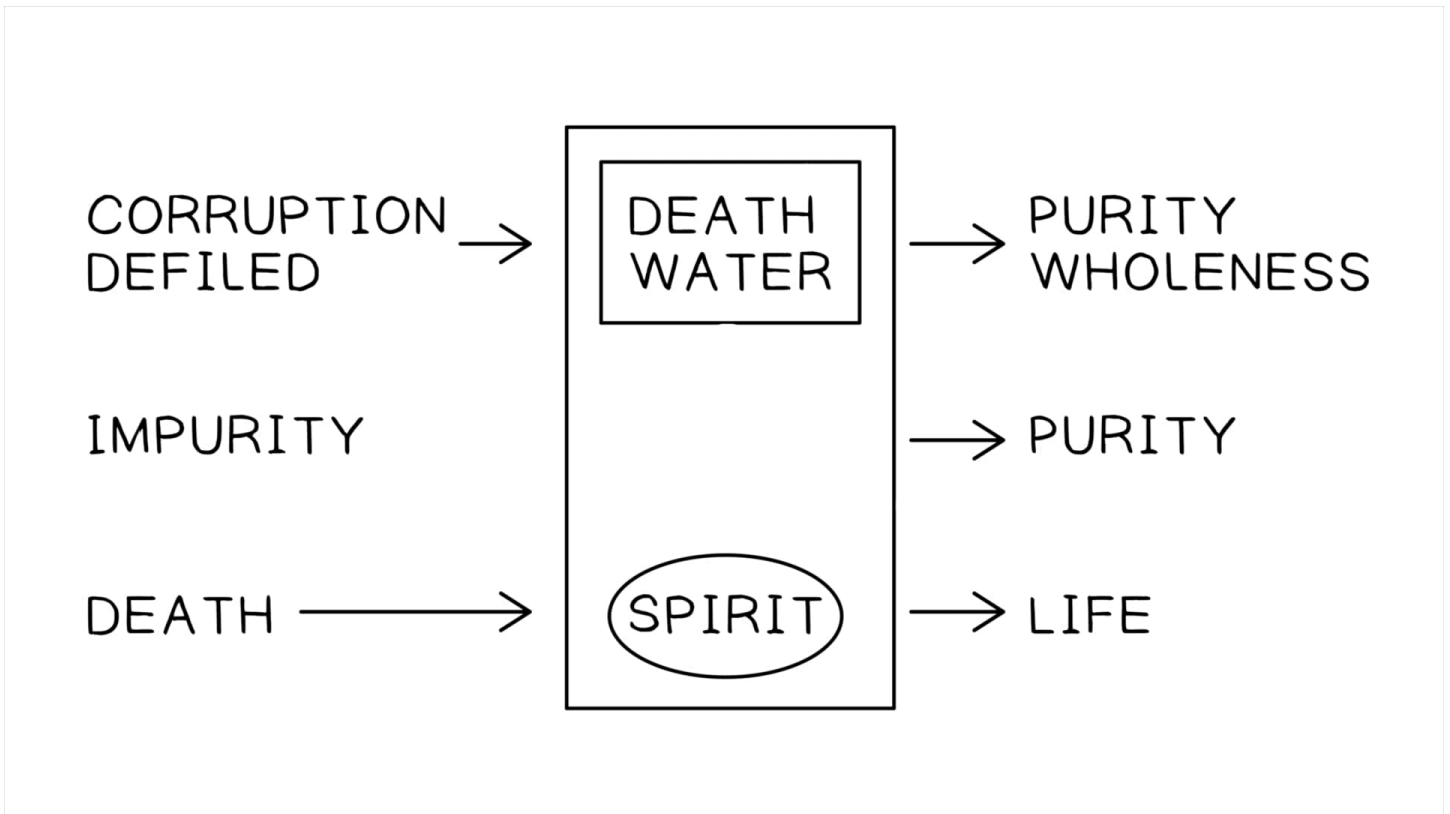
The exiles will return, rebuild, and restore the land to Eden-like conditions, and all for the purpose of the nations paying attention and acknowledging Yahweh (Ezek. 36:33-38).

Holy Versus Common



Holy Vs. Common. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The Waters and the Spirit



The Waters and the Spirit. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How does God plan to restore the reputation of his name among the nations?

Session 21: The Valley of Dry Bones

Key Takeaways

- The Eden story establishes a thematic link between exile and death.
- Israel's history replays the Eden narrative, from God placing his chosen people in the land of blessing to their failure and exile from the land.
- The valley of dry bones is a metaphor where raising the dead to life points to new creation life in covenant restoration.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹ The hand of Yahweh was upon me,
and he brought me out by the **ruakh** of Yahweh,
and rested me in the middle of the **valley** ,
and it was filled with **bones** ,

² and he made me pass among them round and round,
and look, there were very many on the surface of the **valley** ,
and look, they were very dry.

³ And he said to me,
"Son of a human,
can **these bones** **come to life** ?"

And I answered,
"Lord Yahweh, you know."

⁴ And he said to me,
"**Prophesy** over **these bones** ,
and say to them,

'O dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh.

⁵ Thus says Yahweh Elohim to these bones,
Look I will cause **ruakh** to enter you, so you can **come to life** ,

⁶ **and I will put sinews on you,**
and I will make flesh come up over you,
and I will cover you with skin,

and I will put **ruakh** in you, so you can **come to life** ,
and you will know that I am Yahweh."

7 **And so I prophesied as I was commanded** ,
and as I **prophesied** , there was a noise,
and look a shaking,
and the **bones** came together, **bone** to its **bone** ,
8 **and I looked, and look: sinews were on them,**
and flesh came up over them,
and skin covered them from above,
but **there was no ruakh in them** .

9 And he said to me,
“ **Prophesy** to the **ruakh** ,
Prophesy , Son of a human,
and say to the **ruakh** ,
'Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
Come from the four **rukhot** , O **ruakh** ,
and **breathe** on **these slain ones** ,
so they can **come to life** .”

10 **And I prophesied as he commanded me** ,
and **the ruakh entered into them** ,
and they **came to life** ,
and stood on their feet, a very great army.

11 And he said to me,
“Son of man,
these bones are the whole house of Israel;
look, they are saying,
'**Our bones** are **dried up** ,
and our hope has **perished** .
We are completely **cut off** .'”

12 Therefore, **prophesy** and **you say to them** ,
' **Thus says Yahweh Elohim** ,
Behold, **I will open up your graves** ,
and **I will cause you to come up out of your graves, my people;**
and **I will bring you into the land** of Israel,
13 **and you will know that I am Yahweh** ,
when **I have opened your graves** ,
and when **I have caused you to come up out of your graves, my people.**
14 and I will put my **ruakh** within you and you will **come to life** ,
and **I will rest you on your own land** ,
and you will know that I, Yahweh , have spoken and done it,'

declares Yahweh.”

Ezekiel 37:1-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The Resurrection of Israel

As a priest, Ezekiel would have been prohibited from contact with corpses and bones, but Yahweh gives him a thorough tour of a bone-littered valley ([37:1-2](#)). The question ([37:3](#)) borders on farce: “Can these bones live?” Ezekiel knows Yahweh as creator of all life, and he surely knows the rare stories of Yahweh reviving the recently dead ([1 Kgs. 17:17-24](#); [2 Kgs. 4:18-37](#)), but to resurrect and re-create new humans out of age-old scattered bones is beyond his comprehension.

[Ezekiel 37:5-10](#) is a remarkable scene with clear echoes of [Genesis 2:7](#). The new life of these long dead bones will be nothing other than an act of new creation, and the prominent role of God’s “spirit” (*ruakh*, used in all of its nuances of “spirit, wind, breath”) links back to the promise of [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#).

The Meaning and Significance of Ezekiel’s Vision

In [Ezekiel 37:11](#), Jerusalem has fallen, its people have been exiled in Babylon for who knows how long, and the hope of the exiles has vanished and despair has set in.

The only hope Israel has for future covenant relationship with Yahweh will be his life-creating power to completely resurrect the nation from “the grave” (= exile in Babylon) to new life in the promised land ([Ezek. 37:12-14](#)).

Resurrection in the Hebrew Bible

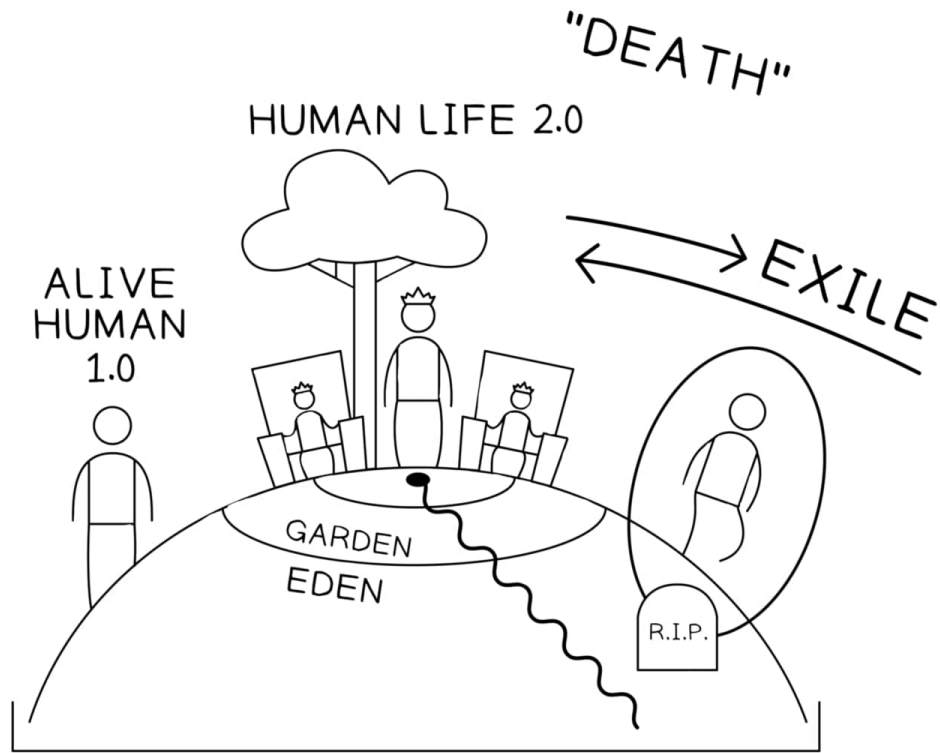
The Hebrew Bible contains many affirmations that Yahweh is not in competition with the gods of the underworld (Molech, etc.), and he alone is the God of the living and the dead ([Deut. 32:39](#); [1 Sam. 2:6](#); [Ps. 104:29-30](#)).

The Psalms contain a number of hopeful expressions that Yahweh’s faithfulness must extend beyond the grave ([Ps. 16:10](#), [49:15](#), [73:23-26](#)).

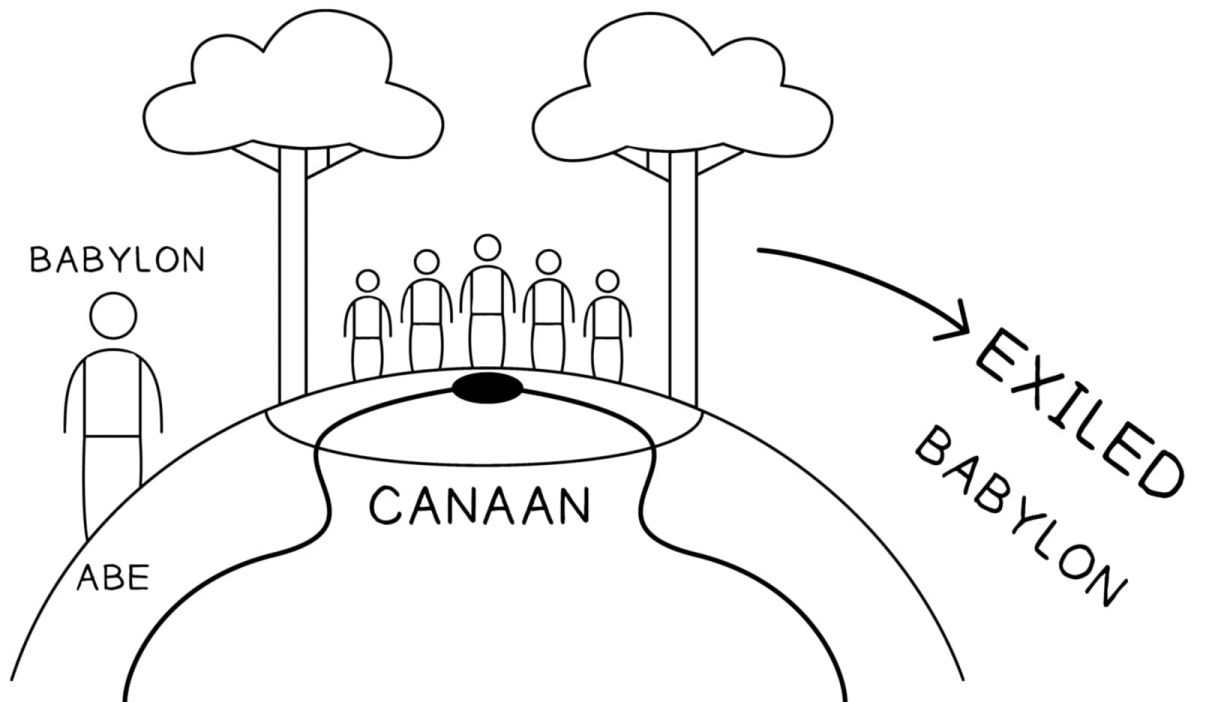
Other prophets pick up this imagery and use “death” as an image for exile and “resurrection” as an image for national and covenantal restoration ([Hos. 6:1-3](#), [13:14](#)).

Ezekiel’s use of resurrection imagery is symbolic of national and covenantal restoration (see [37:13](#)). But this chapter is a key link in the development of the idea that Israel’s restoration to fulfill the promises to Abraham would necessitate something like an actual resurrection of the dead for Israel first, then all humanity: [Isaiah 25:7-8](#), [26:19](#), and [Daniel 12:1-3](#).

Restoration of Israel as a Return to Eden



Restoration of Israel as a Return to Eden 1. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).



Restoration of Israel as a Return to Eden 2. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How does the Eden story shape the prophetic imagination about exile and restoration?

Session 22: The Reunification of Israel

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 2 introduces an Eden ideal of unity when the lone human is divided into two and then united in covenant.
- Reconciliation in the messiah is an act of new creation.
- Ezekiel 37:15-28 is the crescendo of chapters 34-37, recalling the language and themes of the previous units.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 37:15-28

15 And the word of Yahweh came again to me, saying:

16 “And you, Son of a human,
take for yourself **one wood-piece** and write on it:

‘For Judah
and for the sons of Israel,
his companions.’

And take **one wood-piece** and write on it:

‘For Joseph,
the **wood-piece** of Ephraim,
and all the house of Israel, his companions.’

17 And make them come near, **one** to **one**, for yourself,
into **one wood-piece**,
and they will be one in your hand.

18 And when the sons of your people speak to you saying,
‘Will you not declare to us what these mean to you?’

19 say to them,
‘Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
“Look, I will take the **wood-piece** of Joseph,
which is in the hand of Ephraim,
and the tribes of Israel, his companions,
and I will put them with it,
with the **wood-piece** of Judah,
and I will make them into **one wood-piece**,

and they will be **one** in my hand.”

20 And the **wood-pieces** on which you write,
they will be in your hand before their eyes.

21 And say to them,

‘Thus says Yahweh Elohim,

“Look, **I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone**,
and I will gather them from every side,
and I will bring them into **their own land**;

22 and I will make them **one nation in the land**, on the mountains of Israel;
and **one king** will be king for all of them,
and they will no longer be two nations,
and they will no longer be divided into **two kingdoms**.

23 **And they will no longer be** made **impure**

by their dung-balls,
or by their detestable things,
or by any of their transgressions,

and **I will rescue them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned**,
and I will **purify** them,
and they will be my people,
and I will be their Elohim.

24 And **my servant David will be king** over them,
and they will all have **one** shepherd,
and they will walk in my decisions,
and they will keep my statutes,
and they will do them,

25 and **they will dwell** on **the land**,
which I gave to **my servant**, **to Jacob**,
on which your fathers **dwelt**,
and **they will dwell** on it,
they and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever;
and **David my servant will be their chief forever**.

26 And I will cut a **covenant of peace** with them,
and it will be a **forever covenant** with them,
and I will place them and make them multiply,

and will place **my sanctuary in their midst forever**,

27 and **my dwelling place** also will be with them,

**and I will be their Elohim
and they will be my people,**

²⁸ and the nations will know that I am Yahweh who makes Israel holy,
when **my sanctuary is in their midst forever** .””

Ezekiel 37:15-28. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Two Pieces of Wood, Israel’s Reunion, and the New Temple

The two objects are literally called “trees” (Heb. *’ets / יָט*), which could either be a wooden staff/scepter of some kind, or perhaps a writing tablet made of wood (see Block, [The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48](#)), which could be joined with others into a notebook of sorts.

The sign act is dominated by vocabulary about “one/unity/unified” (Heb. *’ekhad* occurs 11 times in this section) and foretells the reunification of the divided people of Israel, a rift that goes back approximately 400 years by Ezekiel’s day (see [1 Kgs. 12-13](#)). The sign act emphasizes that there is one future hope in one renewed covenant for the one people of God.

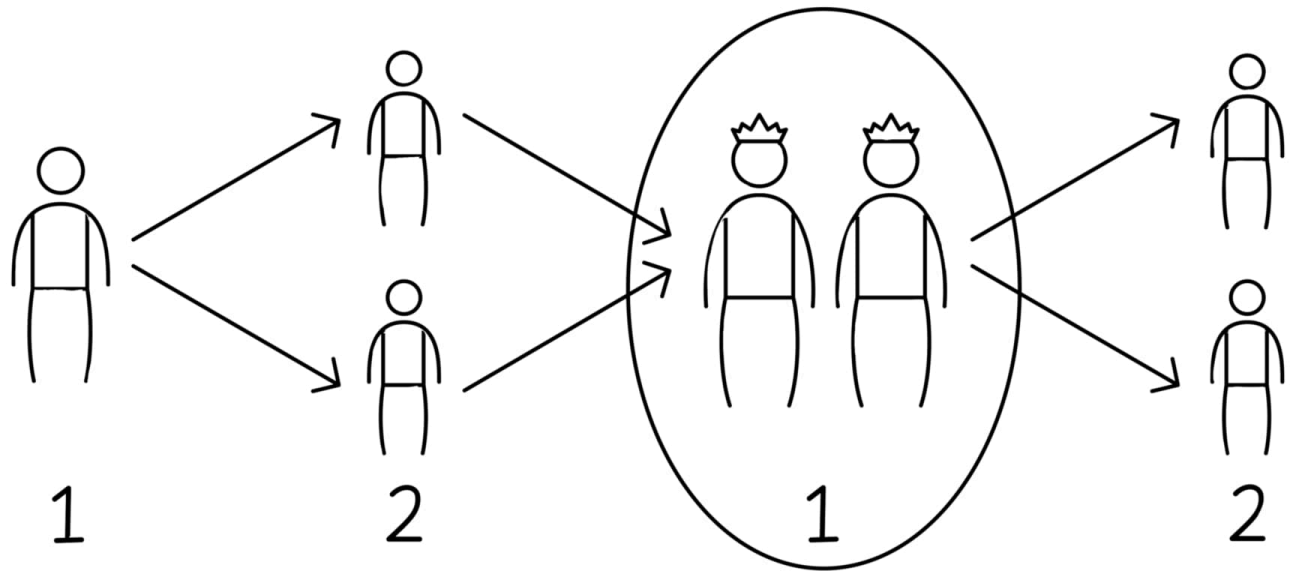
[Ezekiel 37:22-28](#) picks up vocabulary and images from all the oracles of hope in chapters 34-37 and puts them all together in a mosaic.

- 37:21: Regathering the exiles from among the nations ([11:17](#); [20:34, 41](#); [28:25](#); [34:13](#))
- 37:22, 24-25: Future messianic king/new David ([34:23-24](#))
- 37:23: Purification from impurity and idolatry ([36:25](#))
- 37:24: Israel’s obedience to the Torah ([36:27](#))
- 37:25: Abundant life in the land promised to the patriarchs ([36:28](#))
- 37:26: Eternal covenant of peace ([34:2](#) covenant of peace, and [16:60](#) eternal covenant)
- 37:28: The nations recognize Yahweh ([36:21-23](#))

The final lines of 37:26-28 point forward to chapters 40-48 with a renewed Israel back in the promised land and Yahweh’s new temple right in the middle.

One Becomes Many Reunited

GEN 2



One Becomes Many Reunited. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

Why is unity such an important topic for the biblical authors?

Session 23: Gog and the Snake

Key Takeaways

- Gog represents opposition to God's purposes from all the other nations that have not entered Israel's story.
- For God to bring blessing to the whole world, he must confront the influence of the snake in all the nations.
- Ancestry doesn't determine who we are before God. How we respond to God determines our relationship with God.

Yahweh's Victory Over Evil Among the Nations

In [Ezekiel 38-39](#) two great themes from earlier in the book are taken up.

1. The restoration of Israel as Yahweh's covenant people so that his glorious presence that left the temple can be restored.
2. The restoration of Yahweh's tarnished reputation among the nations due to Israel's disobedience and exile.

Ezekiel 38-48 addresses these themes in reverse order.

The Gog Oracles

These chapters are a hiatus between the promise of a future temple in [Ezekiel 37:26-28](#) and its realization in chapters 40-48. The subject is how Yahweh will deal with the still existing threat of evil and rebellion among the nations as part of his plan to restore his world. After Yahweh has dealt with evil among his own covenant people, he turns his attention to the nations to do the same.

The key text that these chapters look back to is the central oracle of the oracles against the nations, [Ezekiel 28:25-26](#), which was not about the nations, but about Yahweh's vindication of Israel in the eyes of the nations who had scorned them. Specifically, it said that Israel would be restored back to its land, living securely "when I execute judgment upon all those round about them who scorn them" ([28:26](#)). It seems that chapters [38-39](#) take up this earlier unique idea of a further divine defeat of rebellious nations after Israel's restoration, and develop and expand upon it further.

The oracles are structured as two large panels, each consisting of four distinct sections with parallel introductions (in [Ezek. 38:1-4](#) and [39:1-2](#)) and conclusions ([Ezek. 38:23](#) and [39:21-29](#)). The flow of the oracles does not follow a linear logic, and the chapters are full of allusive language and imagery from earlier prophetic oracles along with grotesque, extreme images.

