

Triennial Torah Study – 2nd Year 10/03/2012

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<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

Lev 19	Ezek 10-13		Acts 28
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Leviticus 19

Various Holiness Precepts (Leviticus 19)

Parts of this chapter sound like they came from the New Testament. Indeed, in it we find the Old Testament statement of the second great commandment, as defined by Jesus Christ (verse 18; compare Matthew 22:37-40). The chapter opens with an explicit statement of the purpose for what has gone before and of what is to follow: Because God is holy, so must His people be also. This chapter will continue with sundry laws designed to maintain holy relationships with God and men.

The first two laws hew straight to a fundamental necessity for right relationships: reverence. Reverence is the high respect paid by one individual to another, with special attention to submissive behavior. God commands reverence for parents, the teachers of their children, and the observation of all of His Sabbaths, which are teaching occasions between Him, our spiritual Parent, and us, His children. He further enjoins reverence for Himself by again prohibiting idolatry. When children revere their parents and God—heeding their instruction—right relationships based on mutual respect and honor are produced, and a whole multitude of blessings follow.

The regulation concerning peace (or fellowship) offerings again addresses the relationship between God and Israel. God has produced peace and fellowship between Himself and Israel, and that fellowship, symbolized by the peace offerings, must be respected. Thus, peace offerings are not to be treated in a common manner just because they were widely shared among family members. It was very important to remember that, as the family feasted on the offering, God also had His part in it and dined with the family. With such an honored guest in fellowship, care needed to be taken to ensure decorum and respect.

The laws concerning gleanings may not seem like a holiness issue, but they do constitute one, for, as already mentioned, the fundamental idea behind holiness is separation. Here God sets apart a certain portion of a harvest for the poor. In effect, a certain portion was holy to the poor and reserved for their use. Notice, however, that those who received this set-aside portion were still required to work for it. Unlike too many modern welfare systems, the recipients of God's generosity toward them still had to gather their food from the fields and vineyards themselves. This was consistent with the biblical principle Paul later expressed so succinctly: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The law was just to all concerned. It was generous toward the poor, but also fair to the property owners—since God was the one who promised to bless their crops if they would obey Him. By enacting this

law, God ensured that He provided for the destitute among His people—and made all Israel participants in that provision.

Attention to truth and justice is prominently addressed. When a people separate themselves to truth and justice, they are unified and blessed with peace. God's priestly nation Israel needed to be just such a people if they were to serve as examples to the rest of the world. A major part of doing justice is to never allow your brother to continue in sin. Such "tolerance" will destroy your brother and, eventually, your community and nation. It is not "broadminded" or "bighearted" to allow sin to continue (compare 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 6)—it is foolishness and dangerous to all around! Remember, sin affects everything. When a brother is sinning, we

must make an effort to restore him spiritually (Galatians 6:1-2)—in humility, but with open rebuke if necessary (Proverbs 27:5).

Toward the close of the chapter, God addresses blood, divination and soothsaying, hair, beards, body piercing, tattoos, prostitution and Sabbaths. Why? What do all these have in common? Much. All these prohibitions concern pagan practices. Blood consumption was a part of Canaanite worship, as were divination and soothsaying (that is, prognostication based on pagan practices). Shaving around the sides of the head refers to certain tonsures or hairstyles laden with pagan sun symbolism (this practice of tonsure was widely practiced by the Roman Catholic clergy during the Dark and Middle Ages, and still is to some degree today). Trimming of the beard in a certain style was also part of pagan worship. Body piercing and tattoos served to mark a person as the worshiper of a particular god, but God desires that we honor and glorify Him through the clean presentation of our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20). And, as noted earlier, ritual prostitution was a ubiquitous feature of Canaanite religion.

Ezekiel 10-13

The Departure of God's Glory (Ezekiel 10)

The vision of chapters 8 and 9 continues in chapter 10. Here we have a lesson from God of considerable importance to us. For us to continue as God's chosen people, He must actually dwell or live among us. The people of Israel came to understand this following their Exodus from Egypt. In Exodus 25:8 God instructed Moses, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." It was God's intent at that time that He would dwell in the midst of the 12 tribes of Israel in the tabernacle made of goatskins. And His presence was evident in the pillar of cloud illuminated by the divine glory filling the tabernacle (see Exodus 40:34-35). As explained in previous comments, rabbis later designated this glory by the term *shekinah*, meaning "indwelling."

God's glory later came to dwell in the temple built by Solomon after his fervent and humble prayer (2 Chronicles 6-7). God chose to allow His presence—again evident through the radiance and splendor of His glory—to remain in the temple for centuries. Yet after the Jews had proven their determination to continue in false, idolatrous worship, the presence of God did eventually leave the Jerusalem temple prior to its looting and destruction by the Babylonians. Even when the second temple was rebuilt in its place after the return from Jewish exile, God's glory did not occupy it. Moreover, there is no record of the shimmering, luminous glory ever again occupying an earthly building. However, centuries later the shepherds saw the glory appear in the sky as angels announced the birth of the Savior (Luke 2:9). Indeed, the coming of Christ in the flesh was, in essence, God coming to dwell with human beings (John 1:1, 14; Matthew 1:23). And after His death and resurrection, He would again do so through the Holy Spirit.

