

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 59.5%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Jeremiah 27 & Jeremiah 28

Monday: Jeremiah 37:1 – 10 & Jeremiah 34:8 – 22

Tuesday: Jeremiah 37:11 – 21 & Jeremiah 38

Wednesday: Ezekiel 1

Thursday: Ezekiel 2 & Ezekiel 3

Friday: Ezekiel 4

Saturday: Ezekiel 5

Current # of email addresses in the group: 627

Happy Sabbath again! Take two! Sorry about the earlier mistake. On later reflection I thought I should have included Jeremiah 27 and 28 in a slightly different section and I ended up messing up my order all together. The good news is we are further along than I originally thought! Here is a revised reading program for this week. This week we will now begin the book of Ezekiel! Have a great week!

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

[https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA\\_tacLBfv1XR3jH](https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH)

You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists>

### **3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 90 v2**

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

#### **Day 603 – SUNDAY: February 16<sup>th</sup>**

Jeremiah 27 and 28

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “[Jeremiah 27:1](#) says, "In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah..." Most commentators take "Jehoiakim" to be an ancient copyist error in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, believing it should actually say "Zedekiah," as

in some other early manuscripts. It is true that chapter 27 is clearly set in the early part of Zedekiah's reign, his fourth year to be exact, and not Jehoiakim's (compare verses 3, 12; [Jeremiah 28:1](#)).

However, another explanation could be that the chapter break between [Jeremiah 26](#) and 27 occurs in the wrong place. [Jeremiah 26](#) is set "in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah" ([Jeremiah 26:1](#)). Perhaps the last verse of chapter 26 should read, "Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah." The first verse of chapter 27 would then read, "This word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying..." While this may seem unlikely to some, we cannot rule it out as a possibility.

Moving into the substance of the chapter, we encounter a hotbed of political plotting during this fourth year of Zedekiah (594-593 B.C.). "Emissaries from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon met in Jerusalem to plan revolution [against Babylon]. In the Jewish court, pro-Egyptian conspirators probably looked to Egypt for help, especially with the accession of the new king, Psammetichus II (594-589 b.c.e.). Jeremiah [according to God's direction] opposed rebellion, arguing that Judah's only hope was to remain a vassal to the Babylonians" (*HarperCollins Study Bible*, note on 27:1-28:17).

God here again gives Jeremiah a seemingly strange, but dramatic, task to perform. The prophet is to make and then don "bonds and yokes"—and to give these to the gathered envoys for delivery to their national leaders as part of God's message to them that they were all to submit to Babylon. "The yoke is that used by two oxen to pull a heavy load. Normally, yokes consisted of a crossbar with leather or rope nooses or rods of wood that would be placed around the animals' necks. Attached to the crossbar was a wooden shaft for pulling the load

(see [Deuteronomy 21:3](#); [1 Samuel 6:7](#); [1 Samuel 1:5](#); [1 Kings 19:19](#)). For the yoke as a symbol of servitude [[Jeremiah 27:8, 12](#)], see also [1 Kings 12:1-11](#)" (note on [Jeremiah 27:2](#)).

"The task assigned to Jeremiah required great faith, as it was sure to provoke alike his own countrymen and the foreign ambassadors and their kings, by a seeming insult, at the very time that all were full of confident hopes grounded on the confederacy" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on verse 3).

God's message through His prophet is intended to make it plain to the leaders of the surrounding nations that they wield power only so long as He allows it. He would promote Nebuchadnezzar and subjugate these leaders and their peoples under him. Yet in this exaltation of the Babylonian emperor, it is clear that God remains ultimately supreme. He even calls Nebuchadnezzar "My Servant" (verse 6). "With all of his military might and conquests, the king of Babylon was still a servant of the God of Israel, carrying out the Lord's purposes—namely the judgment of Judah [and these other nations]" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 6-7).

In verse 8, the yoke symbol is explained to the emissaries: submit to Babylon or else, the alternative being punishment through the dreadful three-fold cycle of sword, famine and pestilence. Jeremiah then delivers to them a serious warning not to listen to prophets or various occult practitioners who were saying the opposite (verses 9-11). He then proclaims the same message to King Zedekiah, the priests and all the people he encounters as he wanders about wearing the yoke (verses 12-16).

Jeremiah then issues a challenge to the false prophets. Nebuchadnezzar had taken much of the temple furnishings in his prior invasions of Jerusalem (see [Daniel 1:1-2](#); [2 Kings 24:11-13](#)). The false prophets were claiming these would soon be brought back. But Jeremiah says "the

vessels which are left" in the temple would *also* be taken to Babylon in the coming destruction of the city ([Jeremiah 27:16-22](#)). Jeremiah challenges the false prophets to intercede with God to try to stop his words from coming to pass and to bring to pass the things *they* have announced. This would prove who spoke for God.

It may not be quickly noticed but Jeremiah does offer words of hope and encouragement in the midst of this challenge and pronouncement of calamity. In verse 22, he says that Babylon would ultimately be punished and that the temple furnishings would then be brought back as part of Judah's restoration. Surprisingly, these items were apparently well accounted for in Babylon, being returned in specific numbers when the Persians later took over (see [Ezra 1:7-11](#)). It is likely that Daniel played a part in the care and cataloging of them.

### **Hananiah's Lies**

[Jeremiah 28](#) introduces the prophet Hananiah, who contradicts Jeremiah, falsely claiming that *he* speaks for God. "Hananiah had the temerity to use the same introductory formula as Jeremiah, implying a claim for inspiration similar to his. The form of the Hebrew verb *sabarti* ('I will break') in v[erse] 2 is the prophetic perfect, which emphasizes the certainty of a future event or promise. The yoke refers to the one Jeremiah had just made. Flatly contradicting Jeremiah's God-given counsel of submission, Hananiah predicted a return of the captives and the temple vessels within two years, emphasizing the time element by putting it first (v. 3)" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on [Jeremiah 28:3](#)) This was unbelievably bold—and utterly foolish.

Jeremiah responds to Hananiah's message of Judah's imminent national restoration by essentially saying, "Would that it were true!" (compare verses 5-6). But, he continues, this theme of immediate peace and prosperity runs contrary to the long tradition of the messages of God's prophets (compare verses 7-8). If a purported prophet of God comes

along saying everything's just fine and predicting "smooth sailing," the reaction should be as Jeremiah's: "We'll have to see it to believe it" (compare verse 9; [Deuteronomy 18:21-22](#)).

(We experience a similar situation today, with false ministers speaking a different message from that of God's true servants. Only those close to God can determine who His ministers are. Thankfully, most people today have access to His Word and can check what religious teachers say against the Bible—see [Acts 17:11](#).)

Hananiah, angry at the rebuke, breaks Jeremiah's yoke and blasphemously makes his own "sign" out of it, issuing another false prophecy in God's name. His announcement "reversed every statement by Jeremiah and advanced the cause of rebellion against Babylon by Judah and the surrounding nations, something King Zedekiah had desired all along" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 10-11). But Hananiah and those who trust in him soon learn an important lesson about pretending to represent the great Creator God. Hananiah might have broken the wooden yoke on Jeremiah's neck, but those who embraced his message would soon suffer under a figurative yoke of "iron," which is unbreakable (verses 13-15). Hananiah, in fact, learns that he won't even be around long enough to have a yoke on his own neck—except the yoke of death (verse 16).

Remarkably, though Jeremiah said Hananiah would die "this year" (same verse), God doesn't wait the whole year to fulfill the decree. Instead, the false prophet dies just two months later (compare verses 1, 17). "There was no way the people and priests of Judah, who witnessed the confrontation that took place (28:1), could avoid linking Jeremiah's prediction with Hananiah's demise. God shouts out His warnings" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verse 17). Yet the stubborn leaders and wayward populace refused to face reality—that all of Jeremiah's other prophecies were true—and humbly repent.

The false prophets of Jeremiah's day were powerful and influential, as we can see. Again, even today we need to be wary of false prophets—false preachers—who appear to be true servants of God ([Matthew 7:15](#); [2 Corinthians 11:13](#); [1 John 4:1](#)). The apostle Peter warns the Church of God: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways.... By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction will not slumber" ([2 Peter 2:1-3](#)). The Bible even foretells the rise of a great false prophet who will deceive the world at the end of the present age (see [Revelation 19:20](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:3-12](#)).” [END]

Day 604 – MONDAY: February 17<sup>th</sup>

Jeremiah 37:1 – 10 & Jeremiah 34:8 – 22

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “In chapter 37, Zedekiah sends another delegation to Jeremiah, asking him to pray for Judah and its leaders (verse 3). Spiritually blind people commonly think that the prayerful intervention of a known righteous person will cause God to turn a threatening situation around. They fail to realize that they need to change their behavior and that no other human being can do that for them ([Acts 8:22-24](#)).