The Symmetrical Design of Ezekiel 38–39

The Defeat of Gog: Take 1	The Defeat and Disposal of Gog: Take 2
<p>38:1-9: Gog and his army are summoned by Yahweh to the mountains of Israel</p> <p>“Son of man, set your face against Gog ... and prophecy against him and say, ‘Thus says Yahweh, Look I am against you Gog, head ruler of Meshek and Tuval, and I will lead you out ...’”</p>	<p>39:1-8: Gog and his army are summoned and defeated by Yahweh on the mountains of Israel</p> <p>“And you Son of man, prophecy against Gog and say, ‘Thus says Yahweh, Look I am against you Gog, head ruler of Meshek and Tuval, and I will lead you out ...’”</p>
<p>38:10-13: Gog’s motives: to get plunder</p> <p>“Have you come to plunder plunder? Have you gathered your gathering to despoil the spoil?” (38:12)</p>	<p>39:9-16: Gog’s remains are burned, plundered, and then buried</p> <p>“And [the residents of Israel] will plunder their plunderers, and they will get spoil from those who got spoil from them.” (39:10)</p>
<p>38:14-16: Gog and his army are summoned by Yahweh so that the nations acknowledge Yahweh</p>	<p>39:17-24: Gog’s remains are consumed in a sacrificial feast</p>
<p>38:17-23: The four-fold defeat of Gog Earthquake, sword, plague, and flood & fire</p> <p>“And I will show myself as great, and I will show myself as holy, and I will be acknowledged in the eyes of the nations and you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.” (38:23)</p>	<p>39:25-29: Yahweh is acknowledged among Israel and the nations when he defeats Gog and restores Israel</p> <p>“And I will show myself as holy through them in the eyes of many nations, and they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh their God.” (39:27-28)</p>
<p><i>The Defeat of Gog. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).</i></p>	

The Scriptural Roots of the Gog Oracles

These two chapters are the end result of a long-developing theme that began in [Genesis 3](#), with the deceptive snake and the promise of perpetual hostility between the seed of the snake and the seed of the woman.

Genesis 3:14-15 NASB*

¹⁴ And Yahweh *Elohim* said to the snake,
“Because you have done this,
you are cursed more than all cattle,
and more than every beast of the field;
on your belly you will go,
and dust you will eat
all the days of your life;

¹⁵ And **I will put hostility between you and the woman,**
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall strike your head,
and you shall strike his heel.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This promise of perpetual hostility between the lineage of God’s promise and the lineage of the deceptive spiritual powers at work in creation is developed in the following narrative of Adam and Eve’s three sons: the brothers Cain, Abel, and Seth.

Cain is consumed by an animal called “sin” that compels him to murder the seed of the woman. Cain's lineage leads to the founding of the city of blood in Genesis 4:17-24 and the lineage of Tubal-Qayin. Adam and Eve’s lineage restarts with Seth which leads to the worship of Yahweh (Gen. 4:26).

This “sibling hostility” between the seed of the woman and the seed of the snake continues in the story of Noah, a new Adam figure, who also has three sons who end up at odds with each other after the blessings and curses issued by their father.

Genesis 9:25-27 Instructor's Translation

²⁵ And he said:
“Cursed be **Canaan,**
a **servant of servants**
he will be **to his brothers.**”

²⁶ And he said:
“Blessed be Yahweh,
God of **Shem,**
and may Canaan be a **servant to him/them.**

²⁷ May God enlarge **Japheth,**
and may he dwell in the tents of **Shem**
and may **Canaan** be a **servant to him/them.**”

A Future for Japheth ... and Shem ... and Canaan

Noah’s word that God would “enlarge” (יפת) Japheth plays on his name in Hebrew, Yephet (יפת). The name comes from the root *patah* = “to make large.” Noah anticipates that Japheth’s territory will be expanded in the future.

The enlarging of Japheth invites the reader to study the list of Japheth's descendants in Genesis 10:2-5.

Genesis 10:2-5 NASB*

² The sons of Japheth:

Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras.

³ The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz and Riphath and Togarmah.

⁴ The sons of Javan were Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim.

⁵ From these the islands of the nations were separated into their lands ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Here we find tribes and nations that mostly make up ancient Anatolia (Roman Asia Minor, modern Turkey) and Greece. Noah anticipates that these tribes and nations will enlarge their territory and make their way into the territory of Shem.

"May he dwell in the tents of Shem" could be interpreted in two different ways.

"To displace, to disinherit"

There are some contexts where one group "dwelling in the tent" of another is the result of conflict and dispossession.

Psalms 78:55 NASB

[Yahweh] also drove out the nations before them, and apportioned them for an inheritance by measurement, and made the tribes of Israel **dwell in their tents**.

1 Chronicles 5:10 NASB*

In the days of Saul they made war with the Hagarites, who fell by their hand, so that they **dwelt in their tents** throughout all the land east of Gilead.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

On this reading, Noah's words anticipate a future conflict between all of his children where Japheth dispossesses Shem from his tent and makes Canaan his slave. Many texts throughout the Hebrew Bible activate this meaning. For example, this meaning is possible when the nations at war with Israel are from Japheth, or when a future conflict is anticipated between Israel and the nations.

In [Genesis 14](#), five kings of the east (two from Ham and two from Japheth) come to enslave four rebellious kings of Canaan. In the conflict, Lot, a descendant of Shem, is taken captive. Abram, a son of Shem, and two Canaanite allies defeat the five kings and restore the captives. The Canaanite priest king Melchizedek also appears in this narrative, and he worships the creator God and blesses Abram.

The pagan prophet Balaam speaks about the future conflict between Noah's sons ([Num. 24:23-24](#)). He speaks of a descendant of Japheth, the Kittim, who will come to oppress Asshur (from Ham and Shem) and Eber (from Shem).

This conflict is expanded and developed in [Daniel 7:12](#) in the sequence of empires leading up to the final beast and horn that will displace the sons of Ham (Assyria and Babylon) and Shem (the Israelites) in terms of

political power in the land promised to Abraham.

Noah's blessing on Japheth and its relation to the table of nations in Genesis 10 is also behind Ezekiel's fascinating oracle about Gog of Magog. Magog is a seed of Japheth and rules over his brothers Meshek and Tubal. He also brings the sons of Ham (Cush and Put) and non-Israelite sons of Shem (Persia/Elam) as mercenaries in his war with Israel after its restoration from exile. Ezekiel brings together the common Day of Yahweh motif where Yahweh destroys the seed of the serpent from among the nations (see [Isa. 13-14](#); [Joel 3-4](#); [Zech. 14](#)).

"To live together with"

Living in the same tent is an image of unity in some texts.

Psalm 15:1 NIV*

Yahweh, who may **dwell in your sacred tent** ? Who may live on your holy mountain?

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The ideal state of God's covenant people is to "dwell in his tent," that is, to live with him in peace and harmony.

Job 11:14-15 NIV

¹⁴ If you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil **to dwell in your tent** ,

¹⁵ then, free of fault, you will lift up your face; you will stand firm and without fear.

Job's friends accuse him of living in unity with evil, which must be why he's suffering.

Psalm 120:5 NIV

Woe to me that I **dwell** in Meshek, that I **live among the tents** of Kedar!

The poet laments that he has to live in the tents of Meshek (a descendant of Japheth) and Kedar (a son of Ishmael).

On this reading, Noah's words anticipate a day when all of his sons will live together in peace so that the "nations" (sons of Japheth) would be incorporated into the "tents of Shem," that is, experience Yahweh's covenant blessings.

- Genesis [12:1-3](#), [17:3-8](#), and [22:15-18](#) all point to this incorporation of the nations into the blessing of Abraham's family.
- [Isaiah 2:1-4](#) and [chapter 60](#) depict this gathering of the nations to live in the new Jerusalem and experience its abundance.
- [Zechariah 2:10-13](#) and [8:23](#) depict this same inclusion of the nations in the post-exile restoration of God's covenant people.

Zechariah 2:10-11 NASB

¹⁰ “Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,” declares the LORD. ¹¹ “Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become my people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.”

Interestingly, Zechariah 14 brings together both potential meanings of Genesis 9:27. First there is a great conflict between the sons of Noah, resulting in a remnant among the nations that comes to the new Jerusalem to experience its Eden blessings.

Zechariah 14:1-3, 9-11, 16 NASB*

¹ Behold, a day is coming for Yahweh when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. ² For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle ... ³ Then Yahweh will go forth and fight against those nations, as when he fights on a day of battle. ...

⁹ And the LORD will be King over all the earth; in that day Yahweh will be the only one, and his name the only one. ¹⁰ All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin’s Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king’s wine presses. ¹¹ People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security. ...

¹⁶ Then it will come about that any who are remaining of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, Yahweh of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

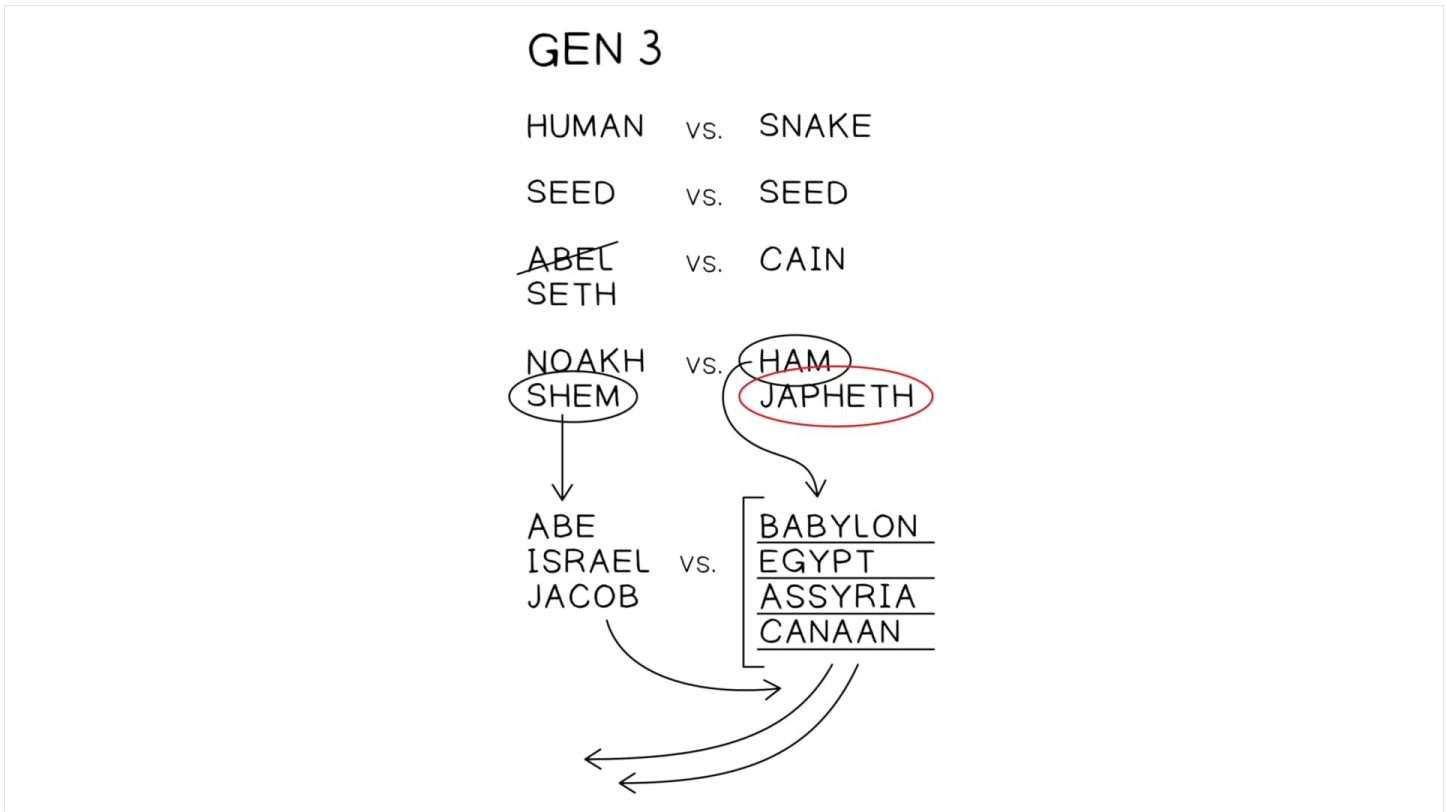
“If the dwelling of Japheth in the tents of Shem presupposes the conquest of the land of Shem by Japheth, it is a blessing not only to Japheth, but to Shem also, since, whilst Japheth enters into the spiritual inheritance of Shem, he brings to Shem all the good of this world (see Isa. 60). ‘The fulfilment,’ as Delitzsch says, ‘is plain enough, for we are all Japhethites dwelling in the tents of Shem; and the language of the New Testament is the language of Javan entered into the tents of Shem.’ ... Moreover it is true of the blessing and curse of Noah, as of all prophetic utterances, that they are fulfilled with regard to the nations and families in question as a whole, but do not predict, like an irresistible fate, the unalterable destiny of every individual; on the contrary, they leave room for freedom of personal decision, and no more cut off the individuals in the accursed race from the possibility of conversion, or close the way of salvation against the penitent, than they secure the individuals of the family blessed against the possibility of falling from a state of grace, and actually losing the blessing. Hence, whilst a Rahab and an Araunah were received into the fellowship of Jehovah, and the Canaanitish woman was relieved by the Lord because of her faith, the hardened Pharisees and scribes had woes pronounced upon them, and Israel was rejected because of its unbelief.”

Keil, C.F. and Delitzsch, F. (1996). [*Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 1*](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 101.

Noah’s words invite us to ponder this portrait of the future of nations, using the patterns of Genesis 1-11 to anticipate just where the story is going. The table of nations, then, becomes a palette of future hope. The stories to follow, from Genesis 11 to the end of 2 Kings, all work out the programmatic poems in Genesis 3:14-15 and 9:25-27. There will be hostility between the seed of the woman and the seed of the snake.

- When the nations are at war, they are giving in to the power of the snake that is luring them into jealous and angry violence (see “Gog of Magog” in [Ezek. 38-39](#)).
- When the nations become a “tent of Yahweh,” then humanity will see that they are brothers who can live together in peace ([Ps. 133](#); [Isa. 2:1-4](#)).

Woman Versus Snake



Woman Vs. Snake. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How do God’s curse on the snake ([Gen. 3:15](#)) and Noah’s curse and blessings on his sons ([Gen. 9:25-27](#)) form the scriptural background for the Gog oracles ([Ezek. 38-39](#))?

Session 24: The Gog Oracles

Key Takeaways

- Gog represents those among the nations who are hostile to God's purposes.
- Ezekiel's oracle imagines what God must do to deal with evil in the rest of the world to bring about his Kingdom.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 38-39

38:1 And the word of Yahweh came to me saying,
2 "Son of a human,
set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog,
the chief head, Meshech and Tubal,
and prophesy against him
3 and say,
'Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"Behold, I am against you, O Gog,
chief head of **Meshech** and **Tubal**,
4 and I will turn you around,
and I will put hooks into your jaws,
and I will bring you out,
and all your army,
horses and horsemen,
clothed in perfection, all of them;
a great assembly,
large shields and small shields,
armed with swords, all of them,
5 **Persia**, **Ethiopia** and **Put** with them,
all of them with shield and helmet;
6 **Gomer** with all its troops;
Beth-togarmah, of the remote regions of the north, with all its troops,
many peoples with you.
7 Be prepared, and prepare yourself,
you and all your assembly that is assembled about you,
and be on guard for them.
8 After many days you will be summoned;
in the latter years you will come into the land,

when it is restored from the sword,
whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations,
to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste;
and its people were brought out from the nations,
and they are living in security, all of them.

⁹ You will go up, you will come like a storm;
you will be like a cloud covering the land,
you and all your troops,
and many peoples with you.”

¹⁰ Thus says Yahweh Elohim,

“It will come about on that day,
that words will come up into your heart,
and you will scheme an evil scheme,

¹¹ and you will say,

‘I will go up against the land of unwalled villages.

I will go against those who are at rest, that live securely,
all of them living without walls,
and having no bars or gates,

¹² to capture spoil and to seize plunder,
to turn your hand against the waste places which are now inhabited,
and against the people who are gathered from the nations,
who have acquired cattle and goods,
who live at the center of the land.’

¹³ Sheba and Dedan

and the merchants of Tarshish with all its villages,
they will say to you,

‘Have you come to capture spoil?

Have you assembled your assembly to seize plunder,
to carry away silver and gold,

to take away cattle and goods,

to capture great spoil?!”

¹⁴ Therefore prophesy, son of a human,
and say to Gog,

‘Thus says Yahweh Elohim,

“On that day when my people Israel are living securely,
won’t you know it?

¹⁵ You will come from your place out of the remote regions of the north,
you and many peoples with you,
riding on horses, all of them,
a great assembly, and a mighty army;

¹⁶ and you will come up against my people Israel like a cloud to cover the land;
it will come about in the last days,

and I will bring you against my land,
so that the nations may know me,
when I display my holiness through you before their eyes, O Gog.”

¹⁷ Thus says Yahweh Elohim,

“Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days,
through my servants the prophets of Israel,
who prophesied in those days, for years,
that I would bring you against them?

¹⁸ It will come about on that day,
when Gog comes against the land of Israel,”

declares Yahweh Elohim,

“that my hot-anger will go up with my anger,

¹⁹ and in my zeal, in the fire of my anger I declare,
that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel,

²⁰ and they will shake before me,

the fish of the sea, and the birds of the skies,

the beasts of the field, and all the creepers that creep on the land,

and all the humans who are on the face of the ground,

and the mountains will be thrown down,

the steep pathways will fall,

and every wall will fall to the land,

²¹ and I will call for a sword against him on all my mountains,”

declares Yahweh Elohim,

“every man’s sword will be against his brother.

²² and I will enter into judgment with him,

with plague and with blood;

and flooding rain, and hailstones,

fire and brimstone,

I will rain down upon him,

and upon his troops,

and upon the many peoples who are with him,

²³ and I will show myself to be great,

and I will show myself to be holy,

and I will make myself known in the eyes of many nations;

and they will know that I am Yahweh.”

^{39:1} And you, son of man,

prophesy against Gog and say,

‘Thus says Yahweh Elohim,

“Behold, I am against you, O Gog,

prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal;

² and I will turn you around,

and I will drive you on,
and I will make you go up from the remotest parts of the north,
and I will bring you against the mountains of Israel,
³ and I will strike your bow from your left hand,
and I will make your arrows from your right hand fall down;
⁴ upon the mountains of Israel you will fall,
you and all your troops,
and the peoples who are with you;
I will give you as food to birds of prey,
and to the wild beasts of the field,
⁵ you will fall on the open field;
for it is I who have spoken,"
declares Yahweh Elohim.
⁶ "And I will send fire upon Magog,
and on those who inhabit the coastlands in security,
and they will know that I am Yahweh,
⁷ and I will make known my holy name in the midst of my people Israel;
and I will not let my holy name be profaned anymore,
and the nations will know that I am Yahweh, the Holy One in Israel.
⁸ Behold, it is coming and it shall be done,"
declares Yahweh Elohim,
"the day of which I have spoken."

⁹ "And the inhabitants of the cities of Israel will go out,
and they will make fires with the weapons and burn them,
even small shields and large shields,
bows and arrows,
war clubs and spears,
and they will make fires of them for seven years.
¹⁰ They will not pick up wood from the field,
or chop wood from the forests,
for they will make fires with the weapons;
and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them,
and they will seize the plunder of those who plundered them,"
declares Yahweh Elohim.
¹¹ "On that day I will give Gog a burial ground there in Israel,
the valley of the passers-on east of the sea,
and it will block off those who would pass-on,
and they will bury Gog there and all his horde,
and they will call it, 'Valley of the horde of Gog.'
¹² And the house of Israel will be burying them,
in order to cleanse the land,
for seven months.
¹³ And all the people of the land will bury them,

and it will be for their name on the day that I display my honor," declares Yahweh Elohim.

¹⁴ "And they will set apart men who will constantly pass-on in the land, burying those who were passing-on, those who remain on the face of the land, in order to cleanse it.

At the end of seven months they will make a search,

¹⁵ and those who pass-on in the land will pass-on, and if anyone sees a man's bone, then he will set up a marker by it until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Gog's horde, ¹⁶ and even the name of the city will be 'Horde,' and they will cleanse the land."

¹⁷ As for you, son of a human, thus says Yahweh Elohim,

'Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, "Assemble and come, gather from every side, to my sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you all, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood.

¹⁸ You will eat the flesh of mighty warriors, and you'll drink the blood of the chiefs of the land, rams, lambs, and goats, bulls, fat ones of Bashan, all of them.

¹⁹ And you will eat the fat unto fulness, and you will drink blood until you are drunk, from my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you.

²⁰ and you will be filled full at my table, with horses and charioteers with mighty warriors and all the men of war," declares Yahweh Elohim.

²¹ "And I will set my honor among the nations; and all the nations will see my justice which I enact, and my hand which I have set on them.

²² And the house of Israel will know that I am Yahweh their Elohim, from that day and also onward.

²³ The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile, on account of the fact that they acted treacherously against me, and I hid my face from them; and I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword.

²⁴ According to their impurity and according to their transgressions I dealt with them,

and I hid my face from them.”

²⁵ Therefore thus says Yahweh Elohim,

“Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob,
and I will have mercy on the whole house of Israel;
and I will show zeal for my holy name.

²⁶ And they will forget their disgrace,
and all their treachery which they perpetrated against me,
when they live securely on their own land,
with no one to make them afraid.

²⁷ When I bring them back from the peoples,
and when I gather them from the lands of their enemies,
then I will display my holiness through them in the eyes of the many nations,

²⁸ and they will know that I am Yahweh their Elohim,
because I made them go into exile among the nations,
and I gathered them again to their own land;
and I will leave remaining none of them there any longer,

²⁹ and I will not hide my face from them any longer,
for I will have poured out my Spirit on the house of Israel,”
declares Yahweh Elohim.”

Ezekiel 38:1-39:29. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The Identity of Gog

In [Ezekiel 38:2](#) we meet “Gog of Magog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.” But who is Gog?

The name Gog is derived first of all from the table of nations in Genesis 10:2 (the sons of Japheth, all located in the north and western Mediterranean). The title Gog could be rooted in a historical figure (= Gyges/Gugu, king of Lydia in west Asia Minor during the late 7th-early 6th century B.C.E.).

“The name seems to relate to one known to the Greeks as Gyges and to the Assyrians as Gugu, who was a powerful king of Lydia in west Asia Minor in the first half of the 7th century. Meshech and Tubal, characterized in 32:26 as a bygone power in the world, are regarded as resurgent, and the old menace come back to haunt their southern neighbors ... Probably this memory, current in Babylonia, had reached the Jewish exiles. Here they are under the authority of 'Gog.' As with the names of nations in ch. 38, so here a great figure of the past is evidently used to define a future threat, just as we might speak of a new Hitler.”

Allen, Leslie C. (1990). [Ezekiel 20-48 \(World Biblical Commentary, Vol. 29\)](#). Thomas Nelson Inc. 204-205.