Later, Stephen proclaimed the truth that God no longer dwells in temples made with hands

(Acts 7:48). As the apostle Paul explained, God's temple is now His Church, the people whom He dwells in through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16). And the initial giving of the Spirit to the Church was accompanied by the miraculous signs of wind and fire, reminiscent of the glory of Ezekiel's vision (see Acts 2).

On the night before His death, Jesus relayed some very important guidelines for God dwelling in His people through the Holy Spirit: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to Him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23). Notice: in order for the Father and Jesus Christ to dwell with a person, that person must be obeying Christ's words. The apostle Paul repeats essentially the same principle in 2 Corinthians 6:16: "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you [Christians] are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'"

But Paul goes on to follow this with a warning from God: "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you" (verse 17). God dwelling among a people or in the heart and mind of a person is conditional upon that people or person being submissive and obedient to God. The presence of any idol or unclean worship will cause God to withdraw His presence. This is one of the most important lessons God is using Ezekiel to teach us in this chapter.

Ezekiel 10 begins with the image of the living cherubim carrying God's throne. God gives the order to the man in linen to gather coals of fire from between the cherubim and scatter them over the city of Jerusalem (verses 1-3). This symbolizes that God has now judged the city and it is to be punished and burned, as when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with fire and brimstone (see Genesis 19:24-25). Yet as we've seen, the punishment on Jerusalem is representative of punishment to befall all of Israel (Ezekiel 9:9-10).

The glory or presence of God then begins to move. The step-by-step exit from Jerusalem is recorded for us. As the glory of God moved from the Holy of Holies to the threshold or entryway of the temple (9:3; 10:4), we see that the living cherubim carrying the mobile throne were waiting outside the temple on the south side (verse 3). The entire house and courtyard were filled with the surrounding cloud and brightness (verse 4). Then, apparently after God assigned the man in linen and the executioners their jobs, He left the temple threshold and ascended His mobile throne above the living cherubim, not returning to the physical Holy of Holies within the temple (verse 18). The cherubim may have moved to meet Him as we see them hovering, with Him above them, at the east gate of the temple (verse 19).

The east gate is probably the one referred to as "the gates of righteousness" and "the gate of the LORD" in Psalm 118:19-20 and the "everlasting doors" in Psalm 24:7, 9. It is called the "Sun gate" in a Talmudic passage (Erubin 5:22c) because the sun would shine through it in the morning. Also through this gate traditionally entered the king and the ark in the sacred processions.

In the next chapter, we will see that when the glory of God leaves the temple through the east gate, it proceeds to the mountain on the east side of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives (Ezekiel 11:23)—after which it presumably ascends to heaven. This path is opposite to the one Jesus

Christ will take when He returns to the earth in power and glory in the future. For at that time He will first descend to the Mount of Olives and then, sometime later following the construction of the millennial temple, enter Jerusalem through the east gate, accompanied by the glory of God (Ezekiel 43:1-5; Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-12; Matthew 24:27). Indeed, a principal theme in this vision and the whole of the book of Ezekiel is the departure and eventual return of God's glory to Jerusalem.

The description of the cherubim takes up a lot of Ezekiel 10, paralleling material from chapter 1. Ezekiel describes the transportation system of God's throne almost exactly as he saw it earlier. His word picture of the cherubim, wheels

rotating within each other with eyes apparently on the rims, the shimmering light in various colors, and the four faces of a cherub, man, lion, and eagle are almost identical to the previous account. This reveals that he was seeing the same God and the same throne. Since all of the faces are the same as those in chapter 1 with the exception of the “face of a cherub,” it is obvious that this face is the same as the face of the ox (1:10).

Another detail to note is that where the wheels are called “Wheel” in the New King James Version of verse 13, others translate the word here as “whirling” or “spinning.” The sound of the cherubim wings became very loud as the throne of God moved out of the temple. It could be heard even in the “outer court” (verse 5). This may symbolize God leaving Jerusalem in a public way, having the fact perceived or loudly proclaimed.

God had in fact prophesied the departure of His glory well in advance. Back in Deuteronomy 31:17-18, He had warned: “Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?’” In Hosea 9:12, God proclaimed, “Woe to them when I depart from them!”

In all these warnings, Ezekiel included, we should recognize that God was not only talking about the ancient destruction He brought on His people. He is also talking about the future—of nations today and of us individually. All of us have a choice before us of whether to be faithful to God or to reject Him. The apostle Paul taught that the greatest mystery of all time is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Jesus Christ living in us through His Spirit is the most wonderful thing a human being can experience in this life. Yet one of the main lessons from Ezekiel is that God stays only where He is wanted and obeyed. This is true of nations, this is true of church fellowships, and this is true of every individual.