This time, Zephaniah the priest is again sent, along with an official named Jehucal, an associate of the Passhur sent in the previous delegation (see [Jeremiah 38:1](#), where the official's name is spelled Jucal).

([Jeremiah 37:4](#) mentions the fact that Jeremiah will later be put in prison, an episode we will soon read about in 37:11-38:28.)

The current inquiry is evidently occasioned by a major change in events—the Egyptians now entering the conflict (compare verse 7). "In the late spring or early summer 588 B.C., Pharaoh Hophra led the Egyptian army into southern Palestine. The Babylonian forces withdrew their siege of Judah and Jerusalem to confront the Egyptians. Zedekiah hoped the Babylonians would be defeated" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 6-8). The "then" of verse 5 is not to denote a new time frame after the inquiry. Rather, verses 4-5 should be understood as parenthetical—giving the background to the inquiry.

The king probably wondered if Jeremiah's message had now changed in light of the Egyptian advance: "The approach of the Egyptian forces (vv. 5, 9) seemed to contradict the message of [Jeremiah 34:2-7](#); moreover, with the withdrawal of the Babylonian army, Zedekiah may have thought that Jeremiah's predictions of doom were wrong after all... Also, Zedekiah may have been encouraged by his alliance with Pharaoh Hophra... He may indeed have doubted his own prophets, and so he wanted to get a message from Jeremiah that would please him. Thus he asked the prophet to pray for him (v. 3)—i.e., to support his actions... In other words, what Zedekiah wanted was for the Lord to make the temporary withdrawal of the Babylonians permanent. He may somehow have felt that the presence of Jeremiah, though he predicted doom, would insure God's protection against Jerusalem's capture. As for his regard for Jeremiah, it was tinged with superstition" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 2-3).

It may be that Zedekiah was thinking that God had relented because of his recent emancipation proclamation, mentioned in the latter part of chapter 34. And indeed, God may have granted the lifting of the siege for this reason—or at least as a test of the people's resolve. Sadly, they had no resolve to continue in their commitment to God and His righteousness. (Human beings in general often try to make God into what they want Him to be—and have Him act as they want Him to.



When they need help, they cry out to Him—but not to intervene when and how *He* deems appropriate, but in the time and manner that *they* think He should. And when the objective seems met, they want God to retire once again.)

Zedekiah and the rest of the nation's hopes that Egypt would save them were in vain, as God makes clear through Jeremiah. This was a passing circumstance. Even if Egypt's forces managed to weaken the Babylonian army, it would still return to finish its devastating work ([Jeremiah 37:6-10](#)).

### **Emancipation Revocation**

After God gave the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, having freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, the first judgment He gave them was the maximum time of seven years that fellow Israelites could be kept in servitude ([Exodus 21:1-6](#)), whether or not these Israelites "had sold themselves into servitude for the payment of their debts, or though they were sold by the judges for the punishment of their crimes. This difference was put between their brethren and strangers, that those of other nations taken in war, or bought with money, might be held in perpetual slavery, they and theirs; but their brethren must serve but for seven years at the longest" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*, note on [Jeremiah 34:8-22](#)). In Jeremiah's time, however, the people of Judah had been ignoring this law.

When Nebuchadnezzar with his armies and allies attacked the cities of Judah, and Jerusalem was under siege, King Zedekiah made a covenant proclamation to the citizens of Jerusalem that gave an appearance of repentance ([Jeremiah 34:8-9](#)). Perhaps this was even in response to God's warning given through Jeremiah at the beginning of the siege: "Deliver him who is plundered out of the hand of the oppressor, lest My fury go forth like fire" ([Jeremiah 21:12](#)).



The citizens appeared repentant also since they readily responded and emancipated their Jewish slaves (verse 10). However, it soon became obvious that Zedekiah and the Jews were not truly repentant and had no real commitment to that decision. The people soon "changed their minds" ([Jeremiah 34:11](#))—they repented of their repentance! Zedekiah either changed his mind or at least weakly failed to enforce his proclamation. (Indeed, we will later find him obviously weak and vacillating.)

Two occurrences led to the Jews reenslaving their servants. First was the lifting of the Jerusalem siege when the Chaldeans left to confront the oncoming Egyptian forces ([Jeremiah 37:5](#)). Even though God knew the hypocrisy and superficiality of Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem, He, out of His great mercy, probably orchestrated this timely reprieve for the Jews. The second factor was the people realizing more than ever how advantageous it was to have slave labor. As soon as they got what they really wanted, deliverance from the Chaldeans, they felt they no longer needed God. Big mistake! God is not to be mocked or manipulated.

Their sin was especially egregious because they were reneging on a covenant they had made with God in His temple to right the wrong ([Jeremiah 34:15](#)). They had even ratified the covenant with a ritual first mentioned in Scripture in [Genesis 15:9-17](#) ([Jeremiah 34:18](#)). They "passed through the parts of the animal cut in two, implying that they prayed so to be cut in sunder ([Matthew 24:51](#); Greek, 'cut in two') if they should break the covenant" (*Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown's Commentary*, note on [Jeremiah 34:18](#)). And indeed, the punishment would be severe.

As a result of their treachery, freeing slaves only to reenslave them, God remarks with sardonic irony that He would free *them*—from His protection. "'Behold, I proclaim liberty to *you*,' says the LORD—to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine!" ([Jeremiah 34:17](#)). God said He

would bring Babylon's army back to conquer and burn Jerusalem—killing or capturing its people.” [END]

### Day 605 – TUESDAY: February 18<sup>th</sup>

Jeremiah 37:11 – 21 & Jeremiah 38

#### Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “The temporary lifting of the Babylonian siege from Jerusalem provides an opportunity for some movement outside the city. Jeremiah sets off for the land of Benjamin—presumably for his hometown of Anathoth, just three miles outside the capital—to, as one commentator translates verse 12, “attend to a division of property among his people there” (qtd. in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 12). (The King James translation, “to separate himself thence in the midst of the people,” is incorrect.) “The presupposition is that a relative had died in Anathoth; so it was incumbent on Jeremiah to be present in connection with the inheritance” (footnote on verse 12).

But the prophet is arrested on suspicion of defecting to the Chaldeans by a captain of the guard named Irijah. His grandfather's name is Hananiah (verse 13)—possibly, as some have suggested, the false prophet Hananiah who died at Jeremiah's decree from God (see [Jeremiah 28](#)).

We then come to Jeremiah's imprisonment. It is not entirely clear if our current reading encompasses two separate imprisonments or two accounts of the same one (compare [Jeremiah 37:11-21](#); [Jeremiah 38:1-28](#)). Those who argue for two imprisonments point out that [Jeremiah 37:15](#) mentions the prophet being cast into “prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe,” where he is thrown into a dungeon or cistern (verse 18), while [Jeremiah 38:6](#) says he was “cast into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's son” (or Malchiah son of Hammelech). The argument in favor of one imprisonment here is that the two accounts

are extremely similar and that, at the end of both, Jeremiah requests of the king that he not be returned to Jonathan's house to die (compare [Jeremiah 37:20](#); [Jeremiah 38:26](#)). Indeed, one imprisonment seems rather likely, which would mean that the dungeon or cistern of Malchiah was in the house of Jonathan—easily explainable if ownership had changed, if Malchiah had built the cistern, or if Malchiah was the official in charge of prisoners.

Pashhur, one of the leaders Jeremiah is arraigned before (who was part of Zedekiah's delegation to Jeremiah at the beginning of the Babylonian siege in chapter 21), is the "son of Malchiah" ([Jeremiah 38:1](#))—perhaps the namesake of the dungeon. With Pashhur is Jucal (same verse), the Jehucal of the delegation Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah when the siege was lifted at the beginning of chapter 37.