Gyges and Lydia were never a threat to Israel in any way, but were known as an ancient superpower, which made them ideal as a prophetic image for the rebellious nations.

Gog in [Ezekiel 38-39](#) is an archetypal and symbolic figure who embodies all the features of Israel’s historical enemies. He represents all the nations in rebellion against God who must be defeated before the restoration of all things.

There seven nations named as the allies of Gog, representing the fringes of Israel's geographical awareness and the four directions of their compass.

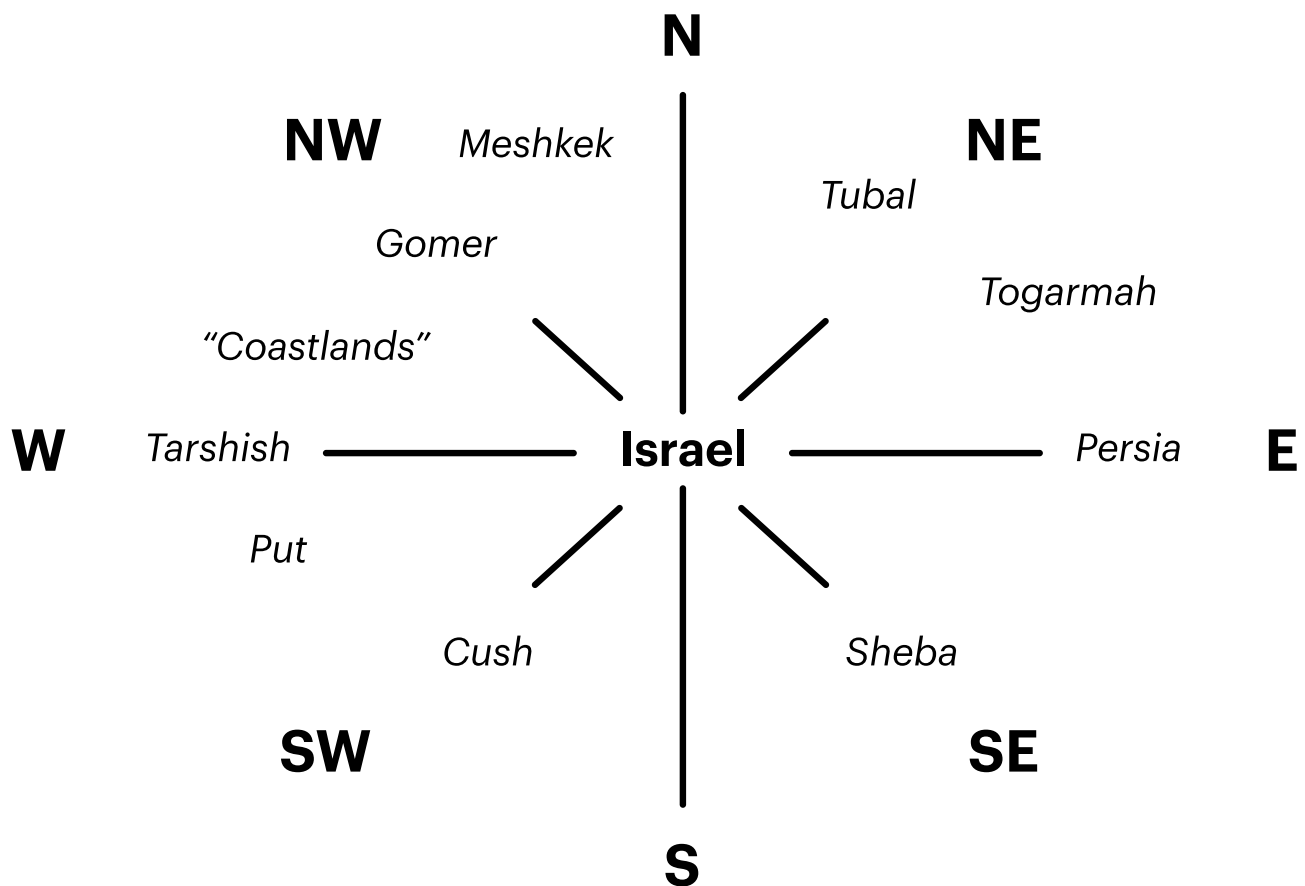
1. North: Meshek, Tubal ([Ezek. 38:3](#), interior of Anatolia = Modern Turkey)
2. East: Persia ([Ezek. 38:5](#))
3. South: Cush, Put ([Ezek. 38:5](#), Ethiopia, Libya)
4. West: Gomer, Beth-Togarmah ([Ezek. 38:7](#), far NW into Western Anatolia and north into Ukraine)

"The names in Ezekiel's lists of allies with Gog form a merismic pattern: they come from the extreme ends of the compass, north, south, east, west, and suggests that the whole world is involved in this attack ... Ezekiel envisions a universal conspiracy against Israel."

Block, Daniel (1998). [The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)](#). Eerdmans.

"These particular nations were selected for two reasons. First, each represents a nation-descendant of Japheth and Ham (not Shem) from the primeval past. Second, with the exception of Persia, they are not well-known historical enemies of Israel but far-flung nations of rumor. Taken together, they represent widely distributed stations on the compass. The oracles depict a global gathering of peoples, from remote localities and from many directions, who converge on the mountains of Israel. In effect, the whole world is against Israel."

Tooman, William A. (2011). [Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38-39 \(Forschungen Zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe\)](#). Mohr Siebeck. 149.



Gog's Allies. Adapted from Tooman, William A. (2011). [Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38-39](#) (Forschungen Zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe). Mohr Siebeck. 149.

The name "Gog" (גוג) also appears in the Hebrew version of the Balaam oracles that were available to the Septuagint translators of the Torah.

Numbers 24:7 Masoretic Text (NASB)*

Water will flow from his buckets,
 and his seed will be in many waters,
 and his king shall be higher **than Agag** (מאגג)
 and his kingdom shall be exalted.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Numbers 24:7 LXX (Instructor's Translation)

A man will come out from his seed,
 and he will rule over many nations
 and his kingdom will be lifted higher **than Gog** (מגג)
 and his kingdom will become great.

This also matches the text in the Samaritan Pentateuch and in the Septuagint revision of Theodotian and the Old Latin.

The wide textual attestation of “Gog” makes it likely that the original reading of Numbers 24:7 was in fact “Gog” and that the reading “Agag” was a later adaptation of Balaam’s oracle so that it referred to David’s conquest of Amalek (see [2 Sam. 8:12](#)).

When and What? The Scope of the Gog Oracles

The unique feature about this oracle is that it is set after Israel’s return to the land ([Ezek. 38:8, 12](#)). This shows that the larger-scale restoration referred to in [39:21-29](#) cannot refer to the return to the land narrated in Ezra-Nehemiah. Ezekiel here envisions that the return from Babylonian exile will be followed by some greater, more cosmic resistance of the nations against the plan of Yahweh.

The main theological concern of these chapters is that even after Yahweh deals with the evil and rebellion among his covenant people and restores them, there is still the problem of evil and rebellion among the nations at large, especially those distant nations who have never been players in Israel’s history.

Key Themes in the Gog Oracles

These oracles address a gap remaining in Ezekiel’s vision of the future. Yahweh’s restoration of Israel from exile into new covenant life ([Ezek. 38:8, 12, 14; 39:2](#)) only solves one piece of the biblical drama. Yahweh still needs to defeat the powers of evil at work among the nations so that his name can be known to all beyond Israel (connected to the theology of blessing and curse of [Gen. 3:15, 9:25-27, and 12:1-3](#)).

The oracles are marked as an eschatological vision in the undetermined far future (“end of years” in [Ezek. 38:8](#); “end of days” in [38:16](#)), and Israel is depicted as restored to the land but living in defenseless, unfortified towns (doesn’t correspond to anything in Ezra-Nehemiah).

Gog as an Archetype of Rebellion

Gog and his hordes are a literary amalgam of the entire prophetic tradition’s portrait of the rebellious nations. Gog and his armies are described with a pastiche of language and imagery from Ezekiel’s descriptions of Egypt and Tyre, as well as descriptions of Assyria and Babylon from many other prophetic texts.

[Ezekiel 38:17](#) makes clear that Gog embodies earlier predictions of a “foe from the North” ([Ezek. 38:6, 39:2](#); see [Jer. 4-6](#), especially [6:22](#)) who is defeated “on my mountains” ([Isa. 14:24-25](#)).

“Ezekiel believed the advent of Gog to be the true fulfillment of these ancient predictions. In the process, a national oracle has been expanded and has assumed apocalyptic significance.”

Fishbane, Michael (1989). [Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel](#). Clarendon Press. 477.

This interpretation wove its way into the textual traditions of earlier prophecies as well (see [Num. 24:7](#) and [Amos 7:1](#)).

Almost all the language and imagery used to describe Gog, his hordes, and the events of his defeat are drawn from Ezekiel 1-37 and other biblical texts—especially Isaiah and Jeremiah and the classic flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, 10 plague narratives—even some of the strangest scenes.

For example, after Gog's (second!) sudden defeat in [39:4-6](#), the leftover mess of weapons and armor (described with seven words!) will supply Israel's firewood for seven years, and lead to seven months of burial cleanup. This scene is developed out of [Isaiah 2:4](#), [Isaiah 9:3-5](#), and [Psalm 46:9](#), as well as out of the priestly regulations for dealing with corpses in [Numbers 19:11-19](#) and [Deuteronomy 21:1-9](#).

The ghastly scene of the scavenging animals eating the corpses of Gog's soldiers ([39:17-20](#)) is a burlesque development of [Isaiah 34:6-8](#) and [Zephaniah 1:7](#): Yahweh throws a celebratory sacrificial meal (*zevakh* refers to general sacrifices not made for atonement, see [Lev. 3](#)) and invites his guests.

Gog's seven allies summarize all the patterns of seven in Ezekiel 25-32; this army is the archetype of the rebellious nations ([Ezek. 38:4-7](#)).

Deliberate Prophetic Exaggeration

These oracles consist of eight frames that create vivid mental pictures in graphic detail: They are not linear and logical, and they are not describing a literal sequence of historical events. Rather the frames are piled onto one another to shock and provoke.

"The vision consists of deliberately exaggerated and caricatured language, not literal prediction. Comparable to political cartoons, the frames are not to be interpreted as prophetic literary photography, but as an impressionistic literary sketch."

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit](#). IVP Academic. 321.

There are all kinds of logical inconsistencies between the various frames if we expect them to offer a realistic sequence of future events.

For example, Gog is defeated no less than six times:

1. by an earthquake
2. by sword
3. by a plague
4. by water and fire from the skies ([Ezek. 38:19-22](#), reminiscent of the de-creation poem of [Jer. 4:24-26](#))
5. by a divine smack ([Ezek. 39:2](#))
6. by a second round of fire ([Ezek. 39:6](#))

The corpses of Gog's army are very carefully buried over the course of seven months ([Ezek. 38:11-13](#)). But, all of a sudden the bodies are once again exposed for scavenging animals to eat ([Ezek. 39:17-19](#)).

"The placement of this frame after the scene involving the burial of Gog creates some logical and logistical problems, but the reader is reminded that this is a literary cartoon, and realism may be sacrificed for rhetorical effect. Indeed, as the oracle has progressed the scenes have become increasingly bizarre, climaxing here in a scene more fantastic than all."

Block, Daniel (1998). [The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)](#). Eerdmans.

Gog as the Ultimate Pharaoh

Gog and his hoards are depicted as the ultimate Pharaoh. Yahweh uses their hard and selfish hearts to lead them toward their own defeat. Divine initiative and human sin interplay here in a similar way to Exodus 1-14 and Isaiah 7-14 and 36-39.

Yahweh initiates calling and summoning Gog (38:4, 7, 16), yet Gog comes against Israel with his own selfish motives (38:10-13). Gog is Yahweh's enemy (38:3), yet also an instrument in his divine plan (38:17).

In contrast to Yahweh's instruments Assyria and Babylon, Gog is allowed to do no harm. Israel plays no active role in defense or attack, but Gog is summoned and defeated by Yahweh alone, as a demonstration of his power and holiness (see Exod. 14:13, 17-18).

Yahweh, God Over All Nations

Yahweh's ultimate goal is to be known among the nations ("they will know that I am Yahweh" repeated 7x, cued from Ezek. 37:28). But Yahweh wants to be known as the God over all creation, not only as the national deity of Israel.

The oracles conclude with Yahweh's double goal in Ezekiel 39:21-23. Yahweh will have shown his justice (verse 21) in two ways.

1. After exile, restoration, and the final defeat of all other rebellious nations Israel will come to know Yahweh truly (verse 22).
2. Through Israel's story of facing God's justice along with their own experience all nations will come to know Yahweh as well (verse 23).

Hope

The concluding frame (39:21-29) picks up themes from all the previous oracles of hope in Ezekiel 34-37 with some new emphases.

- Restore the fortunes (39:25 recalls 16:53-58)
- Compassion (39:25, first occurrence in the book so far)
- Remembering past sin (39:26 recalls 16:61-63 and 36:31)
- Return to the land from exile (39:27 recalls 28:25, 34:13, 36:24, 37:21)
- Pouring out the Spirit (39:29, see also "put my Spirit on you" in 36:27; "pour the Spirit" occurs elsewhere only in Isa. 32:15 and 44:3; Joel 2:28; Zech. 12:10)

Reflection Question

What questions or unresolved conflicts do the Gog oracles address?



Module 6: Ezekiel's Temple Vision

SESSIONS 25-29

As the book concludes, tour Ezekiel's vision of God's new temple and glimpse yet another piece of the mosaic of a renewed Heaven and Earth.

Session 25: Introduction to Ezekiel's Temple Vision

Key Takeaways

- In the design of the Ezekiel scroll, Ezekiel's temple vision in chapters 40-48 links back to Ezekiel's visions and the corrupted temple of chapters 1-8.
- Passages describing the dimensions of the tabernacle or temple provide readers with the opportunity to meditate on the space where Heaven and Earth are one.
- God gives Moses and David a "pattern" of what the people will build, but God shows Ezekiel a completed temple.

Meditating on the Shape of God's Holy Space

Two analogies to help us understand Ezekiel's temple vision.

First, picture a current map of the United States. All the lines that make up the current state borders are the result of a long process of land acquisition and represent centuries of political, economic, and social interests. Imagine a modern-day Ezekiel, convinced that from its origins this arrangement of space is founded on greed and corruption. His equivalent "American vision" would result in a map of perfect symmetrical and proportionate design, so that each state received the same amount of space, and all past wrongs have been made right in this new arrangement. And, just as importantly, the centers of power would all be rearranged, so that the national cathedral would be placed at the exact center of the continent, while the U.S. Capitol and the White House would be de-centered and placed in subordination to the central cathedral. The vision would be a form not just of future hope, but it would constitute a powerful critique of America's past and present. This is precisely the purpose of Ezekiel's vision as stated in [43:1-11](#).

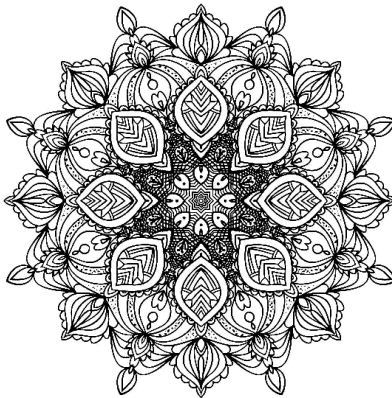
Second, consider meditative labyrinths in the Christian and Buddhist traditions.

There is an ancient tradition in Christian mysticism and spiritual formation of physically walking through a symmetrically designed labyrinth as one meditates and prays. The physical experience of walking in symmetries corresponds to a series of prayer and meditation practices that aid one in turning the prayer over and over again, seeing it from different angles so that one can ponder and raise these musings up to the presence of God.



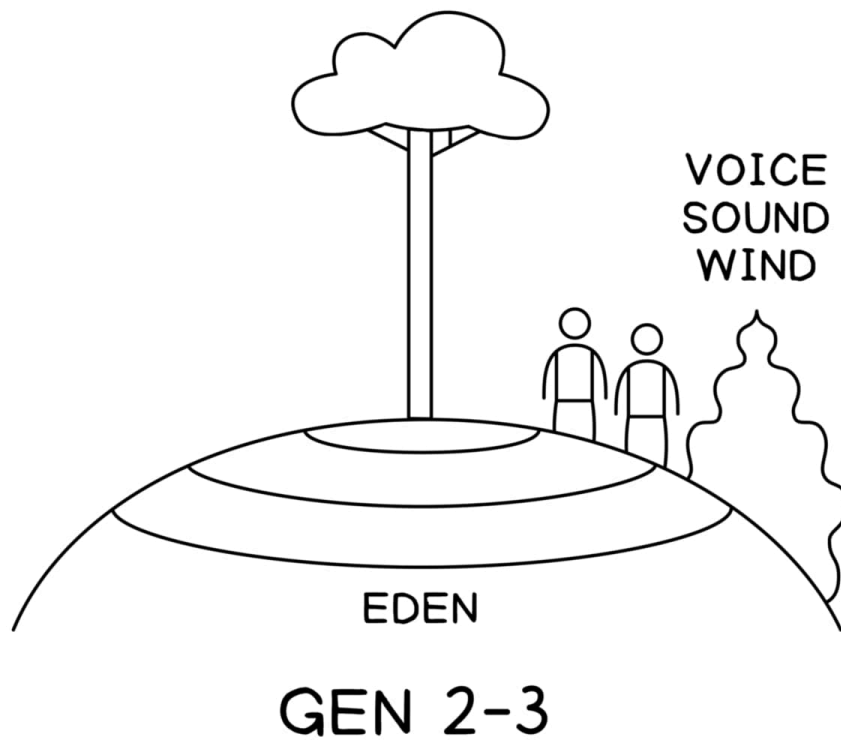
Prayer Labyrinth. awfumc.org

Similarly, Susan Niditch (in "Ezekiel 40-48 in Visionary Context," p. 213), compares Ezekiel's vision to the mandalas of Buddhist visionaries. A mandala was a symmetrical drawing that represented the cosmic order, and meditation and concentration on the mandala led one to imagine traveling about the universe pondering its order, beauty, and divine nature.



Dummies.com (2023). "What Are Mandalas?"

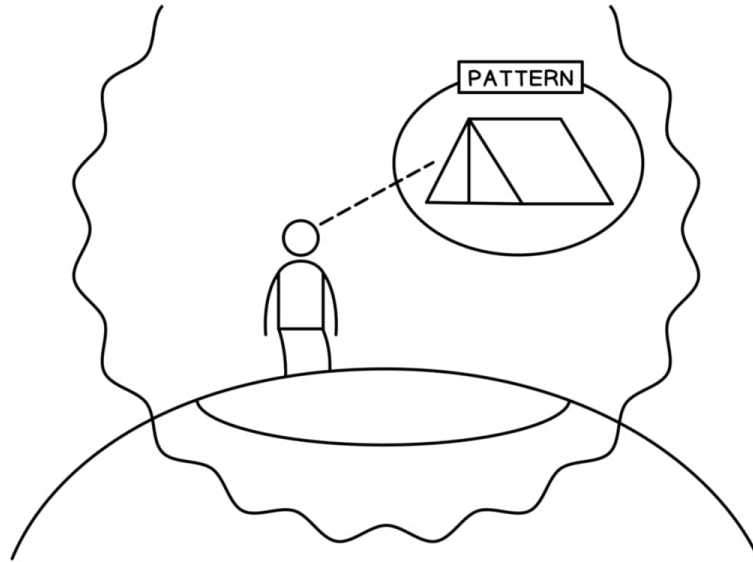
A Tale of Many Cosmic Mountains



A Tale of Many Cosmic Mountains 1. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

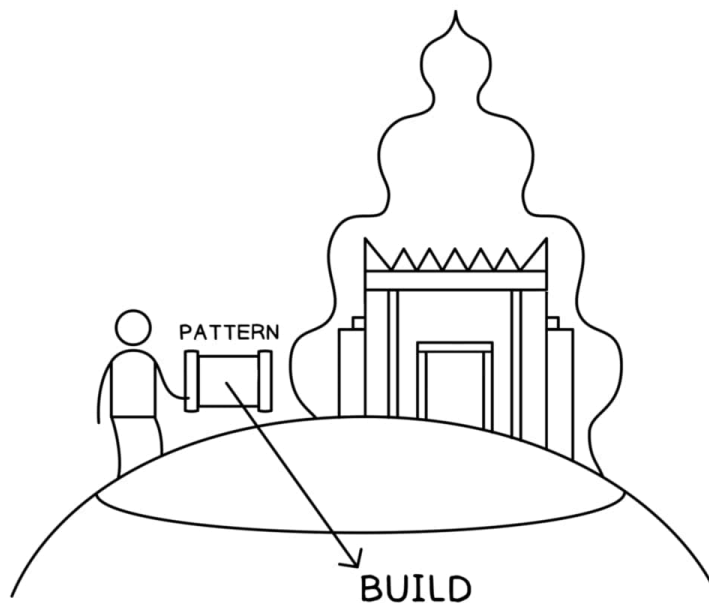


A Tale of Many Cosmic Mountains 2. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).



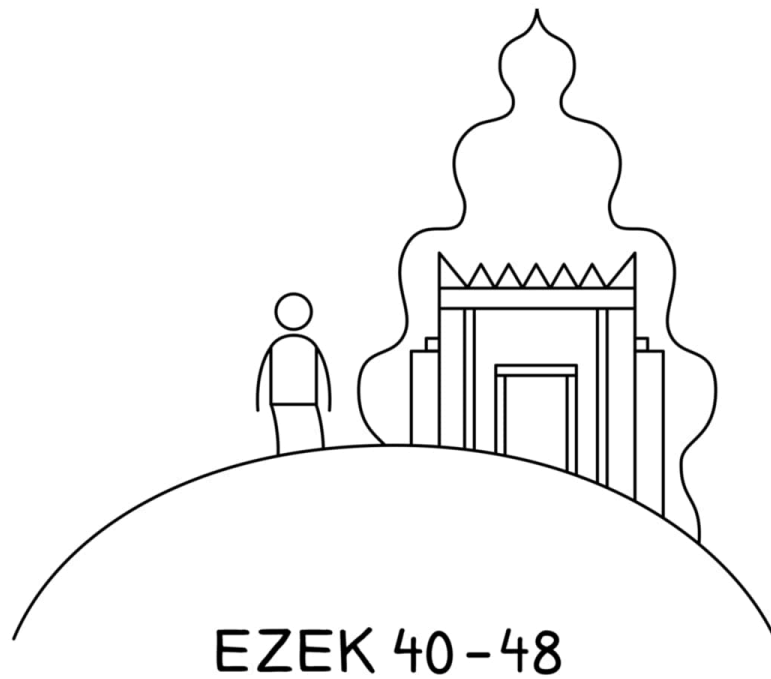
EXOD 24-31

A Tale of Many Cosmic Mountains 3. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).