God withdrawing is never what He wants—it is people who force it on Him. Whenever His place of dwelling—whether a person, a church or religious organization or an entire nation—is filled with objects of false worship or idols, there is no more room for Him. After all, His name is Jealous (Exodus 34:14) and He will not share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8). Satan has organized society so that God is squeezed out—we now have no time for Him. Christ illustrated this in the parable of the sower with the new plants being choked by the thorns (see Matthew 13:7, 22). As individuals we often fill our lives with economic pressure, constant entertainment and various pursuits—and then we wonder why God is not truly manifested and working in our lives. The book of Hebrews warns us not to neglect so great a salvation as that which has been offered to us (2:1-3)—yet we at times come to the realization that we are doing just that. As Paul said to all of us, “It is high time to awake out of sleep” (Romans 13:11). May studying God’s message through Ezekiel aid us in doing just that.

Meat in a Cauldron; A Heart of Flesh (Ezekiel 11)

Ezekiel 11 concludes the vision that started in chapter 8. Ezekiel is now shown a group of 25 men that may or may not be the same as the group of 25 sun worshipers in 8:16. Those here are designated as “princes of the people” (11:1)—possibly civil leaders as this term “denotes public and political officials often serving in judicial, military, or royal posts (see 2 Sam. 8:15-18; 20:23-26)” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Ezekiel 11:1-2). However, leading priests were “princes of the sanctuary” (Isaiah 43:28). Perhaps these are religious leaders who are also acting as civil leaders—or maybe just as ringleaders among the people in evil pursuits.

The Jaazaniah of Ezekiel 11:1 is the son of Azzur, not Shaphan as in 8:11. Again, perhaps the meaning of the name, “God Hears” or “God Harkens,” is significant: “Azur means ‘help.’ He [Jaazaniah] and Pelatiah (‘God delivers’), son of Benaiah (‘God builds’), are singled out... because their names ought to have reminded them that ‘God’ would have

‘heard’ had they sought His ‘help’ to ‘deliver’ and ‘build’ them up. But neglecting this, they incurred the heavier judgment by the very relation in which they stood to God” (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary, note on verse 1).

God told Ezekiel that these men were plotting evil and giving wicked advice in Jerusalem. Remember that Jerusalem in this vision, while pointing literally to the city of Ezekiel’s time on one level, is also intended to represent all of Israel and Judah in the end time, just prior to Christ’s return (compare 9:9-10; 11; 15-21).

Verse 3, which relates the wicked advice given, is clearer in the earlier King James Version than in the New King James: “It [presumably calamity] is not near; let us build houses” (KJV). Perhaps better still, the NIV has, “Will it not soon be time to build houses?” What about the rest of the verse? The New Living Translation renders it, “Our city is like an iron pot. Inside it we will be like meat—safe from all harm.”

In Ezekiel’s day, this directly contradicted the warnings he and Jeremiah had been giving. As leaders, those making these claims should have heeded the threat posed by Babylon and leveled with the people. Yet, instead, they are shown wickedly promoting a false sense of security. Evidently, they themselves were living in denial—confident that even if they came under attack, the walls of Jerusalem and the presence of God’s temple would protect them from harm just like a cooking pot protects the meat inside from the flames of fire outside. Of course, this was foolishness—especially as God had sent such dire warnings through His true servants. The leaders had a responsibility to heed and spread the warning themselves. But they failed miserably in this respect, even going in the exact opposite, quite evil direction by saying all would be well. The same thing often happens among our national leaders today— and will in fact get far worse as the end of the age approaches.

God places the blame for the great number of deaths in the city on the shoulders of the leaders (11:6)—as He earlier placed it on the shoulders of the religious leaders (8:17; see also 9:9). This could mean that the high murder rate is due to a failure to honor and teach God’s laws. Or it could refer to the deaths that have already come as punishment for the people’s sins—the leaders being culpable for failing to properly acknowledge God and educate the nations in His ways and for giving a false sense of security, for not warning the people. When Ezekiel received this vision, the leaders already bore responsibility for the two previous attacks on Judah that left many dead in 605 and 597 B.C.— just as they would be responsible for the terrible slaughter that would follow. The same will be true of leaders in the end time.

In this light, God then uses the cooking pot analogy against them. He agrees that the city is a cooking pot of meat— only it is a pot of dead meat! The corpses of the slain are the meat, being cooked, so to speak (verse 7). Yet this would not include the particular leaders being addressed. They would indeed be killed, but not before they see the full calamity being brought. God says that the city would not be their cauldron. Rather, they would be run out of it and given into foreign hands, to be executed outside of Israel (verses 8-11).

Notice that Israel is again identified with Jerusalem here, which may point to an end-time fulfillment. However, Israel also designates the Promised Land (compare verse 17) and these verses could conceivably apply to what happened to certain leaders in Ezekiel’s own day. Notice what later occurred after Jerusalem’s fall to the Babylonians: “And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the second priest...an officer who had charge of the men of war, five men of the king’s close associates who were found in the city, the chief recruiting officer of the army...and 60 men of the people of the land who were found in the city... [and] brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah [in Syria]. Then the king of Babylon struck them and put them to death” (2 Kings 25:18-21).