The officials are outraged at Jeremiah's public proclamation of what they consider to be a seditious message, and they call for his execution. Interestingly, Zedekiah declares himself powerless against these leaders ([Jeremiah 38:5](#)). He is evidently insecure in his position. Though he had reigned for a decade, it should be recalled that many still considered Jeconiah, a prisoner in Babylon, as the real king. Also, Zedekiah later mentions his fear of pro-Babylonian factions (verse 19). Many were likely blaming Zedekiah for having instigated the Babylonian siege. Now that it had been lifted for a time, a coup was not out of the question. Nevertheless, Zedekiah certainly wielded a great deal of power still. He *could* have protected God's prophet, but it didn't seem politically expedient to him.

The leaders order Jeremiah thrown into the prison "dungeon" (verse 6) or "cistern" (NIV)—ostensibly, as they had called for his execution, with the intention of his dying a slow death. "The cistern of Palestine was commonly a pear-shaped reservoir into which water could run from a roof, tunnel, or courtyard. From about the thirteenth century B.C. it was plastered and its opening stopped by a suitable cut stone, large

enough for protection, but sometimes quite heavy (cf. [Genesis 29:8-10](#))... [In] abandoned reservoirs there is usually a mound of debris underneath the opening, consisting of dirt and rubbish, blown or knocked in, shattered remnants of water containers, and not infrequently skeletons. These may represent the result of accident, suicide, or some such incarceration as that which Jeremiah endured, although he did not experience the usual fatal end of exhaustion and drowning in water and mud" ("Cistern," *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, 1983, p. 129).

Jeremiah is rescued through the intervention of Ebed-Melech the Cushite, who convinces the king to have the prophet removed from the cistern ([Jeremiah 38:7-10](#)). He takes great care in helping Jeremiah out of his confinement (verses 11-13). How ironic that "a foreigner, a once-despised Cushite [and eunuch], cared more for the prophet of God than did the king and princes of Jeremiah's own people" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 11-13). We later learn that this is because he trusts in the God of Israel—and that God will reward him with deliverance from Jerusalem's destruction (39:15-18).

### **Zedekiah's Wavering**

Following the rescue is a dialogue between Jeremiah and Zedekiah, wherein we are afforded insight into the king's thinking. The narrative again demonstrates Zedekiah's instability—constantly wavering and giving in to the pressure of those around him. His day-to-day life was one of rebellion against God, yet there still seemed to be an ingrained fear of one of God's servants. Sadly, Zedekiah was like many leaders today—more intent on pleasing people than following the truth ([Jeremiah 38:19-20](#)).

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus makes this comment about the king: "Now as to Zedekiah himself, while he heard the prophet speak, he believed him, and agreed to everything as true, and supposed

it was for his advantage; but then his friends perverted him, and dissuaded him from what the prophet advised, and obliged him to do what they pleased" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 10, chap. 7, sec. 2).

Nations need leaders who are steadfast and not wavering. God also requires the same of His people. "Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. Instead we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church" ([Ephesians 4:14-15](#), New Living Translation).

Instead of standing fast, "Zedekiah will go down in history as having made more U-turns than a learner-driver breaking in wild chariot horses" (Derek Williams, ed., *The Biblical Times*, 1997, p. 196).

Jeremiah "was stirred to his most direct eloquence. 'And you shall cause this city to be burned with fire' ([[Jeremiah 28](#)] v. 23). This was Zedekiah's last chance to save the city, its walls, its warriors, its women and children. All he had to do was trust the prophet, to lift his head high, take up the flag of truce, walk past the princes and out to the Chaldean armies. This simple act of contrition could have saved the city" (*Mastering the Old Testament*, Vol. 17: *Jeremiah, Lamentations* by John Guest, 1988, p. 271).

Biblical historian Eugene Merrill writes: "Zedekiah was nearly persuaded. Only his pride of position and need to maintain a face of courage in the midst of certain calamity prevented him from acceding to the word of the man of God. That stubbornness against the truth proved to be the undoing of the king and all his people with him" (*Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, p. 465). Zedekiah could not bring himself to surrender. Jerusalem was to fall.

In verses 24-26, Zedekiah commands Jeremiah to not reveal to the other leaders what the two of them had discussed—but to instead say that he had made a request of the king that he not be put back in the cistern to die. Jeremiah complies (verse 27). So did Jeremiah lie? No, for he actually did make this request as part of their discussion in [Jeremiah 37:20](#)—which argues in favor of the two accounts covering the same episode.

While Zedekiah consents to Jeremiah's request that he not be returned to the cistern, the king does not completely free the prophet. Rather he commits him to the "court of the prison" (verse [Jeremiah 37:21](#); [Jeremiah 38:13](#), [Jeremiah 38:28](#)) or "courtyard of the guard" (NIV)—"a place near the royal palace where limited mobility was possible, such as in the transaction to purchase the field [mentioned in our next reading] (see [Jeremiah 32:1-15](#); [Nehemiah 3:25](#))" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Jeremiah 37:20-21](#)). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "The courtyard of the guard, probably a stockade (cf. [Nehemiah 3:25](#)), was the part of the palace area set apart for prisoners. (Friends could visit them there.) The soldiers who guarded the palace were quartered there" (note on [Jeremiah 32:1-2](#)). Jeremiah will remain in this place until the Babylonians conquer the city ([Jeremiah 38:28](#); [Jeremiah 39:11-14](#))." [END]

Day 606 – WEDNESDAY: February 19<sup>th</sup>

Ezekiel 1

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “

Recall from [2 Kings 24:10-16](#) that the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and took away 10,000 captives, including the Jewish king Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah). This was the second Babylonian deportation of the Jews, which took place in 597 B.C. The prophet Ezekiel was among a group of these captives, as the Jewish historian Josephus also relates

(*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 10, chap. 6, sec. 3). Ezekiel's group was resettled "by the River Chebar" ([Ezekiel 1:1](#)), southeast of Babylon. "[Ezekiel 1:1-3](#) and [Ezekiel 3:15](#) clearly define the place of origin of Ezekiel's ministry as Babylonia, specifically at the site of Tel Aviv located near the Kebar River and the ancient site of Nippur. This 'River' has been identified by many with the naru kabari [or 'grand canal'] (mentioned in two cuneiform texts from Nippur), a canal making a southeasterly loop, connecting at both ends with the Euphrates River" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, introduction to Ezekiel). During this period the Jews were allowed to live in communities in whatever area of the empire to which they were transported. They seem to have been viewed more as colonists than slaves. Ezekiel himself was married until his wife suddenly died, and he had a house ([Ezekiel 24:15-18](#); [Ezekiel 3:24](#); [Ezekiel 8:1](#)). Elders of Judah frequently consulted him ([Ezekiel 8:1](#); [Ezekiel 11:25](#); [Ezekiel 14:1](#); [Ezekiel 20:1](#); etc.).

## Introduction to Ezekiel

Recall from [2 Kings 24:10-16](#) that the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and took away 10,000 captives, including the Jewish king Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah). This was the second Babylonian deportation of the Jews, which took place in 597 B.C. The prophet Ezekiel was among a group of these captives, as the Jewish historian Josephus also relates (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 10, chap. 6, sec. 3). Ezekiel's group was resettled "by the River Chebar" ([Ezekiel 1:1](#)), southeast of Babylon. "[Ezekiel 1:1-3](#) and [Ezekiel 3:15](#) clearly define the place of origin of Ezekiel's ministry as Babylonia, specifically at the site of Tel Aviv located near the Kebar River and the ancient site of Nippur. This 'River' has been identified by many with the naru kabari [or 'grand canal'] (mentioned in two cuneiform texts from Nippur), a canal making a southeasterly loop, connecting at both ends with the Euphrates River" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, introduction to Ezekiel). During this period the Jews were allowed to live in communities in whatever area



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The book of Ezekiel begins with an account of the prophet's calling, which occurred "in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month" ([Ezekiel 1:1](#)). This date is equated in verse 2 with "the fifth day of the month...in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity." Since the captivity began in 597 B.C., the fifth year would have been 593. Some understand the 30th year to be counted from Josiah's renewal of the covenant between God and Judah in the 18th year of his reign, 623-622 B.C. (see [2 Chronicles 34:8](#), [2 Chronicles 34:29-33](#)). However, there is nothing to hint at such a connection, and the covenant had long since been trampled upon in the 16 years since Josiah's death. A more reasonable conclusion is that the 30th year refers to Ezekiel's age, especially when we consider that he was a priest ([Ezekiel 1:3](#)). Since a man entered into priestly service at the age of 30 ([Numbers 4:3, 23, 30, 39, 43](#); [1 Chronicles 23:3](#)), God may have elected to start using him as a prophet at this critical age, perhaps highlighting the priestly aspect of Ezekiel's commission. It is interesting to note that if he were 30 years old at this point, Ezekiel would have been born at the time of Josiah's covenant renewal.