1 CHRON 28

A Tale of Many Cosmic Mountains 4. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).



A Tale of Many Cosmic Mountains 5. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

What meaning or benefit can modern readers derive from lengthy descriptions of temple dimensions?

Session 26: Ezekiel's Temple Tour

Key Takeaways

- The glory of Yahweh that left the temple in chapter 10 returns to this new temple in chapter 43.
- The city is decentralized and the priesthood is renewed. All of the details of the organization of the temple, the priesthood, and the land reverse Israel's abuses and purify the people and the land.
- The number 25, featured prominently in the temple dimensions, evokes a mid-point in the 50-year Jubilee cycle.

Ezekiel's Temple Vision

Ezekiel portrays the future of the covenant people through the imagery and vocabulary of a priestly imagination, sketching the contours of the restored temple and land, with Yahweh returning to the temple (43:1-7) after his abandonment of it in [chapter 11](#).

Macro Design of Ezekiel 40-48



Ezekiel 40-48. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Structure and Themes of Ezekiel's Temple Vision

The three main sections of the vision correspond to three broad themes.

1. 40:1-43:27: Yahweh returns to a purified temple to dwell among his people.
2. 44:1-46:24: A purified priesthood and its liturgy are restored to worship Yahweh with covenant fidelity.
3. 47:1-48:35: Israel is restored to a reorganized and holy territory, which then becomes the hub of a renewed creation.

The Macro Design of Ezekiel 40:1-43:27

Ezekiel 40:1-47

Visionary guidance from the east gate to the holy of holies

40:1-4

Introduction: Date and beginning of Ezekiel's vision

40:5-40:37

40:5-27

The outer gates of the temple complex

- **40:5-16** Entry into the outer east gate and its measurements
- **40:17-23** Movement to the outer north gate and its measurements
- **40:24-27** Movement to the outer south gate and its measurements

40:28-37

The inner gates of the temple complex

- **40:28-31** Movement to the inner south gate and its measurements
- **40:32-34** Movement to the inner east gate and its measurements
- **40:35-37** Movement to the inner north gate and its measurements

40:38-47

The inner court's room and tables for sacrifices

- **40:38** The room for washing sacrificial animals
- **40:39-43** The eight sacrificial tables: location and measurements
- **40:44-47** **The inner rooms for priests: the Zadokites who come near to Yahweh at altar**

Ezekiel 40:48-42:14

Description of the temple, its decorations, and the buildings around the temple

40:48-41:4

Entry into the temple and its measurements

- **40:48-49** Movement to the temple entry room and its measurements
- **41:1-2** Movement to the temple's main hall and its measurements
- **41:3-4** Movement to the temple's inner room and its measurements: holy of holies

41:5-15a

Description and measurement of the annexes of the temple and its surroundings

- **41:5-7** The temple's side-annexes and measurements
- **41:8-11** The temple and annex walls and inner court space around them
- **41:12-15a** The temple building and rear building's measurements

41:15b-26

Wall decorations and interior furnishing of the temple

- **41:15b-20** Decoration of the temple's main hall: wood, carved palms and cherubim
- **41:21-22** Decoration of the altar table of the temple's main hall
- **41:23-26** Decoration of the most holy and holy place doors: palms and cherubim

42:1-14

The rooms for the priests

- **42:1-10a** Description of the NW outer court rooms for the priests
- **42:10b-12** Description of the SW outer court rooms for the priests
- **42:13-14** Rooms for the priests who come near to Yahweh and serve

Ezekiel 42:15-43:27

Conclusion of temple measurements, Yahweh enters the temple and the altar is inaugurated

42:15-20

Conclusion of measuring the temple

- **42:15** "Finishing" (בלה) of measurements, exit through the east gate
- **42:16-19** The four sides of the temple complex are measured
- **42:20** Total measurements of the temple complex

43:1-12

Yahweh enters the temple

- **43:1-4** Visions of the Glory of Yahweh entering the temple through east gates
- **43:5-9** Ezekiel taken into inner court, Speech 1: This temple is free of Israel's past defilements
- **43:10-11** Ezekiel in inner court, Speech 2: Ezekiel to report the proportion of the divine temple

43:13-27

Inauguration of the central altar

- **43:13-17** Description and measurements of the central altar
- **43:18-27** Seven day inauguration of the central altar—Zadokite priests come near and serve seven days to "finish" (בלה) the inauguration

Ezekiel 40:1-43:27. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The New Temple and Yahweh's Return

The purpose of Ezekiel's visionary tour is easy to miss. Why is Ezekiel shown the Heaven-on-Earth temple, the ideal sanctuary? The opening and closing paragraphs of the tour (in [Ezek. 40:1-4](#) and [Ezek. 43:10-12](#)) create a frame around this first part of Ezekiel 40-48, and they make very clear why God has taken Ezekiel on this dream tour. He is to declare to Israel what he has seen ([Ezek. 40:4](#), [43:10](#)) as a form of prophetic rebuke ([Ezek. 43:11](#)) mixed with hope so that Israel will see just how badly they distorted the purpose of the temple ([Ezek. 43:7-9](#)) in comparison to its heavenly divine ideal ([Ezek. 43:10-11](#)).

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 40:1-4

- a¹ **In the twenty-fifth year** **of our exile** ,
b at the beginning of the year,
b' on the tenth of the month,
a' **in the fourteenth year** **after the city was struck** ,

on that very day,
the hand of Yahweh was upon me,
and he brought me to there .

² In visions of Elohim **he brought me** into **the land of Israel** ,
and he set me on **a very high mountain** ,
and on it to the south there was **a structure like a city** ,

³ **and he brought me there** ,
and look, a **man** whose **appearance** was like the **appearance** of bronze,
with a linen cord in his hand, and a measuring rod;
and he was standing in the gate,

⁴ and the **man** said to me,
"Son of a human,
see with your **eyes** ,
hear with your ears,
and set your heart to all that I am going to make you **see** ,
for you have been brought here in order for you to **see** it,
declare (דגה) to the house of Israel all that you **see** ."

Ezekiel 40:1-4. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The 25th Year of Exile

Ezekiel dates this vision 20 years after the vision by the river Khebar ("in the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's exile," [1:2](#)), and 14 years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., so this places the vision in the year

The Beginning of the Year

The reference to the beginning of the year could refer to either the first month of the agricultural year (Nisan, in the Spring, March/April), or also to the first month of the liturgical calendar, which was the seventh month of the agricultural calendar, (Tishri, in the fall, September/October; see [Lev. 23:27](#)).

If it was Nisan, then this was precisely the month and day that Babylonians performed the *akitu* festival in which Marduk's statue would be ushered from outside the city into the temple complex where he was enthroned over the new year.

If it was Tishri, then the 10th day was the Day of Atonement, the day on which, every 50 years, the Jubilee was announced (see [Lev. 23:26-32](#) and [25:8-12](#)).

It's entirely possible that the month is left unspecified so that the same date would evoke both associations. The connection to the 50th Jubilee year seems undeniable, and note that "in the 25th year" would mark exactly half of a Jubilee cycle. This is precisely the numerical logic at work in Daniel's "a time, two times, and half a time" (= 3 1/2, see [Dan. 7:25](#) and [12:7](#)).

Also, if this vision is 20 years after the first vision which took place when Ezekiel turned 30 years old, that means that this date also marks Ezekiel's 50th birth year, exactly the year that he would have stepped down from his priestly duties (see [Num. 4:3](#) and [8:23-25](#)).

Twenty-Five

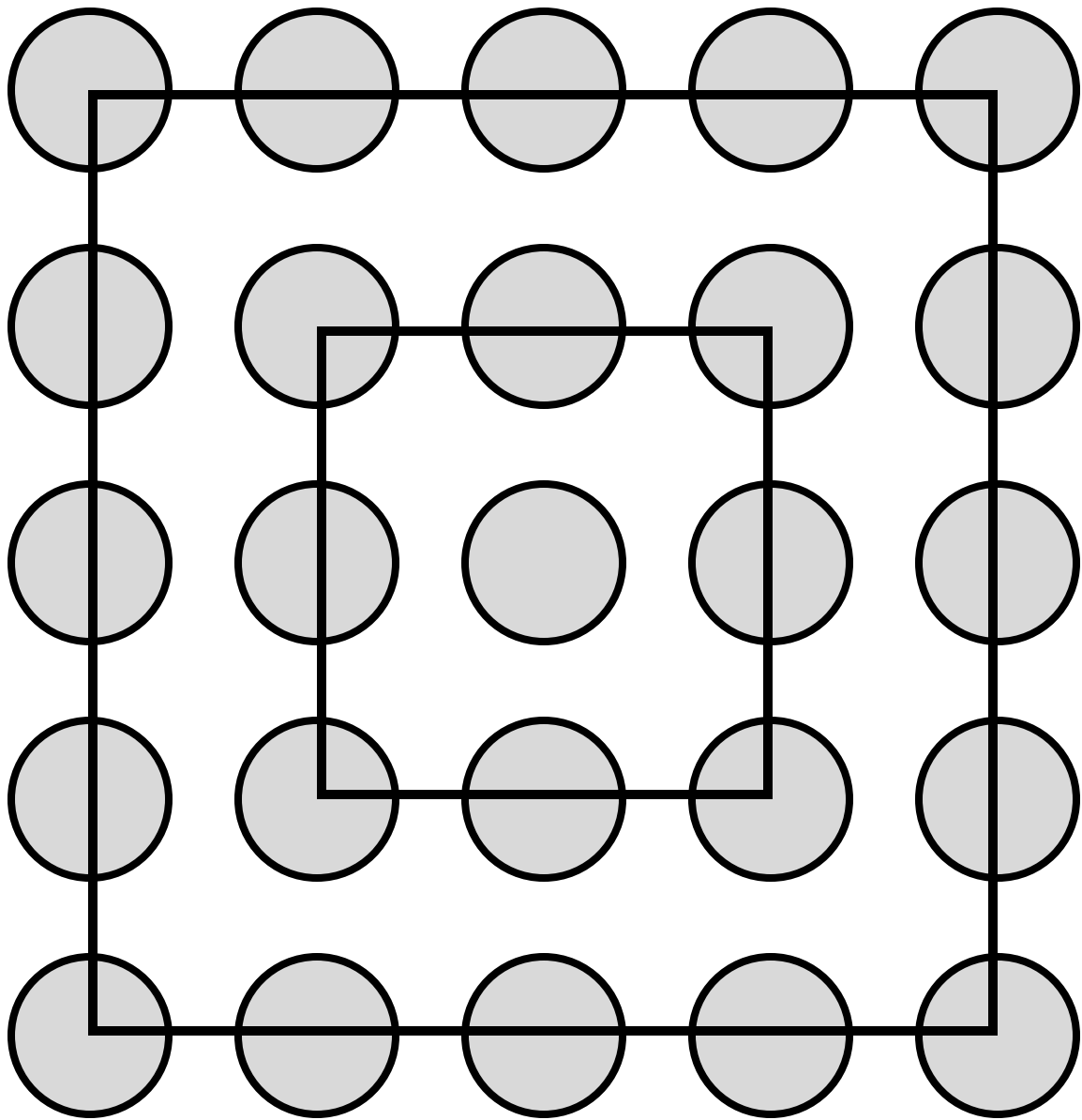
Twenty-five is a highly significant number in Ezekiel's vision [the following is a summary of Stephen Cook, [Ezekiel 38-48](#), p. 129-130 and John Bergsma, "The Restored Temple as 'Built Jubilee' in Ezekiel 40-48"].

Consider all the multiples of 25 in his temple tour.

- The vision happens in the 25th year of the exile ([40:1](#)).
- The entry gate houses are 25 cubits wide (see [40:13, 21, 25](#)) and 2 x 25 cubits long (= 50, see [40:15, 21, 25](#)).
- The distance between the outer and inner gate houses is 4 x 25 cubits (= 100, see [40:19, 23, 27](#)).
- The temple compound as a whole is 20 x 25 cubits, that is, 500 cubits square.
- The total number of steps by which one ascends 100 square cubit inner court comes to 25 ([40:26, 31, 49](#) in the Septuagint).
- The facade of the outer court outside the north gate is 4 x 25 cubits (= 100, see [42:1](#)) long, and 2 x 25 cubits wide (= 50, see [42:2](#)).
- The outer wall of the outer court runs 2 x 25 cubits long (= 100, see [42:7](#)), and is filled with chamber rooms that are 2 x 50 cubits deep (= 50, see [42:8](#)).
- The entire central "reserved land" is 25 x 1000 (= 25,000 square cubits, [48:20](#)).
- The outer wall surrounding the temple complex is 500 cubits squared (= 50 x 10, see [42:16-20](#)), repeated four times. This last figure is significant, as the number 50 was the Jubilee number (7 x 7 + 1). The significance of a "ten-fold Jubilee" is operative in the visions of Daniel, where the "seven sevens of years are determined for your people" ([Dan. 9:25-27](#)).

The number 25 is packed with dense biblical symbolism.

- The 25th year is half of a Jubilee cycle, which happened every 7 x 7 years as a “super Sabbath” for all the people and land to be liberated unto freedom and rest.
- The number 25 is a square number (5 x 5), and it's also important that the numbers 3 and 4 stand behind the number: $25 = 3^2 + 4^2$. The numbers 3 and 4 loom large in Ezekiel's vision: three outer gates, three inner gates, four sides to the reserved portion, the temple precinct, and the city, four Levitical kitchens in the corners, the four horns of the altar.
- The number 25 is a centered square number: 25 is a number that can be laid out as dots on a plane to create a symmetrical pattern of concentric circles. This corresponds to the proportions of Ezekiel's temple complex. The central dot marks the location of the altar, while the inner court is proportioned to the inner circle marked by 3x3 dots (= 100 square cubits, see [40:47](#)), and the outer courtyard is proportioned to the outer circles of 5x5 dots (= 500 square cubits, see [45:2](#)). This creates a concentric pattern of nested zones arranged around a holy center, the altar.



Centered Square Number. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

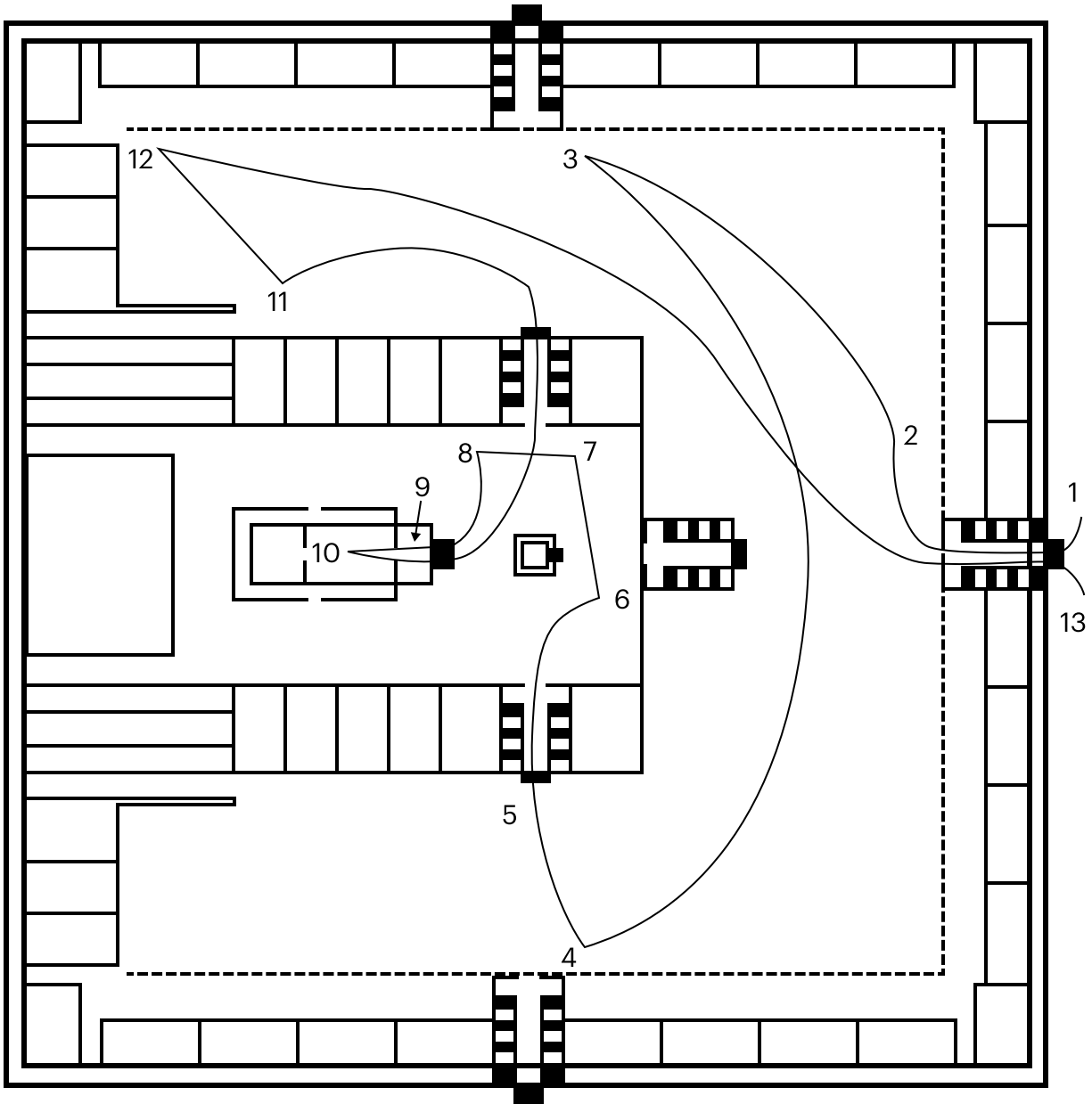
“What is the significance of this date for understanding the rest of the vision (chs. 40-48)? The deportees, in a sense 'half-way' through the exile, would be feeling the discouragement associated with 'mid-time,' and in need of a word of hope from the Lord. Ezekiel provides that in his vision. On the Day of Atonement—on which the old temple would have been cleansed and the Lord would have renewed his presence therein—Ezekiel foresees a new, cleansed temple to which the Lord’s presence returns ... By building the temple according to the jubilee number fifty, Ezekiel suggests that the temple in some sense is Israel’s jubilee; that is, it is in proper worship of the Lord that Israel experiences her true freedom The entire vision of restoration in chs. 40-48 [are] an eschatological proclamation of the jubilee on the Day of Atonement. The major themes of the vision all fit this paradigm: the concern for the restoration and purification of the temple evident throughout the vision corresponds to the purgation of the temple on the Day of Atonement. The vision’s extensive guidelines for the re-allocation of Israel’s land after the exile and the rules for economic justice all correspond to the jubilee’s concern to return Israelites to their ancestral land and re-establish economic equity.”

Bergsma, John (2004). “The Restored Temple as ‘Built Jubilee’ in Ezekiel 40-48,” *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwestern Biblical Societies*, 24. 77-80.

“Some connection to the Jubilee seems undeniable. Having survived twenty-five years of exile on this very day, Ezekiel and his kinfolk were in a position to consider and even expect that they were at least halfway toward liberty from Babylonian activity and restoration to God’s land ... On this highly symbolic Jubilee and New Year’s date, at the point of Ezekiel’s readiness for retirement, God’s hand translates the prophet to a 'very high mountain' ... the archetypal cosmic mountain that connects heaven and birth.”

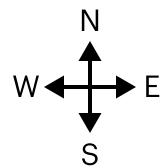
Cook, Stephen L. (2018). [*Ezekiel 38-48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*](#). Yale University Press. 124-125.

From 40:5-42:20, Ezekiel is led on a virtual tour of the temple complex. He’s led by a humanoid figure with measuring tools, and the horizontal dimensions of each area are mapped out. His tour takes him through the outer east gate, around the outer courtyard, then through the inner north gate, then into the temple itself, then back out and around the inner courtyard, then out through the inner south gate, back through the outer courtyard until he returns to where he started at the outer east gate.



Key

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. 40:1-16 | 6. 40:32-34 | 10. 41:1-4 |
| 2. 40:17-19 | 7. 40:35-37 | 11. 42:1-14 |
| 3. 40:20-23 | 8. 40:44-46 | 12. 46:19-24 |
| 4. 40:24-27 | 9. 40:48-49 | 13. 42:15-20 |
| 5. 40:28-31 | | |



Ezekiel's Temple Layout. Block, Daniel (1998). [The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)](#). Eerdmans.

Reflection Question

How is the number 25 related to the Jubilee cycle of Leviticus? What might it signify to the exiles of Ezekiel's time?

Session 27: The Purpose of Ezekiel's Temple Vision

Key Takeaways

- Israel and its kings defiled the temple and corrupted the entire land with injustice, idolatry, and violence.
- Presumptuous kings of Judah tried to elevate their own status by making their burial sites next to the temple.
- The symmetry, order, and proper function of the temple vision communicate a message that induces conviction and guilt over these past abuses.
- Whatever role Ezekiel's vision plays in the larger mosaic of biblical theology, we must honor its purpose for Ezekiel and his audience.