Whoever the 25 leaders are intended to portray, through judgment they would finally come to see the reality of God—that is, of the true God, whom they had denied by not heeding His law and by corrupting His worship with pagan customs and concepts (Ezekiel 11:12).

In verse 13, Ezekiel sees Pelatiah (mentioned in verse 1) die and cries out, asking if God will even leave a remnant. Perhaps Pelatiah is the first of the 25 leaders to fall in the vision. Or, just the opposite, maybe Ezekiel saw the other 24 killed and Pelatiah is the last. And it could be that his name, again meaning “God Delivers” or “Delivered of God,” is significant—that is, if he is not delivered, will anyone be?

Starting in verse 14, God responds to Ezekiel by giving him a wonderful message of comfort and hope. Verse 15 may be slightly mistranslated in the New King James Version. The picture seems to be that the Jews of Jerusalem are saying that all of Israel in exile—the scattered northern tribes and the Jews in Babylon—have been carried far away from God (through virtue of being far from Jerusalem). Consequently, the Jews of Jerusalem see the Promised Land as belonging solely to them. However, the reality is that those with such a mindset in Jerusalem are going to be destroyed while those in exile will ultimately be given the land (verse 17). Yet this would not happen until later generations.

Indeed, even the Jewish return from exile at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah would not fulfill this passage, as it is “all the house of Israel in its entirety” (verse 15) that is to be given the land of Israel and, at that time, they are shown to be repentant and spiritually converted (verses 18-20), signifying the period of Jesus Christ’s future reign on earth—as described in

Isaiah 11 and many other passages. During the centuries of scattering, God says that He Himself would serve as a “little sanctuary” among the people (Ezekiel 11:16), perhaps indicating, as explained in the comments on chapter 9, the Church of God—referred to in Scripture as the “little flock” and the “body of Christ.”

When the captives of Israel and Judah are at long last brought back to the Promised Land in the future, they will purge it of all abominations (verse 18). God then gives hope for a beautiful future of reconciliation with Him for all Israel. The final message of Ezekiel 11 tells us much about God’s great mercy and compassion. In the depth of their sins, while they still practiced idolatry, God promises these people that one day in the future they will be given an opportunity to repent, return to their land and make a new covenant with Him. This covenant will be different from their past experience because God will cause the “stony” (stubborn and hard) heart of evil and rebellion to be removed from them and will replace it with a heart of “flesh”—one that is soft, malleable, emotionally tender and responsive. In other words, He will give them His Spirit, the indwelling presence of His glory, and cause them to desire to obey His laws (verses 19-20). Again, we see a marvelous consistency between the messages of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament about God’s plan for mankind—contrary to what today’s counterfeit Christianity would have us believe. (See the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 31 for a fuller explanation of the New Covenant that God will make with Israel and Judah.)

Even then, verse 21 of Ezekiel 11 cautions that there will yet be those who refuse to obey God and their heart will desire detestable things. Justice will be meted out to them as they deserve.

Finally, Ezekiel sees the glory of God depart from Jerusalem (verses 22-23). In His vision He is transported back to the exiles in Babylonia. And thus his vision comes to an end, whereupon he reports all he has seen to the exiles—starting, no doubt, with those elders who were then seated with him in his house, where he had actually been all along (see 8:1).

Deportation and Devastation—Soon (Ezekiel 12)

Chapter 12 begins a new section in the book of Ezekiel. This new series of messages, extending to the end of Ezekiel 19, apparently follows soon after the vision of chapters 8-11: "Ezekiel always gave specific dates for new visions or oracles. Since no new chronological notice was given, and since the speeches of chapters 12-19 were closely related thematically to the foregoing vision, it can be assumed that these messages were uttered shortly after Ezekiel's explanation of the vision in chapters 8-11" (The Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on verses 1-2).

Thus, the exiles had watched Ezekiel's symbolic acts and heard the rarely spoken prophecies of this normally mute man of God for more than a year. They had seen his acts with their eyes and heard his words with their ears, but it had no impact on them; in fact, they rejected God's message (12:2). Other prophets experienced the same reaction (see Isaiah 6:9-10; Jeremiah 5:21).

The exiles did not grasp the seriousness of Ezekiel's messages. They still believed they would be allowed to return to their land in the near future because Jerusalem still stood and most of the Jewish people continued in the land. Surely, it was only a matter of a little more time before they would be permitted to go back home. Throughout chapters 12-19, several reasons are presented as to why they believe this way. In chapter 12, it is apparent that the people either don't believe prophecy or reason that even if judgment really is going to come on their homeland, it won't happen in their lifetime. It just doesn't seem possible to them—but, of course, it should have. "Ezekiel's next visual demonstration [of the process of deportation] warned the captives already in Babylon that they should not expect a quick return to Jerusalem. He had already shown that the city would soon fall ([chapters] 4; 5); those not killed would be led into exile. These exiles should have understood Ezekiel's meaning, for they had done what he was displaying only six years before, when they had been brought into exile" (The Nelson Study Bible, note on 12:3-7).