There is a strong emphasis on chronology throughout the book of Ezekiel. It contains 13 prophecies dated from the time Jeconiah was taken into exile—the first in 593, the last in 571 (thus spanning 22 years). Four periods are specified: the first five years, 593-588 B.C. ([1:1-25:17](#)); the next two years, 587-585 B.C., surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in 586 ([26:1-29:16](#); [30:20-39:29](#)); 12 years later, 573 B.C. ([40:1-48:35](#)); and a final message against Egypt two years after that, 571 B.C. ([29:17-30:19](#)).

Ezekiel's commission was to serve as a "watchman" for God's people—a sentry who warned of impending danger (see [Ezekiel 3](#); 33). As we will see, his messages were meant in large part for the "house of Israel," even though the northern 10 tribes had been taken into captivity about 130 years earlier ([Ezekiel 3:1, 4, 3, 7, 17](#); [Ezekiel 33:7, 10, 11, 20](#)). In fact, the phrase "house of Israel" occurs 78 times (plus "house of Jacob" one time) in this book while "house of Judah" occurs only 5 times. In some cases, the name Israel is used to designate Judah—but there are numerous instances where it is clear that the northern tribes are meant. Since God would never be a century late in delivering a warning message, it seems clear that He must have inspired significant portions of the book primarily for the end-time descendants of Israel. However, some of the specific prophecies were meant for Ezekiel's time, and some others are dual—meant for Ezekiel's day *and* the end time. The spiritually deteriorating conditions in Judah were a type of the end-time decline of modern Israelite nations, and the approaching destruction and captivity of Judah was a type of what would happen to the nations of Israel—especially the descendants of Joseph—just prior to Christ's return.

In the setting in which Ezekiel found himself, he taught, comforted and encouraged the Jews who were with him in exile. As part of his watchman responsibility, he was also to relay to them God's warnings of Jerusalem's coming destruction due to the sins of the Jewish people. And he proved faithful in delivering these important messages, even acting out various judgments or prophecies at God's direction to make the point clear. At the same time, as we've seen, the prophet Jeremiah was giving a similar warning 600 miles away in Jerusalem to the Jews who were living there. Interestingly, both Ezekiel and Jeremiah were priests called to a prophetic office. A comparative study of their messages provides a clear picture of how much God warned the Jews to repent before their nation was destroyed in 586 B.C. Indeed, we've seen that Jeremiah sent messages to the exiles in Babylon

(see [Jeremiah 29-30](#)). Perhaps some of Ezekiel's prophecies were likewise proclaimed to the Jews of Judah—by letter or just through the reporting of others. Of course, as with those of Jeremiah, many of Ezekiel's prophecies were, as already noted, recorded principally for posterity's sake—with many having dual or even exclusive application to events far in the future.

One of the recurrent themes in Ezekiel's prophecies is that God is sovereign and people will ultimately learn that lesson. The phrase "Then they will know that I am the LORD" occurs no less than 65 times in the book. Jerusalem is the focal point of Ezekiel's prophecies. He begins with what was to occur to Jerusalem in his day and then moves on to the events prophesied for the end of the age. (He closes the book with a wonderful vision of conditions that will exist after the return of Christ.) Yet throughout the first 34 chapters, Ezekiel moves back and forth between prophecies for his own day and the end time—many of the historical events foretold serving as types of what is to come in the end time.

Ezekiel's name means "God Is Strong" (compare [Ezekiel 3:14](#)), "God Strengthens" (compare [Ezekiel 30:25](#); 34:16) or "May God Strengthen." As the book opens, we see how God strengthened him with powerful visions so he could perform the job he was called to do.

### **"The Appearance of the Likeness of the Glory of the LORD"**

The first chapter of Ezekiel is one of the most revealing and exciting in the entire Bible! Ezekiel tells us that the heavens opened and he saw "visions of God"—i.e., not God in reality, but rather in a mental picture, which no one else who might have been with Ezekiel could actually see. Of all the men whom God inspired to write the Scriptures only three—Isaiah, Ezekiel and the apostle John—recorded visions of God's throne. Isaiah's description, which we read earlier, is very short ([Isaiah 6:1-6](#)). Ezekiel gives us much more detail.

The "hand of the LORD" on Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 1:3](#)) represented the strength God was imparting to him. In addition to verification that God was the author of the message, Ezekiel needed encouragement and strength from God in order to do the work God was commissioning him to do (which we will read about in chapters 2-3, a continuation of the same passage).

Ezekiel sees a great windstorm coming—an immense cloud with flashing lightning, surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing, sparkling gold ([Ezekiel 1:4](#)). This is perhaps reminiscent of the pillar of cloud and fire that led Israel out of Egypt. Recall that the preincarnate Jesus Christ dwelt in that cloud, which was illuminated with divine "glory," the shining radiance of God. Indeed, "the glory of the LORD" is specifically mentioned here in Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 1:28](#); [Ezekiel 3:12](#)). The word for glory "suggests 'weight' or 'significance,' indicating the wonder, majesty, and worthiness of the living God" (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on Ezekiel 3:12-13). This visible glory was referred to by later Jewish commentators as the *shekinah*, or "indwelling," as it was the evidence of God's presence among His people. The shekinah glory not only led Israel out of Egypt ([Exodus 16:10](#)), it also appeared in the tabernacle ([Exodus 40:34](#)), in the temple of Solomon ([2 Chronicles 5:14](#)), to the shepherds at Christ's birth ([Luke 2:9](#)), and as surrounding God's throne in John's vision ([Revelation 15:8](#)).

The throne imagery here is somewhat different from that of God the Father's heavenly throne room in Revelation. That's because this image is of a transportable throne moving about the *earth*—and the "LORD" who sits on this particular throne is, again, the preincarnate Jesus Christ. Still, there are some clear similarities, as we will see.

The whirlwind comes from the north—perhaps because the *north* seems to indicate the general area of the sky where the heaven of God's throne is located (Lucifer is pictured attempting to

assault God's throne *on the farthest sides of the north*—[Isaiah 14:13](#)). Whirlwinds from God are recorded several times in the Scriptures. The Ten Commandments were given in a great tempest of thunder and fire ([Exodus 19-20](#)). Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind ([2 Kings 2:1](#), [2 Kings 2:11](#)) and the Lord answered Job out of a whirlwind ([Job 38:1](#); [Job 40:6](#)). Jesus Christ will return to the earth in a whirlwind ([Isaiah 66:15](#); [Zechariah 9:14](#)). Interestingly, this passage of Ezekiel was in Christ's day read in synagogues at the time of Pentecost, and it was on Pentecost that a sound of rushing wind and tongues of fire accompanied the coming of God's Holy Spirit to empower members of His Church (see [Acts 2](#); compare [Ezekiel 2:2](#)).

As the whirlwind approached, Ezekiel was able to make out the likenesses of four living creatures—angelic beings. These are referred to in [Ezekiel 10](#) as cherubs or cherubim. Their function here is to uphold and transport the throne of God. "And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man" ([Ezekiel 1:5](#)). The word *likeness* is translated from the Hebrew *dmuwth*, which means resemblance. They had the general appearance of human beings at first glance—meaning they apparently stood upright on two legs. However, there were marked differences. Ezekiel notices that each one had four faces, four wings and feet like calves that sparkled like bronze (seeming to indicate hooves).

Concerning the faces, Ezekiel tells us that each had the face of a man, of a lion on the right side, of an ox on the left side, and of an eagle. The human face was evidently facing Ezekiel and the eagle face was behind. This does not mean the human face was the primary one. For when the four faces are listed in [Ezekiel 10](#), "the face of a cherub" is substituted for the ox face and called the "first face" ([Ezekiel 10:14](#)). So why did the human faces look toward Ezekiel, while the ox or cherub faces looked to the left? The directions here are significant. Bear in mind that the throne and creatures were coming from the north. Ezekiel therefore

viewed them from the south. So the south face of each was human. The west face of each was that of the ox or cherub, the north face of each was that of the eagle and the east face of each was that of the lion. Considering the traveling throne and cherubim together as a unit, the main face looking to the south from it was the south face of the south-positioned cherub—the human face. The main face looking to the west was the west face of the west-positioned cherub—the ox face. The main faces looking out from the vehicle on the north and east were the eagle and lion respectively.