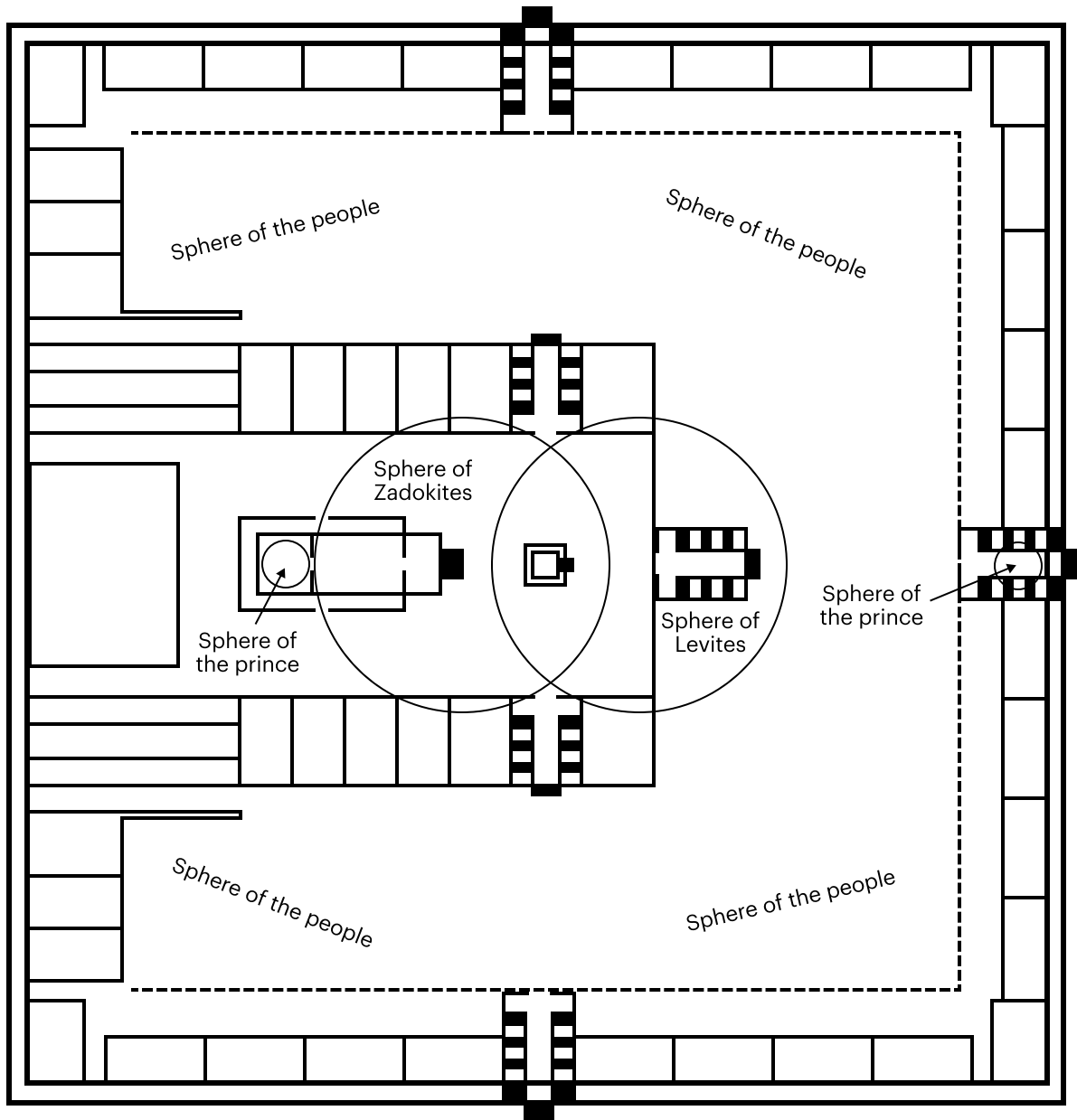
The Three Sacred Zones of Ezekiel 40-48

The nine chapters that make up Ezekiel 40-48 work forward in a sequence that deals with three sacred spaces, scaling larger with each section.

1. The temple and its place within the city
2. The portion alongside the temple and city
3. The land surrounding the temple and the portion

The Temple (Ezek. 40:1-44:31)

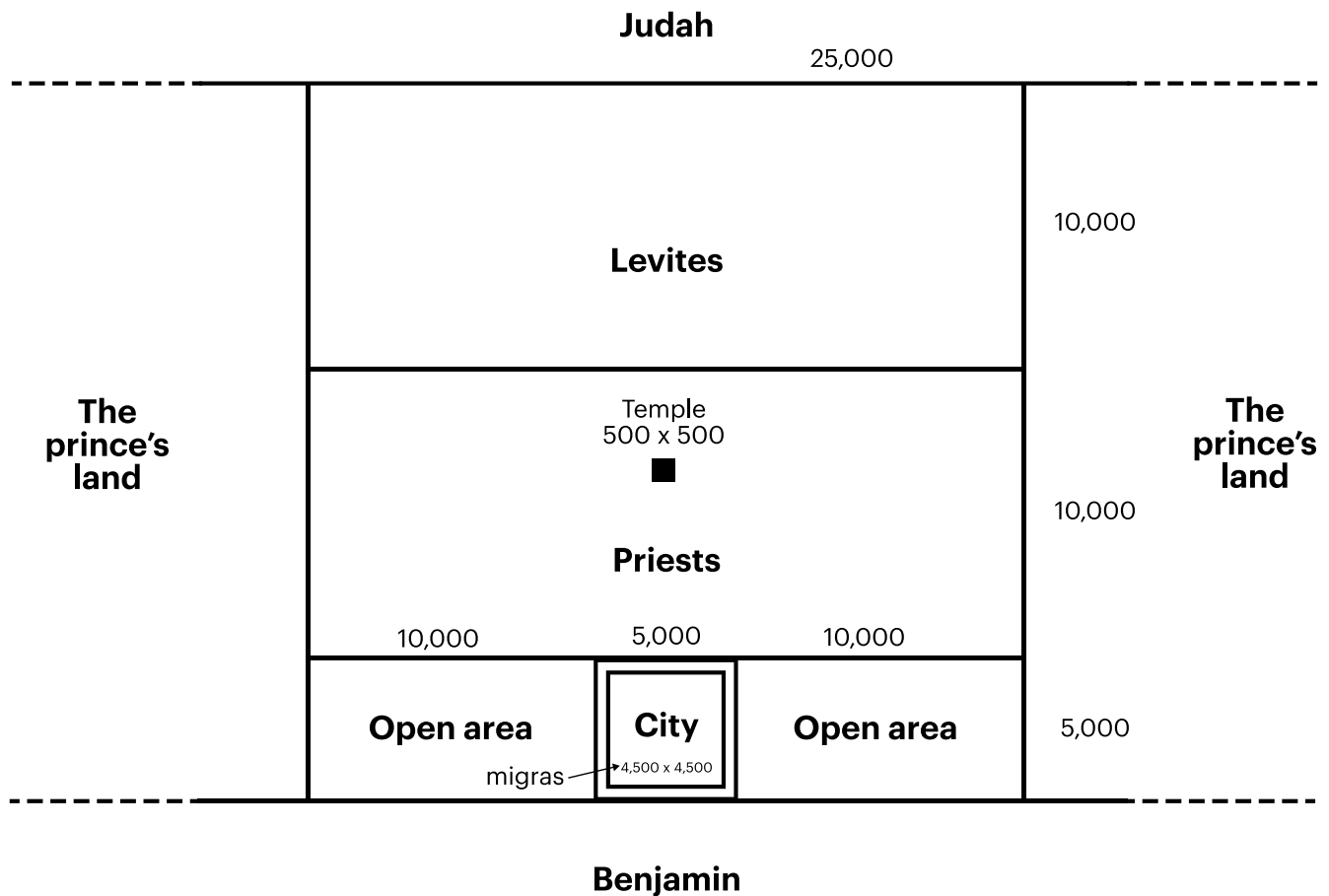
Every part of this section defines the spaces dedicated to the temple, its courts, and the access points into and out of this space. The measurements and design all control access to this space in order to prevent past abuses of the temple.



Ezekiel's Temple Zones. Block, Daniel (1998). [The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)](#). Eerdmans.

The Portion (Ezek. 45:1-46:24)

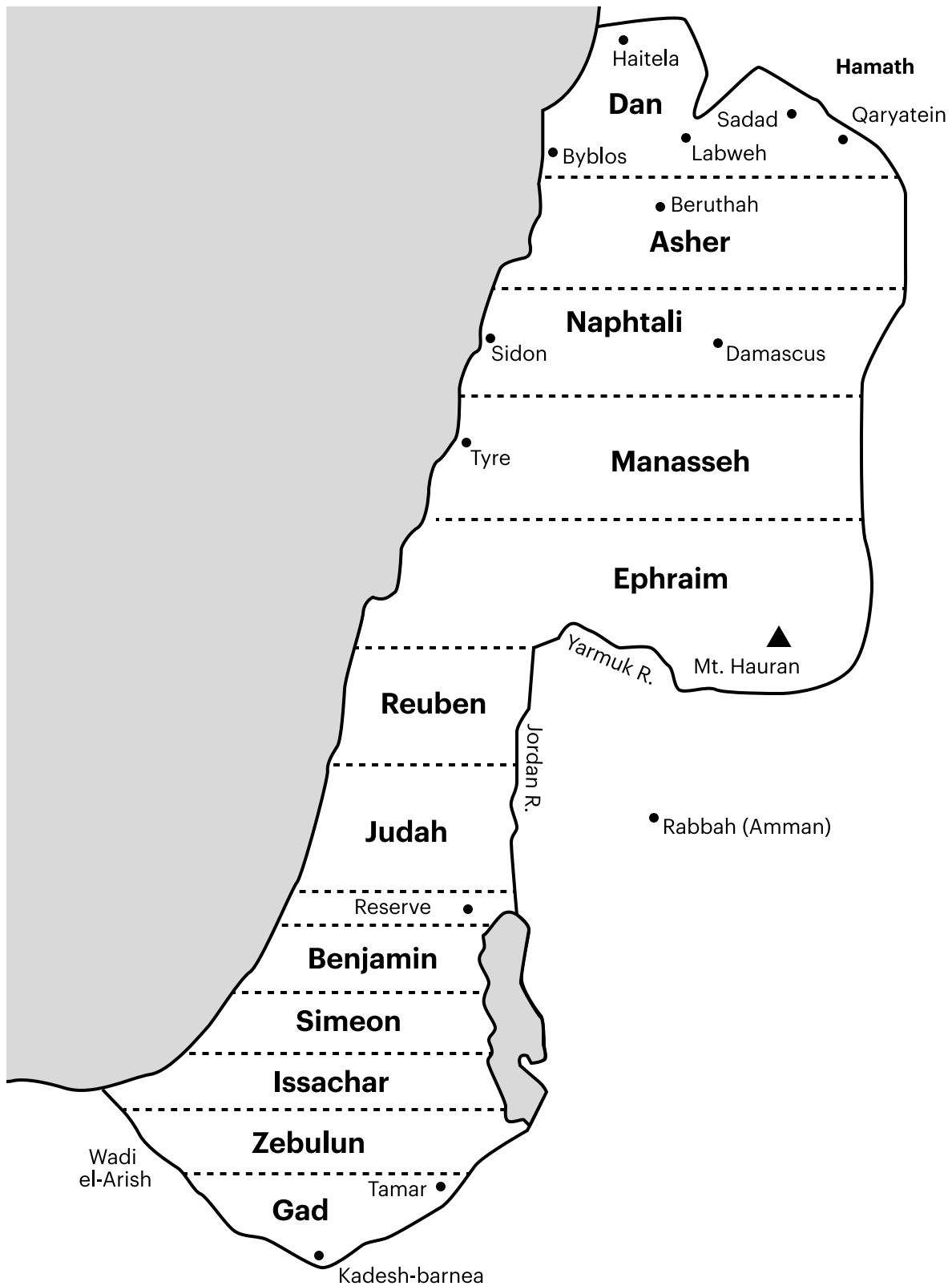
This section separates the temple and the realm of the priests away from both the Levites and the king, and also from the “city,” which isn’t even called Jerusalem. This spatial reorganization communicates that Yahweh’s space is not under the control of the priesthood, but vice-versa. All of Israel’s space and institutions are subordinate to and organized around Yahweh.



The Land Around the Temple. Adapted from Block, Daniel (1998). [The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)](#). Eerdmans.

The Land (Ezek. 47:1-48:35)

This organization redistributes the promised land to the classic twelve tribe organization that began in the era of Moses and Joshua, but it's redistributed in a way that totally ignores the land's topography. Ezekiel's organization disregards geographic realism in favor of theological idealism, and his organization distributes the land without recognition of tribal population. Each tribe is given its own historic possession.



The Land of the Twelve Tribes. Adapted from Block, Daniel (1998). [The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)](#). Eerdmans.

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 43:1-11

¹ And he led me to the **gate** ,
the gate facing toward the east ;

A ² and look, **the glory of the Elohim of Israel** was coming from **the way of the east** ,
and his voice was like the sound of many waters,
and the land was lit up by **his glory** ,

³ and it was like the **appearance** of the **vision** which I **saw** ,
B like the **vision** which I **saw** when he came to destroy the city,
and the **visions** were like the **vision** which I **saw** by the river Chebar,
and I fell on my face.

a ⁴ And **the glory of Yahweh** **entered into** **the house** by **the way of the gate facing east** ,
A' b ⁵ and the Spirit lifted me up,
b' and she brought me into the inner court,
a' and look, **the glory of Yahweh** **filled** **the house** .

⁶ And I heard one speaking to me from **the house** ,
and a man was standing beside me,

⁷ he said to me,

A "Son of a human,
this is the place of my throne,
and the place of the soles of my feet,
where **I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever** ,

and the house of Israel will not again **make** **my holy name** **impure** ,
neither **they** nor **their kings** ,
by **their harlotry** and by **the corpses of their kings** when they die,

B ⁸ by setting their threshold alongside my threshold,
and their door post beside my door post,
with only the wall between me and them,
and they have **made** **my holy name** **impure** by their abominations which they have committed,
and I brought them to an end in my anger.

A' ⁹ Now, let them remove **their harlotry** and **the corpses of their kings** far from me,
and **I will dwell among them forever** .

¹⁰ As for you, Son of a human,
declare (**דגה**) **the house** to the house of Israel,
so that **they may be ashamed of their iniquities** ,
and so they can measure the proportion/perfection,

¹¹ And **when they are ashamed of all that they have done** ,

- a b **the form** of **the house**,
- c and its design,
- d and its exits,
- d' and its entrances,
- c' and all its **forms** and all its **statutes**,
- b' and all its **forms** and all its **instructions**,
- a' make known to them.

And write before in their eyes,
 so that they may observe all **its form** and all its **statutes**,
 and engage them.

- a ¹² This is **the instruction** of **the house** on the top of the mountain:
- b its entire boundary all around will be most holy;
- a' look, this is **the instruction** of the house."

Ezekiel 43:1-11. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The Return of the King (Ezek. 43:1-5)

This opening scene describes the reversal of Yahweh's abandonment of the temple in chapters 8-11 because of Israel's idolatry and covenant infidelity. There have been important future anticipations of this return throughout Ezekiel's oracles (see [Ezek. 20:40-43](#); [37:26-28](#)), but this is the culmination of the initial visions of divine glory first in Babylon (chapters 1-3), then in leaving the temple (chapters 8-11), and now its return.

Notice the explicit recall of the previous visions from chapters 1-3 ("like the vision I saw by the river Khebar") and from chapters 8-11 ("like the vision I saw when it came to destroy the city").

Yahweh's Throne Purified From Past Abuse (Ezek. 43:6-9)

Notice that Yahweh's return to the temple is described in language that recalls the promise of a restored sanctuary from [Ezekiel 37:26-28](#), and both texts are themselves dependent on the description of the wilderness tabernacle from [Exodus 25](#), and also on the conception of the holy of holies as a divine throne, an idea expressed in Isaiah ([6:1-3](#) and [66:1-2](#)) and the Psalms ([11:4](#), [103:19](#)).

Ezekiel 43:7a NASB

He said to me, "Son of man, this is **the place of my throne** and **the place of the soles of my feet**, where **I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever**.

Ezekiel 37:26-28 NASB

²⁶ ... And I will place them and multiply them, and will set **my sanctuary in their midst forever**. ²⁷ **My dwelling place also will be with them**; and I will be their God, and they will be my people. ²⁸ And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when **my sanctuary is in their midst forever**.

Isaiah 6:1 NASB*

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw **Yahweh sitting on a throne**, lofty and exalted, with the train of his robe filling the temple.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 66:1-2a NASB*

¹ Thus says Yahweh, "**The skies are my throne and the land is my footstool**. Where then is a house you could build for me? And where is a place that I may rest? ² "For my hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 11:4 NASB*

Yahweh is in his holy temple; **Yahweh's throne is in the skies**

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 103:19 NASB*

Yahweh has established **his throne in the skies**, and his sovereignty rules over all.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 132:7-8 NASB*

⁷ Let us go into his dwelling place; let us worship at **his footstool**. ⁸ Arise, O Yahweh, to **your resting place**, you and the ark of your strength.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The newness of Yahweh's purified throne is set in contrast to a long history of its abuse and defilement, specifically by the kings of Judah. Three specific abuses are highlighted.

Royal Memorials

At first glance, the phrase "by the corpses of their kings when they die" appears to describe the burial of Judah's kings near the temple grounds. This is odd, however, because most of the kings of Judah are said to have been buried down the southern hill from the temple mount in the city of David (see [1 Kgs. 2:10](#) and the rest of the Kings scroll). There are two kings, however, notorious ones for Ezekiel, who were said to have been buried in a royal palace garden, and this could have been near or adjacent to the temple.

2 Kings 21:18 NASB

And Manasseh slept with his fathers and was **buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza**, and Amon his son became king in his place.

2 Kings 21:26 NASB

[Amon, son of Manasseh] was **buried in his grave in the garden of Uzza**, and Josiah his son became king in his place.

Another possibility is that the Hebrew phrase “when they die” (במותם) should be interpreted to mean “their ritual pillars” (במותם, often rendered “high places”), and so this would refer to stone memorial pillars that were placed in the royal palace next to the temple. These pillars were often used in cults of the dead ancestors, where offerings were made and the presence of the ancestors could be channelled and accessed (see the hints of this practice described in [Isa. 8:18-20](#)).

Either way, the point is that Israel’s kings placed their dead bodies or memorial statues near the temple, and the corpse-impurity or ritual practices were a defilement of God’s holy presence in the temple.

Architectural Usurpation

What does the phrase “by putting their threshold/door beside my threshold/door” mean?

In the narrative about Solomon building the temple, the narrator gives equal attention to Solomon’s efforts to build his own house right next to the temple (see [1 Kgs. 7:1-12](#)).

This could also refer to Manasseh’s construction of altars and shrines to other deities in the temple precincts ([2 Kings 21:5](#)).

The point is clearly that Israel’s kings usurped the temple precincts for their own royal agendas, thus subordinating Yahweh’s holiness to their own aims. But now that Israel’s true king has been enthroned in the center of the land, this will be no more.

Idolatry

Allusions to “their harlotry” and “making my name impure through their abominations” are almost certainly references back to the idolatrous worship profiled back in Ezekiel 8-11.

The Purpose of Ezekiel's Temple Vision

In [Ezekiel 43:10-11](#), Ezekiel is told to “declare” the vision to the exiles, “so that they can measure the proportion.” The word “proportion” is key to understanding the nature of Ezekiel’s vision.

“The proportion” is the Hebrew word *toknit* / תכנית.

This word is incorrectly translated “the plan/pattern” in the NASB, ESV, NRSV, KJV as if the word were a synonym with the similar sound word *tavnit* / תבנית. The NIV offers a translation based on a close study of the word in context.

Ezekiel 43:10 NASB, ESV

... Let them measure **the plan**.

as if from *tavnit*

Ezekiel 43:10 NRSV, KJV

... Let them measure **the pattern ...**

as if from *tavnit*

Ezekiel 43:10 NIV

... Let them consider **its perfection** ...

based on the Hebrew text, *toknit*

What Is a *Toknit* (תכנית)?

The rare Hebrew noun *toknit* / תכנית appears only one other time in the Hebrew Bible, in Ezekiel 28:12.

Ezekiel 28:12 NASB

You were a seal of **perfect proportion (*toknit*)**.

said to the king of Tyre

The meaning “perfect proportion” is based on studying the meaning of this noun's root word, which occurs in the Hebrew verb “to allocate, to assign based on a measure.”

It can refer to an “accurate measure” when someone is weighing amounts in a balance.

1 Samuel 2:3 NASB*

Boast no more so very proudly, do not let arrogance come out of your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and with him actions are **fairly measured/weighed**.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Proverbs 16:2 NASB*

All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD **fairly measures/weights** the motives.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Similar idea repeated in [21:2](#) and [24:12](#).

2 Kings 12:11 NASB

They gave the money which was **weighed** out into the hands of those who did the work, who had the oversight of the house of the LORD; and they paid it out to the carpenters and the builders who worked on the house of the LORD;

It can refer to an abstract concept of “perfect measurement” when speaking of justice and fairness.

Ezekiel 18:25 NASB*

Yet you say, "The way of the LORD doesn't **measure up right**." Hear now, O house of Israel! Is it my way that doesn't **measure up right**? Is it not your ways that don't **measure up right**?

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Similar idea repeated in [18:29](#) and [33:17, 20](#).

It can refer to a builder giving perfect proportions to a structure.

Job 28:23-26 NASB*

²³ God understands its way, and he knows its place. ²⁴ For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. ²⁵ When he imparted weight to the wind and **perfectly distributed** the waters by measure, ²⁶ when he set a limit for the rain and a course for the thunderbolt.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The verb *tikken* means to apply a just or correct measure in the (a) evaluation of something, or in the (b) creation of something which requires perfect and accurate proportions.

This helps us understand the use of the noun in Ezekiel 28:12, which describes the king of Tyre as a seal of “perfect proportion,” that is, designed symmetrically and with ideal measurements.

This linguistic evidence leads to the conclusion that the NIV and many scholars have come to; in Ezekiel 43:10, the prophet invites the exiles to “measure the perfect proportions” of the temple.

The Perfect Proportions of the Temple

What exactly are the “perfect proportions” of the temple? All of chapters 40-42 have been consumed on the horizontal measurements of the temple complex. The lack of vertical dimensions (except for the outer wall and the gate houses) shows that Ezekiel's vision focuses on the arrangement of space rather than on structures as such.

“If one were to enter through the eastern and most important gate, one would observe a perfect symmetrical design. What one sees to the north is perfectly mirrored by what one sees to the south, while in contrast the views from the northern or southern gates would be asymmetrical ... Even more important are the series of perfect squares in the compound. The entire temple complex is 500 by 500 cubits. The most sacred area of all, the Holy of Holies is a square 20 cubits deep and 20 cubits wide ... The center of the entire compound is the altar, whose upper platform measures 14 by 14 cubits while the base measures 20 by 20 cubits, matching the size of the Holy of Holies ... As one looked from the eastern gate, the symmetrical design would lead the eyes up the center line up to the altar, and then past that up further through the temple doors and into the most holy space ... The shape and size of the entire complex reflects lofty theological and spiritual ideals. Its perfect design is in keeping with the perfection of the divine resident.”

Block, Daniel (2013). “Guarding the Glory of YHWH: Ezekiel’s Geography of Sacred Space.” In [Beyond the River Chebar: Studies in Kingship and Eschatology in the Book of Ezekiel](#) (1st ed., pp. 175–196). The Lutterworth Press.

Ezekiel’s audience should study the plans of the house, but not in order to build it. There is no command or even a hint that the exiles are to view this as a building program. Rather, when they see the arrangement, form, and proportions of the space, the goal is for them to feel ashamed of all of the ways in the past that they

and their ancestors abused Yahweh's holy space. The rhetorical goal of this visionary plan is to portray the ideal proportions of the true temple in such a way that it will confront the exiles visually and expose how their past wrongs led them to the exile. By exploring the ideal temple, in great detail, Ezekiel's account exposes to the exiles just how corrupted the Jerusalem temple has become.

The goal of this plan, therefore, is not to provide a blueprint for a structure that is to be built. This is in stark contrast to the two other places in the Hebrew Bible where someone is shown a heavenly vision of sacred space and given a "plan" (*tavnit*, תבנית) and instructions to go and "build" (*banah*, בנה) it.