After pantomiming Jerusalem's siege, lying on one side and then the other over the course of 430 days, and shaving all his hair, Ezekiel was no doubt drawing larger numbers of onlookers. For this next demonstration he probably packed a bedroll, water container, staff and a few clothes. He was to pack them outside his dwelling during the day with people watching him. "In the evening he would dig a hole through the mud-brick wall of his house. Leaving through the hole, Ezekiel carried his bag like an exile (vv. 4b-6a). Next he would cover his face [essentially blindfolded so he couldn't see where he was going] (v. 6b) and go to another place while all the people watched. Ezekiel's act was a sign that God would bring additional exiles to Babylon (v. 6c)" (Expositor's, note on verses 3-7).

The onlookers asked what this meant, and God told Ezekiel to respond that besides the rest of the nation, it particularly concerned the "prince," the ruler, in Jerusalem (verses 8-14). Indeed, leaving through a hole in the wall by night indicated a secret escape. This is exactly what the nobles and political leaders of Jerusalem tried to do six years later during the siege of 586 B.C. They attempted to escape and run but were caught by the Babylonians. King Zedekiah was blinded and carried off to Babylon where he would die (see 2 Kings 25:1-7; Jeremiah 52:1-11). The rest of the nation was also carried away captive, just as God foretold through Ezekiel.

God is clear as to the reason for allowing many of them to go on living. Despite the judgment He is bringing, this is another example of His great mercy. While enslaved, they will come to acknowledge their sinful ways and come to better understand Him (Ezekiel 12:15-16). "They will know that I am the LORD," He states repeatedly. This will also serve as a powerful witness to all mankind. God wants to emphasize that no one should think He wasn't strong enough to prevent the calamity that came upon His nation. Rather, their downfall was due to His power, a fulfillment of the curse He promised. God understands human nature and the depth of evil to which people can sink. People need to know who God is—including what He stands for, His likes and dislikes, His expectations—before they can

learn to properly worship Him. And for those who refuse to heed Him initially, they will ultimately come to know Him in a more ominous way—through judgment.

Using the family analogy He inspires in the New Testament, God has expectations for His household, like any wise father does. Even a physical family fails poorly without mature household rules. On the other hand, proper parental guidance helps children succeed in life. Said succinctly, fatherly love includes laws—not harsh, not without mercy, but rather rules that protect his children from harming themselves and others. How does a wise father ensure that his children respect his rules for their good? He disciplines them. So it is with our heavenly Father’s approach to His children (see Hebrews 12:5-11).

In verses 17-18 of Ezekiel 12, God gives the prophet another pantomime to perform. Ezekiel is instructed to tremble and shake as he ate his food and shudder in fear as he drank water. This would test his acting ability, but the message from God is clear: This is what the nation is going to experience. He then explains that this is to serve as punishment for the incessant violence between people (verse 19)—which probably includes not just physical but emotional violence as well (compare Malachi 2:16).

In verse 20, the chilling warning of Ezekiel 6:6 is reiterated: The inhabited cities are to be laid waste. Many elements in chapters 12-19 hearken back to points made in the earlier chapters of Ezekiel. Recall that in those earlier chapters, Jerusalem was often used to represent the whole house of Israel in the end time. The same can be said of this section. While the message is obviously directed to Ezekiel’s immediate audience, there are, as we will see, indications throughout the section that the message is for all of Israel—and more specifically, since the northern tribes did not receive Ezekiel’s message in ancient times, for Israel’s descendants in the last days.

In verse 6 of chapter 12, Ezekiel was to be a sign to the “house of Israel.” Yet in verses 8-9, this could conceivably be limited to the Jews in captivity, as God asks, “Has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, ‘What are you doing?’” However, we could perhaps imagine people of the modern nations descended from Israel reading Ezekiel’s prophecy and also wondering the same thing—and Ezekiel answering them through this preserved written record rather than his ancient utterances. In verse 10, God says, “This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them.” This verse might seem limited to the Jews of ancient Judah. But, while it clearly does apply to them, it may also have a broader meaning. Again, we have clear precedent in the preceding chapters of Ezekiel for understanding the ancient destruction and captivity of Jerusalem and Judah as typical of punishment that is to befall all of Israel in the end time. The end-time Jewish monarch resides among the Israelites (as we will see more about in Ezekiel 17).

It only makes sense to see Ezekiel’s warning of deportation as applying to not only the Jews still in Judah when he spoke, but also to all Israel and Judah at the end of this present evil age. As other prophecies also show, the cities of the modern Israelite nations are going to be destroyed and the survivors will be marched off into foreign slavery. And again, violence among the people is part of the reason for this punishment. God must be grieved continually at the terrible murders and violent crime that are so common in the lands of modern-day Israel. How we are repeating the experience of our ancestors! At times it seems that the only lesson we learn from history is that men do not learn lessons from history.

