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This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Lev 21-22	Ezekiel 20-22		James 3:19 – 5:20
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Leviticus 21-22

Laws for the Priests and Fitness for Service (Leviticus 21-22)

Because God is holy, His priests, who serve Him and represent Him to His people, must also be holy.

God is eternal and wholly separate from sin. Human death is the product of sin. So, God's priests must be separate from defilement through death. To accomplish this, the priests were forbidden to become defiled with the death of any person who was not a direct and close family member. Proper mourning was appropriate, and hence mourning for a father or mother, brother or sister, son or daughter was permitted. But otherwise, the priest had to be kept far from the defilement of the dead. For the high priest, even defilement for parents was not permitted, nor outward signs of mourning allowed.

Again, tonsures (area shaving of the head), certain beard trimming and body piercing for the priests are prohibited. Such practices were pagan in origin and God wanted His priesthood to be distinctively non-pagan.

Priestly marriages were also subject to stipulations not bound upon the average Israelite. In the case of the high priest, it very clearly states that he could marry only an Israelite virgin. Moreover, the priests of God had to be physically unblemished to perform certain rites. A blemished or deformed priest could not enter within the Holy Place, nor could he officiate at the altar. He could, however, engage in the other duties of the priesthood and partake of the offerings. The spiritual parallels with Jesus Christ, our High Priest, should be obvious.

Not only did the priests' conduct and station in life have to be holy before a holy God, but even their momentary circumstances had to be holy. To officiate at the altar, a priest had to have no ritual defilement upon him. If defiled by disease, bodily discharge, a dead body, a discharge of semen (which may have symbolized the unfruitful going forth of life), an unclean animal, an

unclean person, or by any other means, the priest could not officiate until he was ritually cleansed. Ritual uncleanness was representative of sin. And the holy God cannot be defiled by sin—so everything connected with approach to Him must be without its stain.

Furthermore, if defiled, the priest could not partake of the holy offerings. The priests received portions of certain offerings, which they and their immediate families could eat. But those who partook of the offerings had to also be ritually pure. Thus, as we can see, those who serve God and benefit from His service, must all be clean.

The concluding portions of this section deal with sacrificial fitness. The animals sacrificed to God were symbolic of Christ in different ways. Christ was morally and spiritually perfect and unblemished. Thus, the animals that typified Him had to be physically perfect and unblemished. A sacrifice or offering made with a defective animal was rejected, and an insult to the perfect God. Carnal man would prefer to give God the defects and keep the good for himself. But this God will not allow. Moreover, it was required that sacrifices be from the worshiper's own goods—not from a foreigner's goods. Every sacrifice must “cost” the one sacrificing. Finally notice, once again, that the chapter closes with an emphasis on holiness.

Ezekiel 20-22

A History of Rebellion, a Future of Redemption (Ezekiel 20:1-44)

Chapter 20 begins a new section of the book of Ezekiel. The starting date in verse 1 equates to August of 591 B.C. The section continues to the end of chapter 23, as 24:1 gives a new date, January of 588 B.C. Our current reading encompasses the first 44 verses of chapter 20. “The chapter division in the MT [Masoretic Text, the authoritative Hebrew version] is between v. 44 and v. 45 in the English text. This division best follows the argument of the book at this point” (Expositor's Bible Commentary, footnote on verse 44). This fact becomes even clearer in our next reading.

Again “certain of the elders of Israel” among the Jewish exiles come to Ezekiel to seek information from God as they did in chapter 14. Yet it is clear that when God addresses them, He is speaking not only to them—as they were probably not passing children through the fire at this time—but to the “house of Israel,” the nation they represented (verse 31). Moreover, since the latter part of the chapter concerns “all the house of Israel” (verse 40) being purged of sin and returning to the Promised Land from captivity in the future, it is likely that the message is intended not just for the Jews of Ezekiel's day but for all Israel in the last days.

As God answered before, He says He refuses to be questioned by these elders or the nation (verse 3, 31). Instead, He has Ezekiel proclaim to them the “the abominations of their fathers” (verse 4). Israel's history has been one long series of rebellions against God. The point is not that the Jews of Ezekiel's time or Israelites of the future are to be punished for the sins of their forefathers (as Ezekiel 18 made clear). Rather, God recognized in the Jews of that day, and all Israel today, the same rebellious spirit that had characterized the nation historically. Evil cultural traditions were passed on from one generation to another. It is likely that the Jews of Ezekiel's day were relying on their “noble heritage” to preserve them. God's retort: Let's take a

hard look at that heritage—it's not so good; better think again! Indeed, the actions of the people had many times brought severe judgment from God. Yet included here was a message of hope. While God purged rebellion through punishment, He never completely wiped out the nation—and never would.