Exodus 25:8-9 Instructor's Translation

⁸ Let them **make a sacred space** for me, so that I may dwell among them. ⁹ According to all that I am going to make you see, according to the **pattern** (תבנית) of the tabernacle and the **pattern** (תבנית) of all its furniture, just so you will make it.

1 Chronicles 28:10-12 NASB*

¹⁰ "Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build (בנה) a house for the sanctuary; be courageous and act." ¹¹ Then David gave to his son Solomon the **pattern** (תבנית) of the porch of the temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the mercy seat; ¹² and the **pattern** (תבנית) of all that he had in mind, for the courts of the house of the LORD, and for all the surrounding rooms, for the storehouses of the house of God and for the storehouses of the dedicated things ...

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

"The informed Israelite reader would expect Ezekiel's vision to be a *tabnit* ("building plan") ... but instead 43:10 speaks of a *toknit* ("proportion"). That Ezekiel has viewed a detailed pattern is confirmed by several appearances of the term *tsura'* ("form, design") in verse 11, so why is Ezekiel 40-48 avoiding the term *tabnit*, while also punning on it with the word *toknit*? Based on the precedents in Exodus 25 and 1 Chronicles 28, recipients of a *tabnit* have actual shrines to build. But Ezekiel's literary temple will not, and cannot be built by humans. The term "form" (*tsura'*) in 43:11 stresses that Ezekiel's temple is, instead, an ideal form ... he has seen not a mere building plan, but the perfect proportions of a real divine archetype."

Cook, Stephen L. (2018). [Ezekiel 38-48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary](#). Yale University Press. 185.

"The genre of Ezekiel 40-48 is territorial rhetoric ... a deliberate effort to define space, communicate boundaries, and control access to that space ... The rhetorical purpose of the guided tour is to measure the proportion of the house of Yahweh, not to provide a building plan for the temple. The dimensions given are two-dimensional and define spaces rather than structures. This explains the omission of vertical dimensions for almost all of the structures. The three concentric spaces are the House of Yahweh, the Portion, and the Land of Israel ... with the square altar at the concentric center of all these spaces."

Stevenson, Kalinda Rose (1996). [The Vision of Transformation: The Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40-48](#). Scholars Press. 35-36.

"If Ezekiel 40-48 do not provide a construction blueprint for the post-exilic temple, is this temple intended to be only a literary creation, a symbol for the universal presence of God? ... What would be the rhetorical purpose of producing a text in the Babylonian exile which organizes post-exilic Israel around a temple if Ezekiel didn't expect the returned Israel to have a temple? I find it incomprehensible that Ezekiel could imagine a society without a temple at the symbolic center of the society. Rather than a choice between a building plan or a symbolic metaphor, there is a third option: it is territorial rhetoric ... This text calls for radical social change, by reorganizing Israel's entire geography around Yahweh's presence. Every space that was distorted and abused by Israel's priests and kings has been reshaped and made subordinate to Yahweh's presence in the land."

Adapted quotes from Stevenson, Kalinda Rose (1996). [*The Vision of Transformation: The Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40-48*](#). Scholars Press. 151-153.

A Blueprint for the Third Temple?

At only one point are any vertical dimensions given (the height of the outer wall in [Ezek. 40:2](#)). Besides that, only horizontal measurements are offered, making chapters 40-42 completely inadequate as an actual blueprint. There is no attempt at being comprehensive in detail, and all kinds of crucial measurements are missing (e.g., the "thirty chambers" in [Ezek. 40:17-18](#) are not described at all, yet they form a crucial part of the courtyard design). This underscores that the rhetorical effect of these chapters is not to offer a building plan, but rather (1) communicate the divine ideals through the design shape of a new sacred space and (2) to offer a prophetic message of exhortation and hope ([Ezek. 43:7-12](#)) that will bring shame and repentance ([Ezek 43:8-10](#)). Any details that do not accord with this purpose are ignored.

"Ezekiel was told to convey to the exiles all that he had seen, especially the symmetrical measurements, but the express purpose of that information was to induce shame (43:10-11). In other words, the purpose of Ezekiel's vision was not to provide guidance as to how the temple was to be rebuilt, but to provide reassurance of the hope that it would be rebuilt. Nowhere is there any explicit command that they were actually to build what Ezekiel described ... in contrast to the instructions for the original tabernacle in the wilderness ... In Ezekiel's account there is no word at all of any human participation in the planning or building of the whole complex; it is simply presented to him as a divine fait accompli in the 'virtual reality' of his vision."

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [*The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*](#). IVP Academic. 338.

Shame and Self-Knowledge

In stark contrast, Ezekiel is not shown the ideal temple in order to launch a new building program. Rather, the message communicated by the "proportion, design, and form" is a continuation of Ezekiel's prophetic critique of Israel's history. The perfect design is aimed at bringing his exilic audience to awareness of their guilt so they can see how their corruption of the temple led to its destruction and their isolation in exile.

This has been a stated goal for Ezekiel throughout his entire book, to bring a shameless people who are oblivious and resistant to acknowledge their own role in the disaster of 586 B.C.E. Even Ezekiel's restoration oracles highlight this theme.

Ezekiel 6:9 NASB

Then **those of you who escape will remember me among the nations** to which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from me, and by their eyes which played the harlot after their idols; and **they will loathe themselves** in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations.

Ezekiel 16:53-54 NASB

⁵³ Nevertheless, I will restore their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and along with them your own captivity, ⁵⁴ **in order that you may bear your humiliation and feel ashamed for all that you have done** when you become a consolation to them.

Ezekiel 16:60-63 NASB

⁶⁰ “Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. ⁶¹ **Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed** when you receive your sisters, both your older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant. ⁶² Thus I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, ⁶³ **so that you may remember and be ashamed** and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done,” the Lord God declares.

Ezekiel 20:42-43 NASB

⁴² And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers. ⁴³ **There you will remember your ways** and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves; **and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight** for all the evil things that you have done.

Ezekiel 36:30-32 NASB

³⁰ “I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations. ³¹ **Then you will remember your evil ways** and your deeds that were not good, and **you will loathe yourselves** in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. ³² I am not doing this for your sake,” declares the Lord God, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!”

For Ezekiel, there is a crucial connection between genuine self-knowledge before God and shame, in the sense of an honest awareness of one’s shortcomings. From the beginning, Ezekiel has faced an audience that shows no self-awareness of their responsibility for the disaster of Jerusalem’s fall. Ezekiel shared many parables and visions to convince his audience of their contributing role. Now Ezekiel shares a vision of the ideal temple to show them just how much the Jerusalem temple’s design reflected a corruption of God’s honor, holiness, and covenant relationship ideals.

For Ezekiel, the shame that Israel has experienced is the public shame of defeat by enemies and exile from their homeland. These are examples of “public humiliation” or “reproach” (בּוּשָׁה, בּוֹשָׁה), which lower the honor and social status of a person. Ezekiel mentions this kind of shame experienced by his generation of Israelites, but he also highlights a more interior, personal sense of remorse and guilt (קוֹט). Ezekiel uses both of these word groups to accomplish a significant goal: to awaken the Israelites to a healthy sense of their own failures,

so they can relate to Yahweh appropriately from a place of honest self-knowledge and a dependence upon divine mercy.

“The people, before their deliverance, are apparently unable to feel shame, that is, they do not have an acute sense of themselves and their actions as others see them or as God sees them, and in Ezekiel’s estimation this is a moral failing in their characters ... The capacity to remember their actions as loathsome, to possess such devastating clarity of self-perception is the equivalent of a new moral self capable of making accurate moral assessments ... For Ezekiel shame is not an inherent part of Israel’s identity, a ‘given’ of their human condition ... the very capacity to experience shame constitutes a salvific act by Yahweh—it is a gift from God. It strips the people of their delusions about themselves as their old-self disintegrates, paving the way for a new identity shaped by a new self-knowledge, to see themselves as Yahweh sees them, and thus opening the way to a restored relationship.”

Lapsley, Jacqueline (2000). “Shame and Self-Knowledge in Ezekiel: The Positive Role of Shame in Ezekiel’s View of the Moral Self.” *The Book of Ezekiel*. 156-159.

The Great Altar Restored

After Ezekiel’s tour of the temple structure and Yahweh returns, Ezekiel returns to the courtyard and focuses on the most massive feature, the 10 feet tall x 34 feet square altar with stairs leading up to it. After being described, Ezekiel hears of its purification and dedication ([Ezek. 43:18-27](#)) to begin its regular use in daily sacrifices.

This passage acts as a climax to the initial temple vision of Ezekiel. After touring the great sacred complex, the seven-day dedication ceremony inaugurates the liturgical operations of the temple (just like the seven-day ceremonies of the tabernacle and temple in [Lev. 9-10](#) and [1 Kgs. 8](#)).

Significance: This passage links back to [Ezekiel 20:39-41](#) where Yahweh promises that his people would one day offer pure and acceptable worship, and so they themselves metaphorically become an offering: “I will accept you as fragrant incense” ([Ezek. 20:41](#)). So here, the altar account ends with “then I will accept you” ([Ezek. 43:27](#)). This is precisely the metaphor Paul adopts of himself as one of those who “worship by the Spirit of God” ([Phil. 3:3](#)) and so himself becomes an offering ([Phil. 2:17](#); [Rom. 12:1-2](#)).

Macro Design of Ezekiel 44:1-46:24

Ezekiel 44:1-31

The elevation of the **Zadokite priesthood** from among the Levites

44:1-5

The outer east gate closed as Yahweh’s glory fills the temple

- **44:1-3** Outer east gate closed to everyone but the chief, because Yahweh’s glory went through it
- **44:4** Ezekiel sees Yahweh’s glory in the temple

- **44:5** Ezekiel to observe all the instructions about the temple service, and report them

44:6-16

The Levites are separated as Zadokite priests are elevated

- **44:6-8** The Levites are excluded from serving as priests because of past offenses
- **44:9-14** The Levites are given general temple responsibilities because of past offenses
- **44:15-16** Zadokite priests elevated because of faithfulness

44:17-31

Seven rules of elevated holiness for Zadokite priests

- **44:17-19** Rule 1: The sacred clothing of the Zadokite priests
- **44:20-27** Rules 2-6: The sacred life of the Zadokite priests
- **44:28-31** The future inheritance of the priests

45:1-25

The holy and just arrangements of land, offerings, and liturgical time

45:1-8

The land inheritance for priests, Levites, people, and chief

- **45:1-4** The land inheritance of the Zadokite priests
- **45:5** The land inheritance of the Levites
- **45:6-8** The land inheritance of the people and the chief

45:10-17

Justice in the market and in the temple offerings

- **45:9-12** Justice in economic weights and measures
- **45:13-15** Just measures for Israel's offerings and sacrifices
- **45:16-17** The chief's sponsorship of Israel's offerings and sacrifices for atonement

45:18-25

The new liturgical year sponsored by the chief

- **45:18-20** The offerings for the new year's festival (01/01 + 01/07)
- **45:21-24** The offerings for Passover (01/14 + 7 days)
- **45:25** The offerings for Sukkot (07/15 + 7 days)

46:1-24

The liturgical and land-inheritance regulations for **the chief** and the kitchens for priestly and common use

46:1-15

The liturgical rhythms of the people and the chief

- **46:1-8** Inner east gate closed, only opened only on Sabbaths for the chief's offerings
- **46:9-12** The people's regulated movements in sacred space and the chief's offerings
- **46:13-15** The daily offerings made every morning

46:16-18

The land inheritance of the chief and his sons and the Jubilee

- **46:16** The chief can grant land inheritance to his sons
- **46:17** Land inheritance that the chief gives to his servants is restored at the Jubilee
- **46:18** The chief cannot seize land inheritance from the people

46:19-24

Virtual tour of the sacred rooms for priests and Levites

- **46:19-20** Description of the inner-court kitchen for priests
- **46:21-24** Description of the outer-court kitchens for the people and Levites

Ezekiel 44:1-46:24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 44:1-31

¹ And he made me return by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary,
the one that faces the east;
and it was closed.

² And Yahweh said to me,
"This gate will be closed;
it will not be opened,
and no person will enter by it,
for Yahweh Elohim of Israel has entered by it;
therefore it will be closed.

³ As for the chief,
he will sit in it as a chief,
to eat bread before Yahweh;
he will enter by way of the porch of the gate,
and will go out by the same way."

⁴ And he brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the house;

and I looked, and behold,
the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh,
and I fell on my face.

⁵ And Yahweh said to me,
“Son of a human,
set your heart,
and see with your eyes
and hear with your ears,
everything that I will say to you,
about all the statutes of the house of Yahweh,
and about all its instructions;
and set your heart,
on the entrance of the house,
with all exits of the sacred space.

⁶ You will say to the rebels,
to the house of Israel,
‘Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
“Enough of all your abominations,
O house of Israel,
⁷ when you brought in foreigners,
uncircumcised in heart,
and uncircumcised in flesh,
to be in my sacred space,
so as to profane it, my house,
when you offered my food,
the fat and the blood;
for they violated my covenant;
in addition to all your abominations!

⁸ And you have not kept charge of my holy things,
but you have set them to keep charge of my sacred space.”

⁹ Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
“Any foreigner,
uncircumcised in heart,
and uncircumcised in flesh,
he will not enter my sacred space,
any foreigners who are among the sons of Israel.

¹⁰ However, the Levites,
who wandered away from me when Israel wandered away,
who wandered away from me after their idols,
they will bear the punishment for their iniquity.

¹¹ And they will be servants in my sacred space,
appointed at the gates of the house,
and serving in the house;

they will slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people,
and they will stand before them to serve them.

¹² Because they served them before their idols,
and they became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel,
therefore I have lifted my hand on oath against them,"
declares Yahweh Elohim,
"that they will bear the punishment for their iniquity.

¹³ And they will not come near to me,
to serve me as priests,
nor come near to any of my holy things,
to the things that are most holy;
but they will bear their shame,
and also their abominations which they have committed.

¹⁴ Yet I will appoint them as keepers of the keeping of the house,
of all its service,
and of all that will be done in it.

¹⁵ But the Levite priests, **the sons of Zadok**,
who kept charge of my sacred space,
when the sons of Israel wandered away from me,
they will come near to me to minister to me,
and they will stand before me to offer me the fat and the blood,"
declares Yahweh Elohim.

¹⁶ "They will enter my sacred space;
they will come near to my table to serve me and keep my keeping,

¹⁷ And it will be that when they enter at the gates of the inner court,
they will be clothed with linen garments;
and wool will not be on them,
while they are ministering in the gates of the inner court and in the house.

¹⁸ Linen turbans will be on their heads,
and linen undergarments will be on their loins;
they will not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat.

¹⁹ When they go out into the outer court,
into the outer court to the people,
they will take off their garments in which they have been serving,
and they will rest them in the holy rooms,
and they will put on other garments,
so that they will not transmit holiness to the people with their garments.

²⁰ And they will not shave their heads,
and they will not let their locks grow long;
they will only trim the hair of their heads.

²¹ Nor will any of the priests drink wine,
when they enter the inner court.

²² And they will not marry a widow or a divorced woman,

but will take unmarried women from the seed of the house of Israel,
or a widow who is the widow of a priest.

²³ And, they will teach my people between the holy and the common,
and help them know between the pure and the impure.

²⁴ And in a dispute they stand to judge;
they will judge it according to my justice.

They will also keep my instructions and my statutes in all my appointed feasts,
and they will treat my sabbaths as holy.

²⁵ They will not go to a dead person so as to become impure;
however, for a father or for a mother,
or for a son, or for a daughter,
for a brother, or for a sister who has not had a husband,
they may become impure.

²⁶ After he is purified,
they will count seven days for him,

²⁷ and on the day that he goes into the sacred space,
into the inner court to serve in the sanctuary,
he will bring near his purification offering,"
declares Yahweh Elohim.

²⁸ "And it will be their inheritance;
I am their inheritance;
and you will give them no possession in Israel;
I am their possession.

²⁹ They will eat the grain offering, the purification offering and the guilt offering;
and every devoted thing in Israel will be theirs.

³⁰ The first of all the first fruits,
every kind and every contribution of every kind,
everything from all your contributions,
they will be for the priests;
and the first of your dough you will also give to the priest,
to cause a blessing to rest on your house.

³¹ Any dead or torn corpse of any bird or beast,
the priests will not eat."""

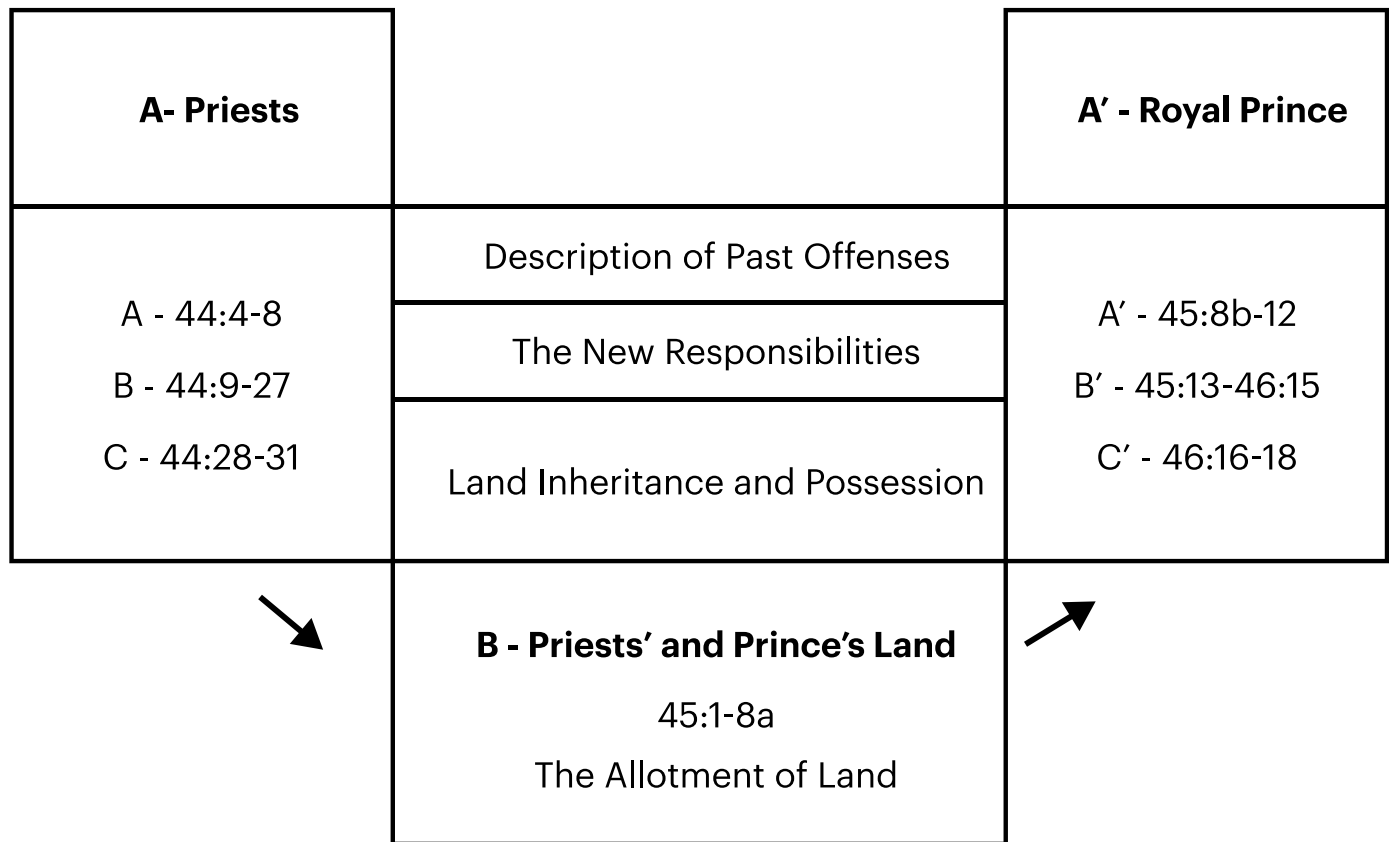
Ezekiel 44:1-31. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The Closed Outer East Gate

Yahweh enters the new temple by means of this gate in [Ezekiel 43:1-4](#), marking it as most holy and symbolically off-limits for normal foot traffic, so it is permanently closed. The closure is also significant because this is precisely the gate through which Yahweh left the temple ([10:19](#); [11:1](#), [22-23](#)). Its closure thus represents the permanence of Yahweh's residence among his people.

Restored Worship

This next section, [Ezekiel 44:4-46:18](#), describes the restored worship of Israel in the new temple by focusing on the priesthood and prince of the people. The section has a symmetrical shape focusing on two groups of people who will serve Yahweh in the running of the temple and the land.



Symmetrical Design of Ezekiel 44:4-46:18. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Priesthood Restored to Zadok and Levi

Ezekiel describes the restoration of the Levites to their role in the temple, and restricts the priesthood to the clan of Zadok, a family that came through Aaron's son Eleazar (see [1 Chron. 6:1-8](#)). Zadok remained loyal to David and Solomon and so was elevated as high priest in place of Abiathar, who was from the line of Aaron's son Ithamar that led to Eli (see [2 Sam. 15:25-27](#); [1 Kgs. 1:8, 39](#); [2:35](#)).

Ezekiel describes an incident not described anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible where the sons of Zadok remained faithful to Yahweh when the rest of the Levites participated in Israel's idolatry ([Ezek. 44:10, 15](#)). And so in the new temple, the Levites are restored to their role (teachers and priests for the people) while the Zadokite priests alone are elevated for their faithfulness ([Ezek. 44:15-16](#)). The priests were not to possess wealth in the form of land ([Ezek. 45:1-8](#)) but were to live off the offerings of the Israelites, and so remain in a symbolic place of dependence on an obedient Israel.

Significantly, the language of priesthood was adopted in the New Testament to describe Jesus as high priest ([Heb. 7-10](#)) and his followers as priests ([1 Peter 2:9-10](#); [Rev. 1:6](#)).

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 45:1-25

¹ "And when you divide by lot the land for inheritance, you will offer an allotment to Yahweh, a holy portion of the land; the length will be the length of 25,000 cubits, and the width will be 20,000. It will be holy within all its boundary round about.

² Out of this there will be for the holy place a square round about, five hundred by five hundred cubits, and fifty cubits for its open space round about.

³ From this area you will measure a length of 25,000 cubits and a width of 10,000 cubits; and in it will be the sacred space, the most holy place.

⁴ It will be the holy portion of the land; it will be for the priests, the servants of the sacred space, who come near to serve Yahweh, and it will be a place for their houses, and a holy place for the sacred space.

⁵ An area 25,000 cubits in length and 10,000 in width, it will be for the Levites, the servants of the house, and for their possession cities to dwell in.

⁶ You will give the city possession of an area 5,000 cubits wide and 25,000 cubits long, next to the allotment of the holy portion; it will be for the whole house of Israel.