As was mentioned in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on [Numbers 2](#), this was the exact configuration of the Israelite camp in the wilderness, wherein the four primary tribal standards of Israel (the lion of Judah, the eagle of Dan, the bull of Ephraim, and the man representing Reuben) were positioned around the ancient tabernacle containing the Ark of the Covenant, itself a representation of God's throne. A similar vision of four living creatures surrounding God's throne was given to the apostle John in Revelation. However, the creatures there are not described as humanoid in appearance or as each having multiple faces. "And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were *four* living creatures... The first living creature was like a *lion*, the second living creature like a *calf*, the third living creature had a *face like a man*, and the fourth living creature was like a *flying eagle*" ([Revelation 4:6-7](#)). The creatures could be the same—or the same in type. Perhaps these extra-dimensional beings look quite different when viewed from different angles. Or, as noted in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on [Isaiah 6](#), perhaps they are capable of changing shape or manifesting themselves in different forms to human beings.

The creatures in the visions of [Isaiah 6](#) and [Revelation 4](#) had six wings. These in Ezekiel's vision are described as having only four. But again, that could be due to shape shifting or viewing from a different angle or



because the wings were engaged in different activities. Consider that Ezekiel saw a wheel over the ground beside each creature ([Ezekiel 1:15](#)). Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel or a wheel spinning inside a wheel—or, rather, "their workings" gave this appearance (verse 16). Perhaps the wheel beside each creature is the "missing" two wings in motion—similar to the effect produced by a hummingbird's wings. Note that Ezekiel describes the sound of the cherub wings not as the whooshing of slow flapping but as "the noise of many waters...a tumult like the noise of an army" (verse 24)—possibly like a modern helicopter. Ezekiel later says the wheels are called "whirling" (see *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary*, note on [Ezekiel 10:13](#)). Perhaps the wings whirled, creating the wheel effect. [Isaiah 6:2](#) says that only two of the six seraphim wings were used for flying.

However, Ezekiel describes the wheels as having very high "rims" or "rings" that were full of eyes ([Ezekiel 1:18](#)). Perhaps these were indeed actual chariot wheels—the "eyes" being jewels. Or again, the "rims" could have been an effect produced by the fluttering wings. John too saw a multitude of eyes: "four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back...And the four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within" ([Revelation 4:6](#), [Revelation 4:8](#)). If the eyes are associated with the wings, perhaps this is similar to peacock plumage—where what appear to be eyes can be seen from either side (the wings of some butterflies and moth wings are also decorated with what appear to be eyes).

Ezekiel says that the entire throne-carrying system of these four creatures was guided by a "spirit" (verse 20). Wherever this spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them. He observes that "the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels." The Hebrew word for spirit is *ruach*, also translated "wind." The source of the windstorm's power was evidently the *wind* created by the wheels.



Interestingly, [Zechariah 5:9](#) describes wind as being in the *wings* of flying creatures. This gives us more reason to believe the wheels of Ezekiel's vision to be wings. (Of course, as these are spirit beings, we should not conclude that wings and wind in the physical medium of air are an actual necessity for their ability to fly.)

Next, Ezekiel describes a "firmament" or platform of crystal stretched out over the heads of the cherubim, on which sat the sapphire-blue throne of God ([Ezekiel 1:22](#), [Ezekiel 1:26](#)). Such a crystalline expanse is also described by John: "Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal" ([Revelation 4:6](#)). It was also seen by Moses and the elders of Israel, when they "saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself" ([Exodus 24:10](#)). Perhaps the sapphire throne was being reflected in the crystal floor beneath it.

In the crowning moment of the vision Ezekiel heard a voice from above the expanse over the heads of the cherubim as they stood with lowered wings. Above the great crystalline platform was the sapphire throne, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man—"a *likeness* with the appearance of a man" (verse 26). The Hebrew for "likeness" is, again, *dmuwth*. Man was made in the likeness of God ([Genesis 1:26](#); [Genesis 5:1](#))—to *look like* Him. (For further proof that God, though eternal spirit, has a body with a form and shape resembling that of human beings, send for or download our free booklet [Who Is God?](#))

Ezekiel saw that from the waist up God's appearance was like radiant gold and that from the waist down it was like fire; and brilliant light surrounded Him. Ezekiel later sees the same glorious form in vision in chapter 8. John described the glorified Jesus Christ similarly in [Revelation 1:14-16](#): "His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace...His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength."

The magnificent brilliance surrounding God and His throne was His awesome, radiating *glory*, which appeared like a rainbow. John also saw the rainbow but pointed out that its predominant color was emerald green ([Revelation 4:3](#)). Ezekiel makes no such note. Perhaps it pulsed with various hues. In any event, the scene was spectacular—and humbling. Ezekiel fell facedown in reverence and awe, and the great God of the universe began to address him. God, as our next reading reveals, was here to call and commission Ezekiel the priest as His prophet.” [END]

#### Day 607 – THURSDAY: February 20<sup>th</sup>

Ezekiel 2 & Ezekiel 3

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “We read here of Ezekiel's calling and commission. God begins by addressing Ezekiel as "son of man." This title is used to refer to Ezekiel almost 100 times in the book. The only other uses of the title in the Old Testament occur in the book of Daniel—when the archangel Gabriel addresses Daniel and also to refer to Christ ([Daniel 8:17](#); [Daniel 7:13](#)). The original Hebrew expression in these instances is *ben adam*—which means "son of Adam." The idea is that of a person representative of the human race. Remember that Ezekiel is a priest—a human representative who serves as an intermediary between God and man. A prophet likewise serves as such a representative.

"Son of Man" is used of Jesus Christ in the New Testament 88 times, almost all of these occurrences being references He made to Himself. Jesus also served and serves as a priest—our High Priest, in fact ([Hebrews 2:17](#); [Hebrews 3:1](#))—and prophet ([Acts 3:22](#), [Acts 3:26](#)) and, in many ways, as a representative of humanity. Yet in Jesus' case, the definite article "the" precedes the phrase. Used alone, "son of man" refers to a descendant of Adam. When used with the definite article it means a specific, looked-for representative—the long-awaited

Messiah—who, as "the Second Man" or "Last Adam," takes the place of the first Adam. Paul uses this terminology in [1 Corinthians 15](#).

God commands Ezekiel to stand ([Ezekiel 2:1](#)). Then Ezekiel has a transforming experience—God's Spirit enters him and is the agency that sets him on his feet (verse 2). This is no doubt spiritually significant. To stand before God is essentially a metaphor for *taking a stand for* God. God commands Ezekiel to do so—and then empowers him to do so through the Holy Spirit. As mentioned previously in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary, it is interesting to consider that the giving of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament on the Day of Pentecost was accompanied by the sound of rushing wind and the appearance of fire ([Acts 2](#))—particularly when we learn that this section of Ezekiel was read by the Jews of Christ's day on Pentecost.

God then gives Ezekiel his new job description. He is being sent to people who are not so keen to obey God's voice. The Israelites are a rebellious people. Actually, all people who do not yet have God's Spirit are rebellious by nature ([Romans 8:7](#)), but it seems that Israelites generally are more independent and self-willed than many gentile nations (see [Ezekiel 3:6-7](#)). Yet Ezekiel is told to give them God's warning message even if they refuse to listen. When the prophecies come true they will know that a prophet of God has been among them—a recurring theme in the book of Ezekiel. Indeed, this would be a witness to them—to deny them the excuse that they were never warned yet also to provide them with a context for later coming to understanding their predicament and perhaps repenting then.

Ezekiel is told to be courageous. During the time of his ministry, he is to expect torment as if from briars and thorns and as if living among scorpions, so great would the animosity against him be. Jeremiah certainly experienced this in a major way. And this brings to mind the words of Jesus just after His final Passover with His disciples. He said His servants should expect to be rejected by men ([John 15:18-20](#)). Indeed,

as we have seen from the examples of other men of God, the lives of those who have proclaimed God's message have never been easy.

God then utters a surprising warning to Ezekiel: "Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house" (verse 8). Even though Ezekiel was God's inspired servant with God's Spirit, this was still a possibility. After all, he was human like the rest of his people and had been immersed in their culture, with its outlook and attitudes, since childhood. Though now strengthened by God, there was a real danger that Ezekiel could be pulled back into their carnal ways—especially if he gave in to defeat in the face of the hostility and persecution he was going to experience. This should serve as a warning to all Christians today to not be overcome by the pressures of society or by its evil enticements and thereby sink into sin and rebellion against God.