In verse 22, God quotes a proverb of the people: “The days are prolonged, and every vision fails.” A “proverb” is a popular saying summing up some common wisdom. But this wasn’t wise at all. Such statements are still common today: “People have been saying that for centuries and it hasn’t happened yet.” And the Bible warned of the pervasiveness of such sentiments in the end time: “Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts [physical wants], and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

“The belief the proverb [in Ezekiel] expresses is, simply, that the message of judgment delivered by Ezekiel and other prophets like Isaiah simply was not true. The argument underlying it is basically, ‘It hasn’t happened yet—so it can’t happen!’ That notion is foolish, whether it’s held by a Californian living in an earthquake zone, or a non-Christian hearing about Christ’s Second Coming! God’s patience in delaying judgment is evidence of grace, not evidence no judgment lies ahead!” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, 1991, note on 12:22).

Others accepted that Ezekiel’s warning was true and inspired, but believed it concerned the distant future and not the here and now (verse 27). This is also true of many believers in the end time. Jesus warned of Christians who would adopt the attitude of “My master is delaying his coming” (Matthew 24:48). Even many who believe Christ’s coming is relatively soon lose any sense of urgency regarding it—seeing it as still far enough off not to concern them. “Maybe someday. But not now. Maybe someone. But not us. God’s response through Ezekiel was, ‘Not someone...you!’ And, ‘Not someday...soon!’ The attitude of the people of Ezekiel’s day is still pervasive in the church. Only if we truly believed judgment was coming to us and soon would we break the bondage of our materialism, and live completely for the Lord” (note on Ezekiel 12:26-28).

Once God accomplishes His proclaimed punishment, no one will be able to contradict it! There were false prophets in Jerusalem with whom Jeremiah was contending at this time (Jeremiah 28:1-5). There will also be false teachers and prophets in the end time. Even though they persuade many people with their words, God’s Word stands sure and will pass the test of time. The chapter ends with this message: “Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done.”’ In less than six years from this prophecy Jerusalem would fall to Nebuchadnezzar and be destroyed.

Similarly, the judgments of the end time are coming swiftly. We don’t know how long. But we know they are coming soon. At some point in the not-too-distant future, what the apostle John foresaw will come to pass: “The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever...that there should be delay no longer” (Revelation 10:5-6). Until then, the end for each of us could be minutes or even seconds away, as we are all mortal and subject to death. So we should live each day with that reality in mind—and direct our lives accordingly.

False Prophets and Prophetesses (Ezekiel 13)

This oracle is a poignant summation of false prophets and prophetesses, serving as a vivid warning for everyone. The first point—and perhaps the most crucial—that God makes is that these people send themselves. He did not and does not send them. They follow their own heart and appoint themselves, although they typically claim a special “anointing” or calling of God. Have we not seen many do this in our own time? Self-appointed ministers, prophets and evangelists have been a curse to the Church and to the world for thousands of years. Indeed, Satan the devil, the father of lies (John 8:44), has ministers who masquerade as ministers of righteousness (1 Corinthians 11:14-15). The Bible lists the righteous characteristics of God’s true servants (e.g., Exodus 18:21; Titus 1; 1 Timothy 3). False ministers or prophets can give the appearance of godliness, but, as Jesus Christ warned, they are wolves in sheep’s clothing and will be revealed in time by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-16).

Notice that in Ezekiel’s account they begin by saying, “Hear the word of the LORD!” (verse 2). They feign righteousness and pretend to have a legitimate message from God. This provides an opportunity for examining one of their most revealing fruits—that is, the truth of what they say. Too often, people focus on charisma and personality rather than on substance. God specifically addresses the issue of a person who “packages” himself in strong appeal—even performing “miracles!”—in Deuteronomy 13. Focus on his message, God says, for he likely is leading you away from God’s Word and law (verses 1-4). God adds through Isaiah: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not

speak according to this word [God's Word], it is because there is no light [no truth] in them" (Isaiah 8:20). A false minister will often use the Bible, just as Satan used Scripture in tempting Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:3, 6). But the discerning Christian meticulously checks the preacher's words against the Bible (Acts 17:11).

Again, what these men described in Ezekiel 13 have to say comes from their own reasoning— not from God. The Almighty states clearly the truth of the matter: the foolish prophets follow their own spirit and have seen nothing. The word "foolish," *nabal* in Hebrew, "implied more than our concept of stupidity. It was a broad term that encompassed spiritual and moral insensitivity contrary to the nature of a wise man. The word was used to describe people who blasphemed (Ps 74:18), who were arrogant (1 Sam 25:25), who were atheistic (Ps 14:1), and who lacked self-discipline and humility. Ezekiel described the basic cause of their foolishness as their reliance on their own hearts and failure to seek God's revelation (cf. Jer 23:16-22; ch. 29)" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on verses 1-7).

All the while that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were preaching God's warning to the Jews—these self-appointed false prophets were proclaiming a different message. Their message was that God would not punish, things were going well and would continue, and there is no need to listen to these two prophets. This is a pattern we see repeated in Scriptural history. The sorcerers of Egypt tried to discredit the warnings that God gave through Moses. Others opposed Joshua, Nehemiah, many if not all prophets we have record of, and later Christ and the apostles. In the time of the end, God will have His two witnesses preaching a final warning (Revelation 11), but Satan will have the Beast and False Prophet who will deceive by miracles (Revelation 13:14). And until then we must expect that false prophets will always be with us. The apostle Peter warns us, "There were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1).