⁷ The chief will have land on either side of the holy allotment and the property of the city, next to the holy allotment and the property of the city, on the west side toward the west, and on the east side toward the east, and in length comparable to one of the portions, from the west border to the east border.

⁸ This will be his land for a possession in Israel; so my chiefs will no longer oppress my people, but they will give the rest of the land to the house of Israel according to their tribes."

⁹ Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"Enough, you chiefs of Israel;
put away violence and destruction,
and practice justice and righteousness.
Stop the evictions of my people,"
declares Yahweh Elohim.

¹⁰ "You will have just balances,
a just ephah and a just bath.

¹¹ The ephah and the bath will be the same quantity, so that the bath will contain a tenth of a homer, and the ephah a tenth of a homer; their standard will be according to the homer.

¹² The shekel will be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, and fifteen shekels will be your maneh.

¹³ This is the offering that you will offer: a sixth of an ephah from a homer of wheat; a sixth of an ephah from a homer of barley;

¹⁴ and the prescribed portion of oil, namely, the bath of oil, a tenth of a bath from each kor, which is ten baths or a homer, for ten baths are a homer;

¹⁵ and one sheep from each flock of two hundred from the watering places of Israel, for a grain offering, for a burnt offering and for peace offerings, to make atonement for them," declares Yahweh Elohim.

¹⁶ "For all the people of the land, this will be the offering, for the chief in Israel.

¹⁷ It will be on the chief to provide the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the drink offerings, at the feasts, on the new moons and on the sabbaths, at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel; he will provide the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel."

¹⁸ Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
"In the first month,
on the first of the month,
you will take a young bull without blemish,
and you will purify the sacred space.

¹⁹ The priest will take some of the blood from the purification offering, and he will put it on the door posts of the house, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the posts of the gate of the inner court.

²⁰ Thus you will do on the seventh day of the month, for everyone who goes astray or is ignorant; so you will make atonement for the house.

²¹ In the first month,
on the fourteenth day of the month,
you will have the Passover,
a feast of seven days;
unleavened bread will be eaten.

22 On that day the chief will provide
for himself and for all the people of the land,
a bull for a sin offering.

23 During the seven days of the feast he will provide as a burnt offering to Yahweh,
seven bulls and seven rams without blemish,
on every day of the seven days,
and a male goat daily for a purification offering.

24 He will provide as a grain offering,
an ephah with a bull,
an ephah with a ram,
and a hin of oil with an ephah.

25 In the seventh month,
on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast,
he will provide like this for seven days,
like the purification offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering and the oil.”

Ezekiel 45:1-25. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Land Inheritance of the Priests and Royal Chief

Ezekiel uses the language of a firstfruits offerings (see [Num. 15:19-20](#)) to describe a section of land that the Israelites will offer to Yahweh (8mi. x 6.5mi.) in their new inheritance, just as the Levites had their own cities before (48 total, 6 as cities of refuge, see Num. 35).

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 46:1-24

¹ Thus says Yahweh Elohim,

“The gate of the inner court facing east,
it will be shut the six days of work;
but on the day of the Sabbath it will be opened,
and on the day of the new moon it will be opened.

² And the prince will enter by way of the porch of the gate from outside,
and he will stand by the doorpost of the gate,
and the priests will perform his ascension offering and his peace offerings,
and he will worship at the threshold of the gate
and then he will go out;
and the gate will not be shut until the evening.

³ And the people of the land will worship,
at the doorway of that gate,
on the sabbaths and on the new moons,
before the face of Yahweh.

⁴ And the burnt offering which the prince will bring near to Yahweh on the sabbath day,
six lambs without blemish,

and a ram without blemish;

⁵ and the grain offering will be an ephah with the ram,
and the grain offering with the lambs as much as he is able to give,
and a hin of oil with an ephah.

⁶ And on the day of the new moon a young bull without blemish,
and six lambs and a ram,
they will be without blemish.

⁷ And an ephah with the bull,
and an ephah with the ram,
he will provide as a grain offering;
and with the lambs as much as he is able,
and a hin of oil with an ephah.

⁸ When the prince enters,
he will enter by way of the porch of the gate,
and by the same way he will go out.

⁹ And when the people of the land come before the face Yahweh at the appointed feasts,
the one who enters by way of the north gate to worship,
they will go out by way of the south gate;
and the one who enters by way of the south gate,
they will go out by way of the north gate.
No one will return by way of the gate by which they entered,
but they will go straight out.

¹⁰ And the chief in their midst, when they go in, he will go in;
and when they go out, he will go out.

¹¹ At the festivals and the appointed feasts there will be a grain offering;
an ephah with a bull and an ephah with a ram,
and with the lambs as much as one is able to give,
and a hin of oil with an ephah.

¹² And when the chief provides a freewill offering,
an ascension offering, or peace offerings as a freewill offering to Yahweh,
the gate facing east will be opened for him,
and he will perform his ascension offering and his peace offerings,
just as he does on the sabbath day.
Then he will go out,
and the gate will be shut after he goes out.

¹³ And a lamb, one year old without blemish,
you will perform as an ascension offering to Yahweh each day;
morning by morning you will perform it.

¹⁴ And a grain offering you will perform with it morning by morning,
a sixth of an ephah,
and a third of a hin of oil to moisten the fine flour,
a grain offering to Yahweh,
a perpetual statute, continually.

¹⁵ And they will perform the lamb, the grain offering and the oil,

morning by morning,
for a continual ascension offering.”

- 16 Thus says Yahweh Elohim,
“If the chief gives a gift out of his inheritance to any of his sons,
it will belong to his sons;
it is their possession by inheritance.
17 And if he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants,
it will be his until the year of liberation;
then it will return to the chief.
His inheritance will be only his sons’;
it will belong to them.
18 The chief will not take from the people’s inheritance,
so as to oppress them out of their possession;
he will give his sons inheritance from his own possession,
so that My people will not be scattered, each from his possession.”

- 19 And he brought me through the entrance, which was at the side of the gate,
into the holy chambers for the priests, which faced north;
and look, there was a place at the extreme rear toward the west,
20 and he said to me,
“This is the place where the priests will boil the guilt offering and the sin offering,
where they will bake the grain offering,
in order that they may not bring them out into the outer court to transmit holiness to the people.”
21 And he brought me out into the outer court,
and he led me across to the four corners of the court;
and behold, in every corner of the court there was a smaller court.
22 In the four corners of the court there were courts for rising smoke,
forty cubits long and thirty wide;
these four in the corners were the same size.
23 There was a row of masonry round about in them,
around the four of them,
and boiling places were made under the rows round about.
24 Then he said to me,
“These are houses of the cooking fires,
where the servants of the house will cook the sacrifices of the people.”

Ezekiel 46:1-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The Chief’s Role in the Sacrificial Liturgies

In [Ezekiel 46:1-15](#), recalling the perpetually closed east gate by which Yahweh’s glory entered into the temple ([Ezek. 43:1-6](#), [44:1-3](#)), we now learn that the chief will sit in that gate on the Sabbath and new month days and sponsor sacrifices on behalf of the people.

The chief alone can enter and exit the east gate, but he may not pass through it. Rather, he can sit in the porch of the gate and make his offerings.

The chief plays a combined role of a king and priest, offering sacrifices on behalf of the people who are gathered around the east gate outside. But the chief's role is also minimized in comparison to Israel's past kings, like Solomon who offered the sacrifices on the day of the temple's inauguration (see 1 Kgs. 8). Here, the chief plays a downsized role that fits within Ezekiel's larger program to correct the past abuses of Israel's kings who claimed a more aggrandized role for themselves than they should have.

The Chief's Limited Property Rights

In Ezek. 46:16-18, Ezekiel recalls the injustice of Israel's kings in seizing ancestral lands from the tribes (e.g., Ahab and Naboth's vineyard, 1 Kgs. 21) and in bending economic policies in their favor (see Amos 8:5-6; Hos. 12:7; Mic. 6:10-11).

Ezekiel specifically targets the practice of "political gifts" of land to people outside his family and tribe (Ezek. 46:17). The king cannot appropriate the land from other tribes and then give it as a political gift to further his own agenda. Rather, the original land allotment stands perpetually. This is grounded in the concept of the land made clear in the Jubilee guidelines of Leviticus 25: The land belongs to Yahweh, and he gives it as a gift to his servants to be perpetually restored every 7x7 Jubilee cycle.

Back to the Rooms for the Priests

Ezekiel 46:19-24 picks up the narrative of Ezekiel's vision from 44:1-4. Since that passage, there have been a series of divine speeches inserted into the narrative (marked by speech formula at 44:6; 45:18; 46:1, 16), and here the narrative resumes.

One of the last places in the heavenly temple that Ezekiel is shown before Yahweh's glory enters the temple are the rooms (לשכות) where the priests sit to eat the holy sacrificial meats that remain from Israel's offerings (Ezek. 42:13-14). So here, near the end of the central literary unit in Ezekiel's vision, similar rooms are described. These are the special places where Israel's priests can cook and eat the holy meat from the offerings so as not to transmit holiness to the outer courts where the people are.

What's Up With the "Chief" in Ezekiel 45-46?

In his vision of the restored temple, Ezekiel envisions a role for a royal leader of the tribes of Israel, but as with everything in this vision, his role is heavily modified and diminished from the authority and role of the past kings of Judah.

The Title "Chief" Versus "King"

Ezekiel saves the word "king" (Heb. *melek* / מלך) to refer to Judah's failed kings of the past (Ezek. 1:2, 17:12) or to the rulers of non-Israelite nations (Babylon in 19:9; Tyre in 28:12; Egypt in 29:2). Only one time does he refer to the future messianic seed of David as a "king" (in Ezek. 37:22-24). Ezekiel's most consistent term for the future royal leader of the restored Israel is "chief" (*nasi'* / נשיא).

“Chief” is an older title used to describe the tribal leaders. Abraham is called a *nasi’* by the Hittites (Gen. 23:6), and Ishmael's descendants who are tribal leaders are called *nasi’* (Gen. 25:16).

In the days before Israel's monarchy, their tribal leaders were called “chiefs” (see Exod. 16:22, 34:31).

In the arrangement of the twelve tribal camps around the tabernacle, the title “chief” is used more (62x in Numbers 1-36) than anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible, aside from Ezekiel 40-48 (where it's used 37x).

The Modified Role of the “Chief”

The following is a profile of the chief's role in Ezekiel 40-48 adapted from Block, Daniel (2010).

“Transformation of Royal Ideology in Ezekiel.” 40-41.

- While the eastern out gate is forever closed to human traffic, the chief alone can sit in the gate house to eat his sacrificial meals before Yahweh (Ezek. 44:1-3). After consuming the offerings, he has to leave out the gate and it is shut behind him.
- The chief is given a special territory, separate from the other tribes, made of two pieces of land to the east and west of the sacred square at the center of the sacred “reserve” (Ezek. 45:7-9, 48:21).
- The chief is the sponsor of all the animals and food for the sacrifices offered on behalf of his family and all the tribes (Ezek. 45:21-25).
- On weekly Sabbaths and new moon dates, the chief stands in the inner court watching the priests present offerings on his behalf (Ezek. 46:1-7, 12).
- The chief can give his granted property to his sons as a family possession, but he cannot confiscate anyone else's land (Ezek. 46:18). And if he gives some of his family land to anyone outside the royal house, it returns to his family in the Jubilee (Ezek. 46:17).

Ezekiel's chief is a highly diminished figure in the restoration, and we can see elements of critique of past misbehavior that is being regulated and prevented. The chief is a civil representative of the tribes who facilitates the temple liturgy alongside the Zadokite priesthood. Together, they function as a royal-priesthood. But their offices are kept separate so as to avoid the violations of Israel's past kings.

The chief is subordinate to the holiness of God and the liturgy; he is not responsible for the operations of the temple. The chief does not build the temple, design the worship, or appoint the priests (as Israel's kings often did).

The Davidic Chief/King of Chapters 34 and 37 and the Chief of Chapters 40–48

There are several views regarding the relationship between the Davidic chief/king of Ezekiel 34 and 37 to the chief of chapters 40-48.

View 1: They Are Not the Same Figure

"The term *nasi*' describes a leader in a more general sense, not necessarily with any connotation of royalty ... There seems to be no connection to the messianic portrayal of a new David that we saw in chapters 34 and 37. The figure in chapters 40-48 appears in the role of patron and provider for the religious ceremonies taking place in the temple. There is no exaltation of his status or any separate privileges. Much more is made of his responsibilities than of his status ... So this does not appear to be a messianic figure ruling in righteousness. This is a very human figure participating in the rituals, offering sacrifices for his own sins (46:1-7), and susceptible to the perennial temptations that surround those in authority (45:9-10; 46:18)."

Wright, Christopher J.H. (2001). [*The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*](#). IVP Academic. 353-354.

View 2: They Are the Same Figure Portraying Different Roles

The prince in these visions plays a subordinate role to Yahweh and the priesthood, and he fulfills all the ideals of the original Davidic commission that Judah's kings never fully realized.

"In Ezekiel's mind, the kings of Israel, specifically David and his descendants, were Yahweh's specially chosen agents appointed to govern his people in his place and thereby secure their well-being. The king's primary role was to represent Yahweh by embodying covenant righteousness in providing security for the people and their land and facilitating the worship of Yahweh in the temple. But in Ezekiel's mind, the ideal and reality of the history of Israel's monarchy were miles apart and so his vision of the coming messianic king portrays him in a subordinate role to Yahweh (chs. 34, 37) and a subordinate role in facilitating the worship of Yahweh as the prince in chs. 40-48."

Block, Daniel (2010). "Transformation of Royal Ideology in Ezekiel."

View 3: Ezekiel's "Chief" Fits in a Larger Messianic Mosaic

Ezekiel's "chief" is a composite portrait that emerges from the many images of the messianic role in the various parts of the Bible. The final framers of the TaNaK did not create a homogeneous mosaic, but they allowed all the individual pictures to stand alongside each other in their diversity.

Sometimes the focus is on the expectation of a coming royal Davidic king who will rule a reunited Israel and the nations in justice and righteousness and rebuild a new temple: [Genesis 49:8-12](#); [Numbers 24:17](#) [2 Samuel 7](#); [Isaiah 9:1-6, 11:1-15](#); [Psalms 2, 72, 110, 132](#).

Sometimes the focus is on an ideal priest who will mediate perfectly between God and his people: Jethro in [Exodus 18](#), the messianic high priest in [Exodus 28](#), Moses the functional high priest in [Exodus 32-34](#), and the faithful high priest in [1 Samuel 1-2](#).

Sometimes the focus is on a coming royal priest who will rejoin the offices of priest and king in one person: Melchizedek in [Genesis 14:18-20](#), David as royal priest in [2 Samuel 6-7](#), and David as king and temple builder in [1 Chronicles 17-29](#).

Sometimes the focus is on the two offices of king and priest operating together in harmony in the restored Israel: Ezekiel 40-48, [Zechariah 4 and 6](#).

In this discussion, it's important that we honor the stated goals of Ezekiel's temple vision in [Ezekiel 43:1-11](#) within its own context.

Very often, Jewish and Christian readers adapt Ezekiel's vision as they integrate it into a larger mosaic of "restored temple" imagery from the prophets and Psalms ([Isa. 2:1-4](#); [Joel 3](#); [Zech. 2](#); etc.). Such adaptation usually forces Ezekiel's vision into the categories of modern Christian debates of eschatology (millennial temple, end-times temple, etc.). The problem is these categories are not native to the Hebrew Bible, so they end up distorting our vision of each text on its own terms.

The portrait of the "chief" in Ezekiel 44-46 is a great example. Ezekiel's vision is a critique of the past by means of holding up an ideal, and to accomplish that goal the Davidic heir is never called "king" but only "chief," the ancient name of Israel's first tribal leaders. The "chief" is a king who has been very much downgraded from the self-aggrandizing habits of Israel's past rulers. In Ezekiel 44-46, he is subservient to the priests and to Yahweh.

Reflection Question

What is the purpose of Ezekiel's temple vision?

Session 28: The River From the Temple

Key Takeaways

- The image of a river flowing out from the mountain of God takes us right back to Eden.
- The river that flows out from the temple refreshes the most barren parts of the land, but it doesn't stop there. The ever-flowing river can be imagined as bringing God's life to the whole world.
- The name of the city is "Yahweh is over there," that is, Yahweh is in his temple, set apart from the city.

Macro Design of Ezekiel 47:1-48:35

Ezekiel 47:1-48:35

The Restored Land Inheritance as a New Eden

47:1-1

A - The River of Life from the Temple

- **47:1-5** Ezekiel's tour of the river coming out of **the temple**
- **47:6-7** The trees on the side of the river
- **47:8-12** The river goes to the Dead Sea and brings new life

47:13-23

B - The Borders of the Restored Land Inheritance

A - **47:13-14** The land inheritance to be distributed to the 12 tribes of Israel

B - **47:15-20** Description of the land's 4 outer borders

A' - **47:21-23** The land inheritance to be distributed for the 12 tribes, including immigrants

48:1-29

B' - The Restored Land Inheritance for the Twelve Tribes

A - **48:1-7** The land inheritance of the 7 tribes north of the sacred reserve

B - **48:8-22** The central sacred reserve for the Levites, priests, temple, city, and chief

A' - **48:23-29** The land inheritance of the 5 tribes south of the sacred reserve

48:30-35

A' - The Twelve Gates of the City and its Name

- **48:30-35** The reserve-city's 12 gates for the 12 tribes, and the name of **the city**

Ezekiel 47:1-48:35. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Translation and Literary Design of Ezekiel 47:1-12

¹ And he brought me back to the door of the house;
and look, **waters** were coming out from under the threshold of the house **toward the east** ,
for the house was **facing east** ,
and the **waters** were going down down from underneath,
from the south side of the house,
from south of the altar.

² And he brought me out by way of the north gate,
and he led me around a way on the outside,
to the outside gate,
by way of the gate that **faces east** ,
and look, **waters** were trickling from the south side.

A ³ When the man went out **toward the east** ,
with a line in his hand,
then he measured a thousand cubits,
and he led me through the **waters** , **waters** reaching the ankles.

⁴ **And he measured a thousand**,
and led me through the **waters** , **waters** reaching the knees;
and he measured a thousand,
and led me through the **waters** , **waters** reaching the thighs,

⁵ **and he measured a thousand**,
and it was a **river** that I was not able to cross,
for the **waters** had risen,
waters for swimming in,
a **river** that could not be crossed.

B ⁶ And he said to me,
"Son of a human,
do you seen this?"

And he brought and returned me back **to the edge of the river** .

⁷ When he returned me, look, **at the edge of the river** ,
trees, very many, on the one side and on the other .

8 And he said to me,
“These **waters** are going out **toward region of the east** ,
and going down into the southern-desert,
then they go toward the sea,
being made to flow into the sea,
and the **waters** of the sea **are healed** .

9 And it will come about, every living creature that swarms,
in every place where the **river** goes,
they will have life .
And there will be **fish, very many** ,
for where these **waters** go, then they **are healed** ,
and everywhere the **river** goes,
they will have life .

10 And it will come about that fishermen will stand beside it;
from the Spring of Gedi to the Spring of Eglayim,
there will be a place for the spreading of nets.
Their **fish** will be according to their kinds,
like **the fish of the Great Sea, very many** .

11 But its swamps and marshes,
they **will not be healed** ,
they will be left for salt.

12 **By the river on its edge,**
on one side and on the other ,
there will come up every kind of tree for food ;
their leaves will not wither,
and their fruit will not finish,
and each month they will bring first-fruit,
because their **waters** flow from the sanctuary,
and their fruit will be for food ,
and **their leaves for healing** .”

Ezekiel 47:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

The Temple's River of Life

The river turns from a trickle in the temple ([Ezek. 47:2](#)) into a river a mile wide ([Ezek. 47:6](#)), turning the desert of the Dead Sea region into a fruitful land full of flowers and fish!

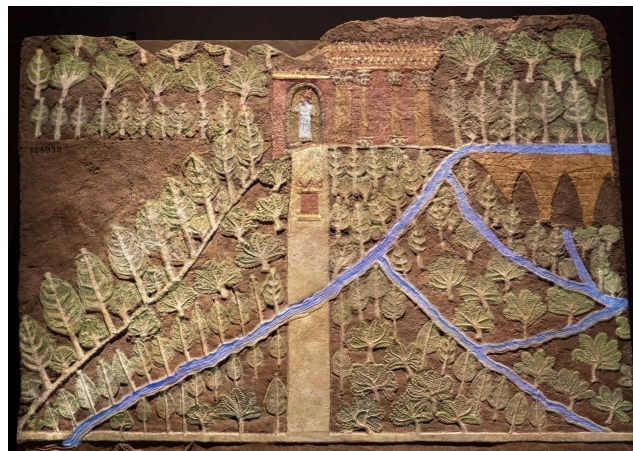
This motif is a common poetic image in the prophets of the new creation. It's rooted in the creation narrative of [Genesis 1-2](#) where the chaotic, dark wilderness ([Gen. 1:2](#)) that is uninhabitable ([Gen. 2:5-6](#)) is transformed

into a lush garden (Gen. 1-2) that contains the head of a huge river that enriches the known world (Gen. 2:10-14).

The Zion psalms (Ps. 46-48, see also Ps. 36) depict the temple with this symbolic-poetic imagery to describe Yahweh as the source of all life.

Later prophets use these images (desert into garden) of future hope (Isa. 41:17-20, 44:1-5; Joel 3:17-18; Zech. 14:8-9), or they reverse the images (garden into desert) as an image of the day of Yahweh (Joel 2:3; Jer. 4:24-26).

This was a common motif in ancient Near Eastern conceptions of temples as a meeting place of Heaven and Earth and as sources of divine life that enrich the world with fertility. (Below: image of Ashurbanipal's royal garden with temple atop the hill, 7th century B.C.E.)



SPL. [National Geographic](#).

Ezekiel's vision is about the heavenly temple as the source of divine life that will flow out of Yahweh's presence and transform all creation. Even though he portrays this restoration only within the framework of Israel's promised land, this localized image is itself a picture of cosmic restoration. The Eden river (Gen. 2:10-14) was the source of life to the known kingdoms of the world (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon). It's this universal meaning that John the visionary adopts from Ezekiel in his depiction of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22.

The New Allocation of the Land

In Ezekiel 47:13-48:29, Ezekiel depicts a new division and allotment of land according to boundaries and equal divisions that never existed historically before or after him. It is theological geography with symmetry designed to emphasize key themes.

The order and placement of the tribes reflects an ancestral grading system. The tribes from Jacob's concubines (Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Gad) are placed furthest from the sanctuary, while those descended from his two wives are placed equally on both sides of it. This results in a reordering of location that departs from any historical reality.

Ezekiel 47:13-14 emphasizes equality. The historical locations of the tribes were the result of many complicated factors and mixed motives of different tribes (Dan relocated to found a new temple, Judges 17-21; the Transjordan tribes had mixed motives, Num. 32; the Northern tribes seceded after Solomon, 1 Kgs. 11-12).