In contrast to rebellion, God tells Ezekiel in the same verse, "Open your mouth and eat what I give you." This signifies being *receptive* to God. Ezekiel sees a hand stretched out to him with a scroll—no doubt of the ancient kind, written on skins sewed together to make a long piece, which was then rolled up from an end. The writing was usually on one side, but in this case it was on both sides—as if running over—to express the abundance of the lamentations, mourning and woes with which the scroll was filled.

Ezekiel is instructed to eat the scroll, which he does ([Ezekiel 3:1-2](#)). However, remember that the account is still that of a *vision* ([Ezekiel 1:1](#)). The eating of the scroll did not actually happen except in Ezekiel's mind. What did it mean? Recall Jeremiah's account of *his* calling: "Then the LORD put forth His hand [similar to what Ezekiel saw] and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: 'Behold, I have put *My words* in your mouth'" ([Jeremiah 1:9](#)). So in [Ezekiel 2-3](#), the scroll with writing represented God's message that Ezekiel was to proclaim. Eating the words means the prophet accepts them and internalizes them. We see the sentiment repeated in verse 10: "Son of man, receive into your

heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears." Here, receiving into the heart replaces receiving into the stomach. It is interesting to note that Holy Scripture, the "word of righteousness," is referred to as food in the New Testament (compare [Hebrews 5:13-14](#); [Matthew 4:4](#)). Even today, we still employ the metaphor of "digesting" information.

The words to Ezekiel are, in his mouth, as sweet as honey ([Ezekiel 3:3](#)). Yet he is soon in "bitterness" (verse 14). Very similar imagery is presented to us in the book of Revelation, when John is told to take a little "book" from an angel: "I went to the angel and said to him, 'Give me the little book.' And he said to me, 'Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.' Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter" ([Revelation 10:9-10](#)). In both cases, this seems to express the joy and wonder of initially coming to understand prophecy—followed by the great heartache that sets in when considering the terrible judgments people are going to have to suffer and the abominable sins that have necessitated such punishment (and perhaps anguish over the fact that the message will provoke great hostility and derision).

Ezekiel is commanded, "Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them" ([Ezekiel 3:1](#)). This certainly meant the people of Judah in Ezekiel's immediate context, as they are the people to whom he actually proclaimed his message (that is, to a percentage of those in Babylonian exile). But, as we will see in going through his book, many of Ezekiel's prophecies were intended for all of Israel—that is, the northern 10 tribes as well, who had gone into captivity about 130 years earlier. So Ezekiel's commission must be understood in a broader context. He was to "go" to the rest of the house of Israel in a metaphoric sense by sending them a message—His book. He would not

personally deliver the message to these recipients. Instead, others would later bear the responsibility of getting the word to them. Jesus Christ sent His disciples to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" ([Matthew 10:6](#)). And His disciples today still have that duty.

God informs Ezekiel that even though he speaks the same language as his audience, he should not expect a great response to his warnings. God states that the pagan gentiles who have never known Him would be more likely to listen. Jesus stated essentially the same thing, telling Jewish cities of His day: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes...And you, Capernaum...if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day... The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah" ([Matthew 11:21-23](#); [Matthew 12:41](#)).

God states that the house of Israel would not listen to Ezekiel because they would not listen to *Him*, as when God told Samuel, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" ([1 Samuel 8:7](#)). Yet God encourages Ezekiel. In [Ezekiel 2:6](#), He had told His servant not to be dismayed by the looks of the people. Now God says He will make Ezekiel's face stronger than theirs: With great intensity and determined will (the rock-hard forehead), he would be able to face them down ([Ezekiel 3:8-9](#)). God had similarly told Jeremiah, "Do not be dismayed before their faces... For behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land" ([Jeremiah 1:17-18](#)). These are encouraging words for all who preach God's truth to others, since we learn to rely on His strength instead of our own. God helps us to be properly "thick-skinned," being more concerned about His will than the judgments of other people.

Ezekiel is then specifically instructed to go and preach God's message to the Jewish captives in Babylonia ([Ezekiel 3:11](#)). In verses 12-13 we are reminded that all the while, this blazing vision of God's glorious throne has been ongoing. The great "rushing wind" sound of the cherubim's wings is again heard. Ezekiel himself is "lifted up" and transported (verses 12, 14). This is evidently still part of the vision, for in verse 15 we find him among those he started out with as the book opened (see 1:1).

The exact location of Tel Abib, or Tel Aviv (not to be confused with the modern Tel Aviv, Israel), is not known—though it is said to be on the River Chebar, which, as noted previously in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary, was evidently a canal adjoining the Euphrates southeast of Babylon.

Ezekiel sits astonished with the captives for seven days. His preaching is not yet started. Rather, he now has to try and assimilate all that God has told him he will be responsible for proclaiming. Interestingly, priests were required to take seven days to be consecrated for their office ([Leviticus 8:33](#)). And it is at the end of the seven-day period that God actually places Ezekiel in the position of watchman.

"A watchman in O[ld] T[estament] times stood on the wall of the city as a sentry, watching for any threat to the city from without or within. If he saw an invading army on the horizon, or dangers within the city like fire or riots, the watchman would immediately sound the alarm to warn the people" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on [Ezekiel 3:16-17](#)). If a watchman failed to do his job and people suffered as a result, that watchman was held accountable. God informs Ezekiel that the only way for him to save himself is to relay God's message—whether or not anyone responds to it. God tells Ezekiel that he will be held accountable for the evil that people do if he doesn't warn them of the consequences.



Isaiah recorded how watchmen of Israel have not done their job. [Isaiah 56:10-12](#) states: "Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. 'Come,' each one cries, 'let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better'" (NIV).

Again, "the hand of the LORD was upon" Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 3:22](#)). As God instructs, he goes out to the plain—"the wide open plain common in the heart of Babylonia" (*Expositor's*, footnote on [Ezekiel 3:22](#))—and sees, again in vision, the glorious picture of God's throne he recorded in chapter 1 ([Ezekiel 3:23](#)).

Ezekiel is then told to go into his house. He is to live as if under house arrest and must remain in his house unless he is giving a special message from God. In many cases he is to pantomime or act out what is going to happen. There are 25 pantomimes of Ezekiel recorded for us in this book, many of which were stressful and self-sacrificing to carry out. Staying in his house is the first one. God established when Ezekiel would prophesy. Ezekiel was to remain in his house, except when God required him to go outside to dramatize His messages. The fact that he is to remain mute is a restriction against public speaking. It probably doesn't mean that he could never speak in private. This condition of being restrained from speaking publicly would last for almost seven and a half years—until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. ([Ezekiel 33:21-22](#)). However, as we will see, there were several times during this period that God directed him to speak." [END]

Day 608 – FRIDAY: February 21<sup>st</sup>

Ezekiel 4

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "In this second pantomime instructed by God, Ezekiel is directed to act out a mock siege against Jerusalem. Recall that he was to effectively be mute, so the prophet's strange actions would communicate God's message. This was to be a sign to the people of Judah living in captivity. No doubt word of what Ezekiel was doing spread throughout the colony and perhaps even to those in faraway Jerusalem.

The prophet is instructed to draw a diagram of the city on a clay tablet and then represent its siege by an attacking army through building miniature earthen siege works around it ([Ezekiel 4:1-2](#)). He is also to set up an iron pan between himself and the city as a wall (verse 3). Some commentators have viewed this as depicting a siege wall, but it is *in addition* to the miniature siege wall of verse 2. Other commentators understand it as a barrier signifying God separating Himself from Jerusalem and no longer protecting it—or even as His "iron-willed" determination to destroy the city. Indeed, Ezekiel is to have his arms uncovered—the image of a man with rolled up sleeves, ready to fight—as God is described in [Isaiah 52:10](#).

The mock siege is given as a "sign to the house of Israel" (verse 3), which is rather interesting. The next verses clearly delineate between the house of Israel (the people of the northern kingdom) and the house of Judah (those of the southern kingdom). Jerusalem, as the ancient capital of all 12 tribes, is used here to represent the nations of both Israel and Judah. The sins of both are what bring about this siege.