God's description of them in Ezekiel 13 is very appropriate for any time, but especially the end time before Christ returns. Indeed, the "day of the LORD" is explicitly mentioned in verse 5. While this term may in some sense signify times of God's triumph against His enemies in the past, it mainly denotes the final triumph of God at the end of the age, when He pours out His wrath on a cataclysmic scale never before seen. We should understand that the calamity of Ezekiel and Jeremiah's day was a forerunner of the world-shaking events that will accompany the time of the end.

God says the false preachers are "like foxes in the deserts" (Ezekiel 13:4) or, as the NIV renders it, "jackals among ruins." "They scavenged for themselves while causing, ignoring, and profiting from the human wreckage surrounding them. They were racketeers instead of reformers" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 2-4). These false prophets found themselves a place to prosper among people who were in the process of decaying. The reason they were accepted among the remnant of the people was that there was a foreboding atmosphere, and the people wanted to hear optimism. People prefer to hear good news or a soft, easy message—one that makes them feel good (see 2 Timothy 4:3-4). This is why so many churches today preach a "feel-good" message instead of a call to repentance. Reader boards or signs on churches often proclaim that churches are "empowering" or "uplifting" or "celebrating" people. Building a following and making people feel good about themselves is apparently the most important goal.

God describes the job of a true prophet or minister as figuratively going up into gaps in a wall to rebuild and repair it so that people are protected (compare Ezekiel 22:30; Psalm 106:23). This can be understood as the responsibility to warn people of their spiritual gaps—areas in which they are disobeying God and need to change. It can also refer to the nourishing care of a pastor, who prays for, listens to and counsels his congregants, helping to heal wounds in their lives (see 1 Thessalonians 2:7). Christians, being human, will make mistakes. When they know they have, they need help and encouragement to overcome the results of their errors. A true minister is there for them, neither judging nor

whitewashing them for what they did, but rather helping to build them back up spiritually. In essence, the requirement is to do what needs to be done in the service of God and others. True prophets would have seen the need to warn the people of the coming danger and show them what was required to avert it. A true watchman operates on the principle of 1 John 3:17: “Whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” One who knows the truth has a responsibility to provide warning and direction for those who don’t.

Instead of protecting and caring for the people, these charlatans seduce the people with false assurances of “‘Peace!’ when there is no peace” (verse 10), a message decried earlier in the book of Jeremiah (6:14; 8:11). Instead of giving the people the truth, which will always stand firm, these false teachers were giving them lies, which can never stand under the weight of testing. The people thought they were doing a good job—creating, in a figurative sense, a solid wall firmly cemented together—because of what they were told by men who claimed to be God’s representatives. A more accurate figure of what they were doing, however, was piling stones into a heap and having the false teachers put a layer of plaster or whitewash over them, so that it looked solid. When the day of testing comes, the lack of strength in the wall will become evident (Ezekiel 13:10-16).

The false claim of being God’s instruments wasn’t limited to men. In this message God specifically includes women who are false prophetesses (verse 17). God says they “hunt souls” (verse 18) or, rather, “‘lives’—the whole person; the idea [the word soul often connotes today] of disembodied spirits was completely alien to Jewish thinking” (Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible, note on verse 18; compare 18:4, 20). Essentially, the goal of these women is to trap or ensnare people.

The prophetesses are portrayed as fortunetellers or witches. Notice this paraphrase in the Contemporary English Version: “Tell them they’re doomed! They wear magic charms on their wrists and scarves on their heads, then trick others into believing they can predict the future. They won’t get away with telling those lies. They charge my people a few handfuls of barley and a couple pieces of bread, and then give messages that are insulting to me. They use lies to sentence the innocent to death and to help the guilty go free. And my people believe them! ... They do things I would never do. They lie to good people and encourage them to do wrong, and they convince the wicked to keep sinning and ruin their lives” (Ezekiel 13:18-19, 22).

The grain here, however, may be more significant than just payment: “Hittite practices and later Syrian rituals demonstrate that divination was carried out with barley bread either as part of the pagan sacrificial ritual or as a means of determining whether the victim would live or die. The prophetesses, therefore, profaned God by misrepresentation” (Expositor’s, note on verses 17-19).

Even though witchcraft was forbidden in the covenant God made with His people (Leviticus 19:26), it was practiced, and primarily by women—just as in Egypt and Babylon. “Despite the strong warnings of the Law, the people turned more and more to these occultists during the days preceding Jerusalem’s fall” (Word in Life Bible, note on Ezekiel 13:18-19). Witchcraft and other forms of occultism are certainly on the rise in our day as well—and their popularity will likely further increase as times worsen.