Ezekiel 45:8-9 emphasizes security. Ezekiel's vision ensures the land will forever remain a tribal possession; it will not be seized by the monarchy for abuse as it was so many times in Israel's history (e.g., Naboth's vineyard, 1 Kgs. 21).

Ezekiel 47:21-23 emphasizes the inclusion of the nations. Ezekiel surprisingly depicts gentiles and immigrants who take up permanent residence among Israel as eligible for possession of the ancestral lands. This is tantamount to full inclusion in the covenant people, as dramatic as Isaiah's statement in Isaiah 56:1-8.

The New Jerusalem and Its Gates

The naming of the gates of the new city in Ezekiel 48:30-35 had precedence earlier in Israel's history (2 Kgs. 14:13; Jer. 37:13), but Ezekiel's is a schematic representation of all of the tribes.

The city is a perfect square (Ezek. 48:30-35), as is the temple at its center, and in that center is the glorious presence of Yahweh that Ezekiel saw in Babylon at the beginning of the book (Ezek. 1:3). The book comes full circle, depicting the reunion of Heaven and Earth in the new creation with Jerusalem as the symbolic center of Yahweh's redemptive work.

The Name of the City

The name of the city in Ezekiel 48:35 is not, contrary to most contemporary translations, "Yahweh is there." That translation would require the Hebrew *Yahweh sham* (יהוה שם), and that is not what the Hebrew of Ezekiel 48:35 says! There is a modifying suffix on "there" called a directional *heh*, (an -ah attached to the end of a word) which directs attention away from the perspective of the speaker: *Yahweh shammah* (יהוה שמה).

- "the skies" (השמים), "toward the skies" (השמיימה, see Gen. 15:5)
- "the house" (הבית), "toward/into the house" (הביתה, see Gen. 43:16)
- "there" (שם), "over there/to there" (שמה, see Gen. 19:20)

When the noun "there" (שם / *sham*) is used with the directional *heh*, it always means "over there" (שמה).

Ezekiel 1:20 NASB*

Wherever the Spirit was, the living-beings went toward there/over there (שמה) ...

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Jeremiah 27:22 NASB*

They will be carried to Babylon and they will be over there (שמה) until the day I visit them ...

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The point of all of this is that the name of the city is "Yahweh is over there," which points to the temple at the center of the land. In other words, Yahweh is not in the city, but "over there" in the temple. The city has become a symbolic pointer to the dwelling place of Yahweh in the temple. This is a huge departure from the

David-Zion traditions, where Zion is equivalent with the palace of the Davidic king and with the temple. Ezekiel's critique of the monarchy is connected to this total separation of the temple from the power of the monarchy. It is Yahweh's presence and authority alone that stand at the center of the land.

“When used in texts such as Genesis 19:20, 22; 21:13, and Jeremiah 18:2, the Hebrew *shammah* points to a place one anticipates visiting, a destination. The name of Ezekiel's city thus suggests it is the rendezvous point for those on their way to the divine presence. ‘The Lord whom you see is that-a-way’—the city is a key waypoint or port of call for pilgrims seeking to draw near to God.”

Cook, Stephen L. (2018). [Ezekiel 38-48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary](#). Yale University Press. 297.

Appendix: Crucial Factors in Interpreting Ezekiel's Temple Vision

Historical Context

The vision is the final dated oracle in the book of Ezekiel (see [48:35](#), 40:1). It is dated to first day of a new year, 25 years after Jehoiachin's deportation (597 B.C.E.), 14 years after the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.E.), and 10 years after his salvation oracles began (as noted in [48:35](#), 33:21-22), that is, in the year 572 B.C.E.

However interpreters integrate Ezekiel's vision into their larger synthesis of biblical eschatology, we must take this primary context seriously. This vision is first and foremost a message from Ezekiel to his contemporaries in exile, and part of the Hebrew Bible's message to post-exilic Israel back in Jerusalem.

Twenty-five years is half of a Jubilee cycle (referred to in [Ezek. 48:35](#); 46:17), and the 10th day of the first month is precisely the day that the preparations for Passover begin (see [Ezek. 48:35](#); Exod. 12:3). Both Passover and the Jubilee are deeply connected to the story of Yahweh's liberation of his people and his land from slavery (see [Ezek. 48:35](#); Exod. 12-13; Lev. 25).

Literary Genre

This final vision is called “visions of *Elohim*” (מראות אלהים, [Ezek. 40:2](#)). This is the same title given to his earlier visions of the divine throne-chariot ([Ezek. 1:1-3](#)) and of his virtual tour of the Jerusalem temple ([8:1](#)). Those visions are explicitly placed “in-between the skies and the land” ([Ezek. 8:3](#)), which is a biblical way of referring to what we would call an “alternate dimension” of reality, which explains the many symbolic and surreal features of his visionary experiences.

- He devours an entire scroll written with divine words ([Ezek. 2:8-3:3](#)).
- He was seized by his hair and transported to Jerusalem ([Ezek. 8:3](#)).
- He digs through walls and enters secret rooms of the temple ([Ezek. 8:8](#)).
- He sees multiple scenes of Israelite idolatrous worship happening simultaneously, even though they actually happened over the course of many years. Manasseh's Asherah statue of [Ezekiel 8:5](#) was already torn down by Josiah in the time before Ezekiel, yet he sees it as present in the moment. The Tammuz

rituals are also described by Jeremiah (Jer. 7:18), but happened decades after the time of Manasseh and Josiah.

- He sees angelic messengers of destruction touring about the city marking some people's foreheads and destroying others. This event is a symbolic depiction of the remnant who is spared from the Babylonian onslaught, while others will be killed in the siege and attack on the city (see Ezek. 9). Ezekiel also sees divine fire from the throne chariot thrown down upon the city.
- Ezekiel "sees" the divine glory leave the temple and Jerusalem and cross the valley of Kidron and go over the Mount of Olives (Ezek. 11:22-25).

Ezekiel's "divine visions" are apocalyptic experiences in which he gains access to the heavens where he "sees" a world of symbols that give him new perspective on earthly events. These visions are packed with heavy doses of symbolism steeped in earlier biblical imagery (cosmic creation, Eden, Sinai, Jerusalem, and temple). Whatever interpretive principles we use to understand the symbolism of Ezekiel 1 and 8-11, it is only consistent that we approach Ezekiel 40-48 with the same expectations.

Biblical Theme

Ezekiel's temple vision is the culmination of a core biblical theme that began in Genesis 1-2 and is developed throughout the Hebrew Bible.

1. The Cosmic Temple

Genesis 1:1-2:3 depicts creation as the separation and organization of a three-tiered cosmos (the skies, the land, the abyss under the land) in which Heaven and Earth are joined together through the image of God—humanity as God's royal-priests.

The seven-day scheme and the sequence from chaos to cosmos, the placement of the divine image on the land, these details (and many more) portray creation as a cosmic temple.

2. Eden as Proto-Temple

Eden is portrayed as a high mountain garden where Heaven and Earth overlap, and the place to which God elevates humanity to learn wisdom and the fear of the Lord so they can rule the world as God's partners.

Genesis 1-2 depict a divine ideal for the cosmos as a place where Heaven and Earth are distinct realms that overlap and are bound together in harmony.

3. The Promised Land, Mount Moriah, and Bethel

The land of Canaan is depicted as an Eden-like land, to which Abraham is elevated out of the "fire of the Chaldeans" (Gen. 11:27-32). It is a place where he meets with God on high mountains and by sacred trees, and is blessed by God (Gen. 12:1-9, 13:12-18).

Because of Abraham and Sarah's sin against Hagar (Gen. 16), God requires the surrender of Abraham's firstborn sons (Ishmael in Gen. 21 and Isaac in Gen. 22). On Mount Moriah (proto-Zion) God provides a substitute offering that both redeems the chosen son and dies for the sins of Abraham and Sarah.

God meets Jacob at Bethel ([Gen. 28:10-20](#)), where he has an apocalyptic vision of Heaven and Earth overlapping in a field. He sees the ramp that connects Heaven and Earth, and he receives a promise that God will restore him to this Eden-like land after his long exile. Note that Jacob encounters angelic boundary-guards when he re-enters the land ([Gen. 32:1-2](#)).

4. Mount Sinai

In the burning bush ([Exod. 3](#)), on Mount Horeb/Sinai, Moses encounters a divine-human figure in the middle of a fiery tree, and the space is called “holy ground.” This will become the same place where Israel will come to meet with Yahweh ([Exod. 19](#)) who will appear in cloud, wind, and fire ([Exod. 19-20](#)).

5. The tabernacle

6. The Jordan River

7. Jerusalem, Zion, the temple

Ezekiel and the Exodus Narrative

The structure of much of this vision seems to intentionally recall the broad narrative structure of the Exodus and Sinai narratives. [Adapted from Block, Daniel (2013). “Envisioning the Good News: Ten Interpretive Keys to Ezekiel’s Final Vision.” In [Beyond the River Chebar: Studies in Kingship and Eschatology in the Book of Ezekiel](#) (1st ed., pp. 175-196). The Lutterworth Press. 163-164.]

Feature	Exodus Narrative	Ezekiel’s Restoration Oracles
Yahweh commissions a human agent.	Exod. 3–4	Ezek. 33
Yahweh separates Israel from the nations and delivers her from bondage.	Exod. 5–13	Ezek. 34–37
Enemy forces challenge Yahweh’s salvific work on his people’s behalf.	Exod. 14–15	Ezek. 38–39
Yahweh appears on a high mountain.	Exod. 19	Ezek. 40:1–4
Yahweh provides for his residence among his people.	Exod. 25–40	Ezek. 40:5–43:27
Yahweh prescribes the appropriate response to his grace.	Leviticus	Ezek. 44:1–46:24
Yahweh provides for the apportionment of his land to his	Num. 34–35	Ezek. 47–48

Ezekiel Mirrors Exodus. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Feature	Exodus Narrative	Ezekiel's Restoration Oracles
people.		
<i>Ezekiel Mirrors Exodus.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).		

The Relationship Between Ezekiel's Torah and Moses' Torah

There are similarities between the divine revelations Ezekiel and Moses receive. They are both received on high mountains to be given to the people after the making of a covenant, both focus on temple and priestly concerns with Levites and an elite family of priests, the presence of Yahweh is manifest in divine cloud, and neither Ezekiel nor Moses get to personally experience the promised land.

There are also differences. The priestly line is different (Zadok vs. Aaron [Ezek. 43:19](#), [Ezek. 44:15](#)), the priestly garments are different ([44:17-19](#)); there are no temple furnishings; and there are different offerings (e.g., New Moon in [46:6-7](#) vs. [Num. 28:11](#)).

Earlier References

These are not the only places Ezekiel pointed forward to Israel's new worship temple. He developed this theme in [Ezekiel 20:32-45](#) and [Ezekiel 37:26-28](#) and the images from those texts need to be taken into account here.

Symbolic and Stylized Elements in the Vision

Some elements in Ezekiel's vision stretch the imagination or represent a clearly symbolic ideal.

1. The "high mountain" ([Ezek. 40:2](#), never named as Jerusalem) where the temple is located is a clear "Eden," "Zion," and "Sinai" motif. The fact that all of these distinct sacred mountain spaces can be merged together into one geographical place means that we are dealing with a transcendent "space" where Heaven and Earth overlap. (Jerusalem sits on a ridge 2,500 feet above sea level and is overshadowed by the Mount of Olives to the east; these are clearly poetic descriptions; Zaphon in [Ps. 48:2](#) was the Canaanite version of the Greek Mount Olympus, see also [Isa. 2:2](#) and [Mic. 4:1](#)).
2. The river flowing out of the temple ([Ezek. 47](#)) was never a reality ([Ps. 46:4](#); [Joel 3:18](#); [Zech. 14:8](#)).
3. The structure is highly symbolic. This was true of the tabernacle and temple as well, but in this structure even more so.

“The plan of the city is idealized as a perfect square with three gates punctuating each side to provide admittance for the twelve tribes. The emphasis on the twelve tribes itself reverses five centuries of history. The apportionment of the land of Israel among the tribes to a large extent disregards topographic and historical realities. The dimensions of the temple and the city are dominated by multiples of five, with twenty-five being a particularly common number. All in all Ezekiel’s scheme appears highly contrived, casting doubt on any interpretation that expects a literal fulfillment of his plan.”

Block, Daniel (1998). [*The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans.

Reception of This Vision in Judaism and Christianity

Ezekiel’s plan was apparently not read or received as a literal program of restoration by anyone in the post-exilic community (Ezra-Nehemiah shows a desire to restore Israel according to the Mosaic Torah, not Ezekiel’s: no land redivision, no "prince," the temple was not built according to Ezekiel’s description).

When John the visionary depicts the new creation in [Revelation 21-22](#), he is clearly adopting language and imagery from Ezekiel 40-48 (John’s vision is on a “high mountain” in 21:10; a new Jerusalem in which God dwells in 21:11; the heavenly guide with a measuring rod in 21:15-17; symmetrical plan for the city in 21:11-21; river of life in 22:1), but never literally. He adapts Ezekiel’s images for his own rhetorical and theological purposes.

- John names the city as the new Jerusalem ([Rev. 21:2](#)) where Ezekiel leaves it unnamed to separate it from its past ([40:2](#)), and later renames it “Yahweh is there” ([48:35](#)).
- John’s city emphatically has no temple ([Rev. 21:22](#)), which is a theological impossibility for Ezekiel, where it’s at the center of the land.
- Sacrifices: Ezekiel portrays a fully functioning sacrificial system run by Zadokite priestly staff. In Revelation this would be a theological contradiction as the lamb has already been slain ([Rev. 21:22](#)).
- City residents: In John, believers are purified by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God ([Rev. 7:14](#)), while in Ezekiel there is continued need to distinguish pure from impure.
- The nations: In Ezekiel, there is a purely ethnic-Israelite focus, but in Revelation the scope of the renewal is for all nations (cross reference the leaves of the tree in [Ezek. 47:12](#) and [Rev. 22:2](#)).

Ezekiel's Other Visions

Ezekiel contains numerous visionary experiences that were clearly symbolic explorations of theological realities.

- Eating the scroll in [2:1-3:15](#) symbolizes accepting the message of judgment and internalizing its reality as mediator.
- Consider the symbolism of throwing fire on Jerusalem and the symbolic “slaughter” in [Ezekiel 9:1-11](#).
- Re-creating the dry bones into new humans in [Ezekiel 37](#) is a promise of national covenant renewal.
- Ezekiel 40-48 is a similar visionary exploration of the meaning and hope of Yahweh’s return to his people and what kinds of realities will exist when God dwells among his people.

Main Interpretive Views of Ezekiel's Temple

A Blueprint for the Eschaton

This view holds that Ezekiel's temple vision describes an actual temple to be built when the Messiah returns to restore Jerusalem and rebuild the messianic kingdom.

There are several problems with this view.

- There is no basis in the New Testament for the hope of a restored temple in Jerusalem. Any texts that might be appealed to are fraught with interpretive challenges and are by no means a clear anticipation of a new temple that should be associated with Christian hope.
- In the depiction of the new creation in [Revelation 21:22](#), it is very clear that there is no centralized temple because the entire creation is filled with God's presence.
- The gospels portray Jesus as the ultimate reality to which the physical temple pointed ([John 2:13-22](#)). Jesus acted and spoke as if he played the role of the temple (offering forgiveness, [Mark 2:1-13](#); healing and purifying the unclean, [Mark 5:24-34](#); receiving worship, [Matt. 14:33](#)).
- The rest of the New Testament portrays "the body of Christ," i.e., the community of Jesus' followers, as the body of the Messiah, that is, as a temple ([John 7:37-39](#); [Acts 2:1-4](#); [1 Cor. 3:16-17](#); [1 Pet. 2:4-10](#)).
- The restored temple in Ezekiel 40-48 presumes an Israel that still sins and requires sacrifices of atonement for their sins. This stands in tension with a vision of the restored Israel as fully obedient to God's will ([Ezek. 36:22-36](#)) and also with the idea that Jesus' death and resurrection provided an ultimate and unrepeatable act of cosmic atonement (as in [Heb. 8-10](#)).

A Symbolic Ideal

This view holds that these chapters are part of Ezekiel's prophetic message of challenge and hope ([Ezek. 40:4](#), [43:10-12](#)) aimed at generating repentance. He depicts an idealized temple using "symbolic geography and architecture" to convey his prophetic message; it was not intended for precise historical reference or as a blueprint for those attempting to build a future temple.

The location of the temple ("a very high mountain", [Ezek. 40:2](#)) is symbolic. "High mountain" = symbolic connection point between Heaven and Earth. The temple is heavenly and already exists, and it doesn't need to be built.

The city-temple complex is over one mile wide and a perfect square, a magnified version of the holy of holies ([Ezek. 48:17](#), [48:35](#)).

There is a river coming from the temple mount ([Ezek. 47:1-12](#)). It is a symbolic stream that plays a similar role to the four-headed river from Eden ([Gen. 2:10-14](#)).

The image of priests offering continuing sacrifices ([Ezek. 45](#)) and of the messianic "prince" having sin offerings made on his behalf ([Ezek. 45:22](#)) is inconsistent with the New Testament theology of the finality of Christ's sacrificial death ([Heb. 9-10](#)).

Territorial Rhetoric (Utopian Vision)

At multiple points in the visions, Ezekiel is told the purpose of his being shown these spaces and what he is supposed to do with all that he sees and writes down.

Ezekiel 40:1-4 and 43:1-11 make it clear that Ezekiel's vision was originally addressed to an exilic audience, and it was designed to have a rhetorical impact on their view of the hoped for restoration and on their view of themselves before Yahweh.

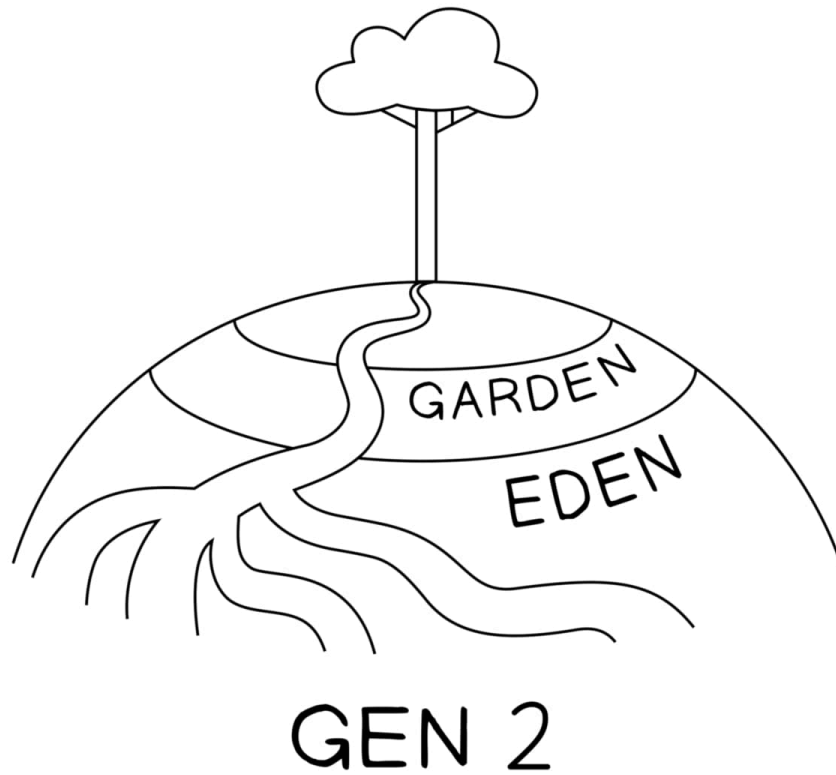
"If Ezekiel 40-48 do not provide a construction blueprint for the post-exilic temple, is this temple intended to be only a literary creation, a symbol for the universal presence of God? ... What would be the rhetorical purpose of producing a text in the Babylonian exile which organizes post-exilic Israel around a temple if Ezekiel didn't expect the returned Israel to have a temple? I find it incomprehensible that Ezekiel could imagine a society without a temple at the symbolic center of the society. Rather than a choice between a building plan or a symbolic metaphor, there is a third option: it is territorial rhetoric ... This text calls for radical social change, by reorganizing Israel's entire geography around Yahweh's presence. Every space that was distorted and abused by Israel's priests and kings has been reshaped and made subordinate to Yahweh's presence in the land."

Stevenson, Kalinda Rose (1996). [*The Vision of Transformation: The Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40-48*](#). Scholars Press. 151-153.

"Sir Thomas More in 1516 invented the term 'utopia' by playing on two Greek prefixes, *ou* and *eu*. The prefix *ou* means 'no/not' and *eu* means 'good/well.' Combined with the Greek word *topos*, which means 'place' a utopia is thus, at once a place of well-being and a fictive non-place. What More's utopia is not, contrary to widespread usage, is a perfect place. And neither is Ezekiel's ideal temple and land. Ezekiel's utopia is not yet the full realization of God's reign over the new creation. Access to the temple is still limited to only the priests, sacrifices of atonement for sins are still necessary, and the ideal David of Ezekiel 34:23-24 and 37:25 is a far cry from the diminished "chief" of Ezekiel 40-48. In particular, Israel's promised future heart transplant is not presupposed (Ezek. 11:19-20 and 36:26-27); atonement offerings would not be necessary if it had already taken place. A literary utopia of More's type is a means of social critique, which must grapple persuasively with the continuing struggles and tragedies of real life. A literary utopia thus keeps at least one foot in the problematic world of the present ... The original island of Utopia described by More in his book of 1516 was not futuristic or eschatological, but an engaging critique of contemporary England. Similarly, Ezekiel 40-48 is not a vision of a future God-given reality, which readers must fit into all of God's other plans for earth's destiny. Neither is it a blueprint for an actual, realistic temple slated for human construction ... It is a revolutionary text designed to challenge the status quo as Israel looked forward to its return from Babylon."

Cook, Stephen L. (2018). [*Ezekiel 38-48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*](#). Yale University Press. 5-6.

The River from the Garden of Eden



The River from the Garden of Eden. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ezekiel (2021).

Reflection Question

How do you make sense of all the different images of rivers, cities, trees, temples, and mountains layered in visions like Ezekiel 40-48?

Session 29: Reflecting on Ezekiel

Key Takeaways

- Prophetic literature is some of the most challenging to interpret and requires wisdom to engage it well. But it provides a lifetime's worth of meditation and reflection.
- Ezekiel demonstrates a faithful response to God's calling. He lives out a parable of God's message to his people, trusting that God would bring about everything he said he would.
- The book of Ezekiel invites us to walk about the story of Israel with God and to consider the height, width, and breadth of God's love and faithfulness in bringing his people through exile into new life in his presence.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

Take some time to reflect on the insights you learned in this class.