As part of the symbolism, Ezekiel is told to lie on one side for 390 days, figuratively bearing the iniquity of the house of Israel, and then for 40 days on the other side, bearing Judah's iniquity (verses 4-6). Based on verse 9, which says that Ezekiel's time of lying on his side was 390 days, some construe the 40 days as being part of the 390. But this goes against the clear sense of verse 6. Verse 9 simply concerns the number

of days of the mock siege in which he is required to eat certain food—the 390 and not the 40.

Each day of lying down is said to represent a year (verse 6). This brings to mind [Numbers 14:34](#), where God imposed on Israel the punishment of 40 years of wandering in the wilderness for the 40 days of the mission of those who spied out the Promised Land and returned with an evil report. Interestingly, too, the figures of 390 and 40 add up to 430 years, a significant time span in Israel's history—this being the length of time from God's covenant with Abraham to the Exodus (see [Exodus 12:41](#); [Galatians 3:17](#)).

The meaning of the 390 and 40 years is not entirely clear. There are numerous difficulties here. For instance, we aren't told when the count of years begins or ends in either case. And it is not clear whether we should count backwards or forwards. Notice verse 5 in the New King James Version: "For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity." This seems to imply a count backwards of 390 years of past sin, which strangely—if we started with the time this prophecy was given in 593 B.C.—would land us late in the reign of King David. Or, if we counted back from the northern kingdom's fall at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 B.C., this would place the start of the 390 years in the period of the judges.

But perhaps "years of their iniquity" is meant to imply years *due to* their iniquity—that is, years of consequences their iniquity has brought about. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states in a footnote on verse 4, "The term 'aon (*awon*, 'sin') has three basic meanings (1) 'iniquity,' (2) 'guilt of iniquity,' (3) 'the punishment for iniquity.' Here the context reflects the second meaning...though the third meaning can be equally argued." Indeed, in place of the word iniquity, the Tanakh and NRSV have "punishment." This changes the meaning entirely, as it would indicate that the 390 years are a period not of past sin but of coming judgment; the count would be forward and not backward.

Counting 390 years forward from the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. interestingly brings us to 332 B.C., the year that Alexander the Great defeated the Persian forces of Darius III at the Battle of Issus. It has been suggested the northern tribes were basically confined through the remainder of the Assyrian Empire, the entire Babylonian Empire and the duration of the Medo-Persian Empire, finally gaining their freedom with the overthrow of the Persians by Alexander. Perhaps that is so for any Israelites who had remained in the vicinity of northern Assyria. However, it should be mentioned that the Israelite Scythians helped to defeat Assyria and that many of them had migrated away to freedom even before. Certainly a great multitude became free with the onset of the Babylonian period, though a significant number of them were later made to submit to Persian rule. Still, it was the Scythian Massagetae (most likely Israelites), ranging free on the Asian steppes west of the Caspian Sea, who killed the Persian emperor Cyrus the Great when he tried to conquer them. It should also be mentioned that there were still Israelites dwelling under the dominion of Alexander and then of his successors, the Seleucids. These would gain their independence the next century as the Parthians.

As for the 40 years for Judah, this too is uncertain. Some scholars contend that it should be counted backwards, understanding the period to extend from the time of the renewal of the covenant by Josiah in 622 B.C. until the year 582 B.C., which was the time that the remainder of the Jews were transported to Babylon (see [Jeremiah 52:30](#)). But why would a period of sin be counted from the renewal of the covenant? Some view the 40 years as the period of terrible sin during the Jewish king Manasseh's reign prior to his repentance—the time of Judah's greatest evil, for which God proclaimed destruction on the nation and its capital ([2 Kings 21:10-15](#); [2 Kings 23:26-27](#)). On the other hand, counting forward—viewing the 40 years as a period of coming judgment—it is conceivable that the time intended is that from the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. to 546 B.C., the year Cyrus the Great secured

the western Persian Empire through the conquest of Lydia, effectively making him more powerful than the Babylonians. He returned east the same year. Over the next seven years, he would encroach on Babylonian territory, finally invading Babylon in 539 B.C.

And there are yet other possibilities. A number of scholars point out that Ezekiel's prophecy is dated from the captivity of Jeconiah in 597 B.C. and argue that this should be the starting point for counting forward—noting also that the full 430 years should be counted, thus ending with 167 B.C., the time of the Jewish Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Greeks. Counting from the time the prophetic message was portrayed, 593 B.C., would bring us to 164-163 B.C., when the Maccabean revolt had proven successful. Counting 390 years forward from 593 would bring us to 203-202, the time the Parthians were gaining independence from the Seleucids (and then it is 40 years beyond *that* that brings us to *Judah's* push for independence from the Seleucids). Consider, in this light, that the Seleucids were essentially the successors of Assyria and Babylon—and that the years would, in this case, signify the times of emergence from their oppression (as the 430 years in Exodus marked the end of oppression and slavery).

Of course, this is all assuming that the years in question refer to ancient history. Perhaps they have some end-time application. Consider the siege Ezekiel portrays. It is against Jerusalem, and yet it is a sign to both Israel and Judah. Surely this was not meant to be understood in Ezekiel's day, as the northern tribes did not then get the message. Moreover, the siege Ezekiel conducts lasts 430 days, about a year and two months. But the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in ancient times lasted for around two and a half years.

In [Ezekiel 4:8](#), God says he would restrain (literally, "place ropes on") the prophet to make him unable to turn and switch sides during the acting out of the siege. How, then, was Ezekiel able to cook his food—as we next see him instructed—while lying down? The situation was the

same as that with Ezekiel's muteness. He wasn't required to be on his side 24 hours a day. He prepared meals and, as we see in chapter 8, he was sitting in his house less than a year and two months later—apparently while the mock siege was still going on (compare [Ezekiel 1:1-2](#); [Ezekiel 3:15-16](#); [Ezekiel 8:1](#)). The wording in [Ezekiel 4:8](#) simply means that whenever he lay down, God made sure he was only on the correct side for the specified group of days.

God then tells Ezekiel what he is to eat for the next 390 days—a mixed-grain bread (verse 9). God first told him to bake it in a defiled way, cooking it over dried human waste, in order to symbolize the defiled state of Israel and Judah (verses 12-14). But after Ezekiel expressed his revulsion at this, God allowed him to instead cook the food over cow manure, "a common fuel then as now" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 12-15). The issue of defilement, it should be noted, was strictly over the matter of using human waste (see [Deuteronomy 23:12-14](#)), not from mixing grains as some have supposed (as the proscription against mixing grains forbade the crossbreeding of plants, not the cooking of them together). Centuries later the apostle Peter felt the same revulsion toward eating unclean animals, refusing when he was told to kill and eat them in a vision ([Acts 10:14](#)).

Some have argued that [Ezekiel 4:9](#) provides the recipe for bread that is ideal for sustaining us—as it sustained Ezekiel for more than a year. (You can even buy "[Ezekiel 4:9](#) bread" in some health food stores.) But that is not the point of the verse in its context at all. What we see is that Ezekiel's food was to be "by weight" (verse 10), to symbolize rationing during the time of siege, as the explanation in verses 16-17 makes clear (compare [Ezekiel 5:16-17](#); [Leviticus 26:26](#)). "The recipe of six mixed grains for the bread indicates the limited and unusual food supply while in bondage in a foreign land. The small amounts of these grains [evidenced by the fact that they had to be thrown together in a mixture to produce a sufficient quantity of meal] vividly picture the

short supply of food in a city under siege. Because a city under siege was cut off from outside supplies, the people had to ration their food and water. If it ran out, they would be forced to surrender. In Jerusalem, the people would be allowed daily only a half pound of bread (twenty shekels) and less than a quart of water (one-sixth of a hin)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Ezekiel 4:4-11](#)).

Certainly the mixed-grain bread had some sustaining value, but this was far from a balanced diet. If one is going to claim that this is meant to portray ideal food, the same would have to be said for cooking over dung—and that just does not follow. In fact, notice verses 16-17 in the NIV: "Son of man, I will cut off the supply of food in Jerusalem. The people will eat rationed food in anxiety and drink rationed water in despair, for food and water will be scarce. They will be appalled at the sight of each other and will waste away because of their sin." They would be aghast at the gaunt, emaciated appearance of one another. It is likely that Ezekiel's diet produced the same effect in him: "The people watched and got the message. They watched with growing horror as Ezekiel weighed out his meagre measure of mixed grain and eked out his water ration. They saw the prophet wasting away, as the population of Jerusalem would do under siege" (*Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible*, note on chapters 4-5).