The accounts of rebellion begin with Israel's time in Egypt. In verses 7-8, "God spoke of something not explained in the Book of Exodus; that is, the Israelites had engaged in the idolatry of the Egyptians during their sojourn there. Thus, though not mentioned elsewhere, there was the threat of divine retribution against the people before the time of the Exodus (which is mentioned in [Ezekiel 20] v. 10)" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 8).

In verses 9, 14 and 22, God explains that He acted "for My name's sake." God's name carries His reputation and signifies all He stands for. When the Israelites sinned, they, as His representatives, essentially profaned His name before other nations (see also 36:20). Their unfaithfulness is labeled as "blasphemy" (see 20:27). God consistently upholds the honor of His name, so that all will be sure to take Him seriously. This necessitated punishment for disobedience—but also the preservation of Israel as a nation to fulfill His promises.

Profaning or blaspheming God's name was a violation of the Third Commandment, against taking God's name in vain. Israel also broke the First Commandment, against worshiping other gods, the Second against using idols or images in worship and the Fourth, against breaking God's Sabbath. The first four of the Ten Commandments outline man's duty to God—and the fact that all were transgressed clearly illustrates Israel's rebellion against God. Indeed, the focus of Ezekiel 20 is Israel's idolatry and Sabbath breaking as the primary basis for past judgment—as it would be for coming judgment (see Ezekiel 22). This was according to the specific terms of God's covenant with the nation. In listing the blessings for national obedience and curses for disobedience, He began with a specific mention of idolatry and Sabbath breaking (see Leviticus 26:1-2).

The seventh-day Sabbath was to be a sign to show that Israel acknowledged Him as the one true Creator God and that they were His chosen people (Ezekiel 20:12, 20; Exodus 31:12-17). It continues, in fact, as the day God commands for rest and holiness—it is still a sign for distinguishing God's people (see Hebrews 4:9-10, which states that the Sabbath rest remains, and our free booklet, *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*). It is not the only identifying sign, of course, because many keep the Sabbath without really knowing why or obeying God in all other areas—but it is nonetheless an important one and certainly one of the most visible. Sadly, the modern nations of Israel—those of northwest European heritage, chief of which are the United States and Britain—stand guilty of idolatry and, especially, of Sabbath breaking, which they do not even recognize as sin. It is partly because they don't recognize and honor God's Sabbath that they cannot truly understand and know God (see again Ezekiel 20:12, 20).

In verses 11, 13 and 21, God quotes Leviticus 18:5, which explains that God gave the people statutes and judgments that would enable them to live, and states that the people had rejected these. This verse in Leviticus had introduced laws of sexual morality, forbidding adultery,

incest, homosexuality, etc. The clear implication is that Israel had sunk into sexual depravity (compare Ezekiel 22:9-11).

So, God says, He “gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live” (20:25). Some theologians gravely misinterpret this verse as meaning that, because of the Israelites’ disobedience, God imposed on them “bad laws,” such as sacrifices, tithing, the Holy Days, etc. Of course, God does not give “bad laws.” This verse has nothing to do with any laws that He gave—whether ceremonial laws instituted for a time or permanent statutes such as tithing and the Holy Days. Rather, as Psalm 81:12 explains, God gave them over to their own stubborn hearts’ desires and reasoning. In other words, He let Israel reap what it had sown. Romans 1:18-32 mentions how people who rejected God and His truth were given over to lewd and evil practices such as homosexuality—an exact parallel with Ezekiel 20. The Israelites descended so far as to burn their children in sacrifice (verse 26). In short, God allowed the Israelites to depart from His system of law and morality and embrace that of the world around them—to their great detriment, so they would ultimately learn a powerful lesson. God decries Israel’s participation in pagan worship beginning not long after the nation came into Canaan. In verse 29 God says: “Then I said to them, ‘What is this high place to which you go?’ So, its name is called Bamah [high place] to this day.” The Israelites had worshiped at pagan high places (hill shrines) so much that “high place” became a generic term for any place of worship, still in common usage in Ezekiel’s time.

In verses 30-31, God warns the people of Israel—the Jews of Ezekiel’s time and all Israel of the end time—that they are following the wicked example of their ancestors. The modern Israelite nations are, as mentioned, replete with idolatry and Sabbath breaking. Sexual immorality is commonplace and widely accepted among them. And, as mentioned in the Bible Reading Program commentary on Ezekiel 16, their people are guilty of child sacrifice—that is, through abortion or “offering” children over to society’s ultimately lethal values.