Yet it should also be recognized that these women probably symbolized the penetration of the Babylonian Mystery religions into the worship of the true God. Veils or scarves were worn by pagan temple prostitutes as part of their garb when they were working to ensnare a customer. Once taken, the victim was then enticed further with occult mysteries. In this sense, pagan religion, harlotry and witchcraft or sorcery all went together in an unholy mixture.

In prophecies of the end time, this false religious system that sprang from Babylon is actually portrayed as a temple prostitute involved in harlotry and sorcery, condemning God’s faithful servants to death: “[Concerning] the great

harlot...the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication... The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet... And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints... [By her] sorcery all the nations were deceived” (Revelation 17:1-6; 18:23). The same system is referred to in Nahum 3:4 as the “seductive harlot, the mistress of sorceries” or, as the King James Version has it, “the mistress of witchcraft.”

Today, this great false mystery system masquerades as the world religion known as Christianity. Its many false churches throughout the nations of modern Israel may well be pictured by the women in Ezekiel 13.

God ends this prophecy against the false teachers by stating that He will deliver His people from them. In ancient times, that was accomplished to a certain extent by the destruction of Judah and the Jews being taken into captivity. Most of the ruling politicians and religious leaders were killed by the Babylonians, while most of those who were still trying to obey God were among those who were spared and taken to Babylon. This group formed the core of the faithful community in exile, later members of which would return to Jerusalem decades afterward with Zerubbabel or with Ezra to rebuild the temple.

Of course, the heart of Babylon was not an ideal place to escape from pagan religion—and many Jews succumbed to its enticements either completely or in part, with various Babylonian ideas and concepts entering into the practice and beliefs of Judaism just as other erroneous pagan concepts later would enter Christianity. Again, we should understand that the ancient destruction of Judah was merely a forerunner of the greater calamity that still is yet to come— to be followed by the ultimate deliverance of Israel and all mankind from the evils of all false religion into the glorious light of God’s wonderful truth.

Acts 28

We ended last week with the ship, crew, and Sha’ul finally coming upon land in a sort of shipwreck. They discovered they were on the island called Melite. They were greeted and cared for graciously by the people who lived on the island. They built fires and warmed them, for it was still raining. As Sha’ul was adding wood to his fire, a snake came out due to the heat and bit him! When the people of the island saw this they exclaimed, “This man is certainly a murdered, whom, though saved from the sea, still right-ruling does not allow to live.”

When after a time Sha’ul did not get sick and die, they determined he must be a mighty one (a god) because he was immune to the adder venom. Shortly thereafter (perhaps until the next daylight), the chief of the island named Poplius allowed them to stay in his home for three days. It just so happened also, that Poplius’ father was ill and suffering from dysentery and inflammation. Sha’ul went to him, laid hands upon him and prayed, and he was healed. When the people of the island heard of this, they all came to Sha’ul for healing and were healed.

The people of the island showed them great respect and sent them off sailing eventually with many supplies to meet their needs. After three months they eventually boarded an Alexandrian ship that had stopped there at the island to winter whose figurehead was “Twin Brothers.” (or Sons of Zeus, or Castor and Pollux) They sailed and then stopped at Syracuse for three days and sailed again and came to Rhegium. After a day there they sailed and came to Puteoli, where there were “brothers” there. They stayed with the brothers for seven days and then set final sail for Rome. When they arrived in Rome, the Captain delivered all the prisoners except for Sha’ul who he allowed to stay by himself with a personal soldier guarding him.

After three days of Sha’ul staying back in the area where the soldier was guarding him, he began to speak to the people around (who were of the Jewish belief). He explained to them how it was that he had come to be in the position he now found himself. How he had been falsely accused and he was found guilty of nothing by the Roman courts and they had determined to let him go. There was no cause found to put him to death. But the Jews at

Jerusalem would have nothing of it and he was forced to appeal to Caesar. He also let it be clear that the reason for all of this predicament was his testimony concerning “the expectation” meaning specifically the resurrection of the dead.

They let it be known that they had heard nothing of this. They had no letters, were not aware, were left out of any decisions, and had heard nothing wicked about Sha’ul at all. They had heard, though, about ‘the Sect’ that Sha’ul was noted to now be a part of and they asked him intently to share with them the facts of the truth concerning “the Sect”. And having appointed him a day, many came to him where he was staying, to whom he was explaining, earnestly witnessing about the reign of Elohim, and persuading them concerning Yahshua from both the Torah of Mosheh and the Prophets, from morning until evening.

Some believed, but some did not and they began disagreeing amongst one another. To which Sa’ul said, “The Set-apart Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, ‘Go to this people and say, “Hearing you shall hear but by no means understand, and seeing you shall see but by no means perceive, for the heart of this people has become thickened, and with their ears they heard heavily, and they have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ear, and understand with their heart, and turn back, and I should heal them.” Isaiah 6:9-10.

Therefore Sha’ul proclaimed that this Word of Elohim will not go until the Gentiles and they shall hear! Sha’ul stayed there in Rome in his own rented house awaiting trial and he received all who came to him. He continued proclaiming the reign of Elohim and teaching about the Master Yahshua Messiah with all boldness, unhindered.