Again, however, it should be pointed out that this was a prophecy that concerned the future of both Judah and Israel. As such, it was evidently meant in a dual sense—applying in part to Jerusalem's fall to ancient Babylon but also the fall of Judah *and* Israel to *end-time* Babylon, as the next chapters make even clearer." [END]

Day 609 – SATURDAY: February 22<sup>nd</sup>

Ezekiel 5

Daily Deep Dive:



The UCG reading plan states: "Chapter 5 continues with instructions about the mock siege. God tells Ezekiel to shave his head and beard. Shaving the head and beard was a sign of humiliation and disgrace (compare [Ezekiel 7:18](#); [2 Samuel 10:4](#)). For priests it was a mark of defilement, rendering them unfit for temple duties ([Leviticus 21:5](#)). Israel, God's priestly nation, was going to be humiliated and defiled.

The cut hair was to be divided into three equal piles ([Ezekiel 5:1-2](#)). At the end of the mock siege, which would not come until more than a year later, the piles of hair were to be dispensed with in different ways. Ezekiel was to place one pile in the middle of the clay diagram and burn them (verse 2), symbolizing the third of the people who would die in the siege by pestilence and famine (verse 12). The next pile of hair—another third—was to be placed outside the perimeter wall and struck with a sword (verse 2), symbolizing those who would suffer violent death at the hands of enemy military forces (verse 12). And the last third was to be tossed into the air for the wind to carry away (verse 2), signifying that one third of the people would be taken captive by military forces and scattered (verse 12).

When and to whom would all of this happen? The destruction is commonly assumed to apply to ancient Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians in 586 B.C., and that is likely on one level. But, as stated in the comments on chapter 4, Ezekiel is portraying punishment to befall not just Jerusalem but all of Israel—that is, all 12 tribes (symbolized by Jerusalem, it being the ancient capital of all Israel). Notice the end of [Ezekiel 5:4](#): "From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel." Indeed, this exactly parallels the next chapter, which is directed to "the mountains of Israel" (verse 3). Ezekiel is to proclaim: "Alas, for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence" (verse 11). Yet the northern kingdom of Israel had *already* fallen—to the Assyrians 130 years earlier. So for this prophecy to make sense, it must refer to the future

destruction of Israel—which, as other prophecies make clear, is to take place alongside Judah's destruction at the end of the age.

For another parallel passage, notice [Zechariah 13:8-9](#): "And it shall come to pass in all the land...that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested." Two thirds die, just as in Ezekiel's prophecy. And the last third, though initially brought through the fire, escaping death at first, is then sent through a great period of trial, which fits with the experience of national captivity and scattering. This prophecy of Zechariah was given long after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Indeed, it was given at the time of Judah's restoration after the Babylonian captivity. So it could not refer to that destruction. In fact, we know the time frame of the foretold destruction since, in the very next verse, the prophecy continues right into [Zechariah 14](#), a message clearly concerning Christ's return at the end of the age. This destruction, then, happens just prior to that.

So again, this is something all Israel—Judah and Israel—will experience at the end of the age. The people of Judah today are the Jewish people. The descendants of the northern kingdom of Israel, on the other hand, primarily make up the nations of Northwest Europe and other nations of Northwest European heritage, including the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (request or download our free booklet [The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy](#) to learn more). Imagine, then, the overwhelming magnitude of destruction that awaits these nations for their sins. If the Israelites today throughout these nations were estimated at around 300 million people, then 100 million would die through pestilence and famine—involving ghastly, desperate instances of cannibalism as the famine raged ([Ezekiel 5:10](#); compare [Leviticus 26:29](#); [Deuteronomy 28:52-57](#)). Another 100 million

would die at the hands of enemy military forces, and the remaining 100 million would go into captivity.

These tolls are staggering. To make matters worse, recall the prophetic indications that only a tenth of the Israelites who go into captivity in the end time will survive (see [Amos 5:3](#); [Isaiah 6:11-13](#), Living Bible). Using the above numbers, this would mean that only 10 million would remain at Christ's return. These figures should serve as a frightful and dire warning to the people of modern Israel. The horrible terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were as nothing when measured against to what is yet to come (compare [Deuteronomy 28:58-68](#)).

While these warnings are graphic and threatening, there is still hope for repentance. Indeed, God always gives a warning with the hope that the disaster He is about to bring may be averted (see [Jeremiah 18:5-8](#); [Jonah 4:2](#), [Joel 2:12-14](#)). God does not rejoice in the punishment of the wicked—no matter how deserved it is ([Ezekiel 18:23](#); [Ezekiel 33:11](#)). He rejoices in repentance and obedience to the only way of life that is right and good—His way ([Isaiah 48:17-18](#)).

Interestingly, distinct from the three categories of national punishment, Ezekiel was to take a few strands of hair and tuck them safely away in the edge of his garment ([Ezekiel 5:3](#)). These hairs symbolized a special, select group. The Hebrew word translated "edge" is sometimes translated "wings," as a marginal reference in the King James Version notes. To understand the symbolism, compare [Psalm 91:1, 4](#): "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty...under His *wings* you shall take refuge." The meaning, then, is evidently one of divine protection. However, even some of those who are in this special group are to be burned up.

In Ezekiel's time, the protected group could perhaps indicate the initial captives who were resettled in Babylon—who experienced a measure of peace (compare [Jeremiah 29:4-7](#)). Indeed, these constituted Ezekiel's

immediate audience. They did not have to experience the worst of the horrible destruction on Judah, in which Jerusalem and the temple were sacked and razed. Yet among these, some stubbornly persisted in wickedness and were killed as a result (compare verses 21-23). This, then, would have served as a stark warning to those who witnessed Ezekiel's prophetic actions.

What, then, of the end-time context? Regarding the last days, Jesus Christ gave His servants, true Christians, these instructions: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" ([Luke 21:36](#)). He later gave this message to His faithful followers of the end time: "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world [the Great Tribulation], to test those who dwell on the earth" ([Revelation 3:10](#)).

Yet another message shows that even some Christians will have drifted far from God and will require severe circumstances to shake them up and cause them to repent: "So, then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth... I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire [evidently the fire of the Great Tribulation]... As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (verses 16-19).

In [Revelation 12](#), a "woman," representing the Church of God, is taken to a place of protection from Satan the dragon (verses 13-16). But Satan then goes in pursuit of the "rest of her offspring" who, though they keep God's commandments and testimony, are evidently not as faithful as they need to be at that time and therefore are not with the others in the place of protection (verse 17). (Of course, this is a very general breakdown. There may well be some faithful individuals who don't go to a place of safety but are instead martyred, just as most of the original apostles and many Christians of later periods were.)

Thus it appears that those bound in the hem of the garment are meant, in an end-time context, to represent members of God's true Church. Yet there are at least two ways of understanding this. One is that the collection of hairs initially bound in the hem symbolizes all Church members alive at the end time. Of these, some remain protected (those taken to a place of safety) and some are cast into the fire of the Great Tribulation (never going to the place of safety). The other possible way of looking at it is that the hairs initially bound in the hem represent those Church members who are taken to a place of safety in the end time. Of these, some remain protected in the place of safety and some are cast into the fire—losing that protection for some reason. The former seems more likely as the latter does not take into account those true Christians who do not go to the place of safety at all.

Of course, the major focus of [Ezekiel 5](#) is the terrible calamity that comes on Israel as a whole—each third experiencing a distinct punishment as we've seen. The ancient fall of Jerusalem would be a shocking lesson to all the nations—as the future fall of all Israel will be to a much greater degree (verse 15). Let it be a lesson to us *before* the fact. We must take warning now—for any one of us could yet be part of one of the three dreadful categories presented here. Let us be alert and pray regularly as Christ instructed in [Luke 21:36](#), so that we may be counted worthy to escape what is coming—and to remain sheltered under the wings of the Almighty. Indeed, in our prayers we should specifically *ask* for His protection, as many biblical examples illustrate. Yet let us pray this for the right reasons. Jesus taught that preserving our physical lives should not be the reason for seeking protection. We must be willing to give up our lives for our convictions if need be ([Matthew 16:25](#)). We seek protection so that we may continue to serve God and care for others—and to continue growing in the kind of character God desires of us. Our ultimate goal is eternal life in His Kingdom. That is the only lasting and impregnable security.” [END]