God will not allow the nation to cross-examine Him (20:31). Instead, its people will be punished. Still, “judgment isn’t a sign God has abandoned. It is evidence that He keeps on being committed to us [compare Hebrews 12:5-11]. Israel wanted to desert God and serve pagan deities ([Ezekiel 20] v. 32). God says ‘Never.’ His love is greater than all our sin. We can stray, but God will bring us back to Him” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on verses 32-38). Of course, whether an individual remains faithful to God is ultimately that person’s choice. But, knowing the human heart, God is confident of saving the vast majority of His people.

God will ultimately deliver the Israelites with an outpouring of fury on the unrepentant among them and on their enemies (verses 33-34). Verse 34 shows that God planned to regather the Israelites even as He was determining to scatter them. As in the original Exodus, God will again lead the people through the wilderness in a journey of return to the Holy Land (verses 35-36). The passage here refers not to the Jewish return from Babylonian exile in ancient times but to a future return of all Israel.

But there is a warning here. God says, “I will make you pass under the rod” (verse 37). This terminology is used in Leviticus 27:32 in reference to a shepherd counting His sheep with

respect to tithing, where one out of ten is devoted to God. This could mean an enumeration or the indication that many Israelites will die and that God will start over again with a “tithe” of those who go into captivity (compare Amos 5:3). This certainly fits the imagery of the purge God says He is conducting—to get rid of the rebels (not allowing them to return to the land of Israel) before bringing those who are left back to the Promised Land and into His covenant (Ezekiel 20:37-38).

Verse 39, in the New American Standard Bible, states, “Go ahead and worship your idols for now, you Israelites, because soon I will no longer let you dishonor me by offering gifts to them.” God will put a stop to their idolatry—through bringing the people to repentance and removing those who refuse to repent. God’s “holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel” (verse 40) is here a reference to God’s future Kingdom, in which Jesus Christ will reign over Israel and all nations from Jerusalem (see Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3). At last, the Israelites will understand the evil of their ways and come to hate them. They will finally come to know the true God and embrace His ways in genuine repentance.

Fire and Sword Against the South (Ezekiel 20:45-21:32)

As noted in the previous reading, the authoritative Hebrew text of the Old Testament has a chapter break after Ezekiel 20:44, making verses 45-49 part of the next chapter. This makes sense, as there is a clear thematic break from the previous section. God goes from the promise of future national restoration to the call again for judgment. Verses 45-49 contain a parable in this regard that is interpreted in the first seven verses of chapter 21.

The message of this section is for the “south.” In fact, Ezekiel 20:46 uses three different Hebrew terms translated “south.” “The three words used for ‘south’ in this verse are (1) *temanah* which basically means ‘right,’ so that when facing east in the normal orientation of that day, the ‘right’ would be ‘south’; (2) *darom* is Ezekiel’s normal designation for ‘south,’ used only for geographical directions in all O[ld] T[estament] occurrences; and (3) *neghebh* [or Negev], a term that denotes a ‘dried-up land,’ normally the region south of the Judean hill country from Beersheba south, though it is also used for geographical direction (especially here combined with the word ‘forest’)” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, footnote on verse 46). “The southern forest referred to the southern kingdom of Judah, a forested area in biblical times, even into the upper Negev” (note on verses 45-49). The point is to emphasize whom the prophecy concerns—the Jews of the land of Judah in Ezekiel’s own day.

The “forest” is also a figurative reference to Jerusalem and its royalty, the royal buildings having been built from Lebanon cedars—the national armory even named the “House of the Forest of Lebanon” (see 1 Kings 7:2; 10:17). Through Jeremiah God had foretold the fall of Judah’s royal family this way: “They shall cut down your choice cedars and cast them into the fire” (Jeremiah 22:6-7).

Ezekiel complains to God that those hearing his message dismiss his words as too mysterious to understand (Ezekiel 20:49). So, God directs him to explain matters more clearly.

The message is for Jerusalem, the holy places of the land and all those in “the land of Israel,” which, in context, meant Judah of that time (21:2). The “fire” that would spread “from the south to the north” (20:47-48) represented a “sword” of warfare “against all flesh from south to north” (21:3-4). “From the south to the north” may simply mean everywhere throughout the country. But it could also indicate the direction of destruction. Later in the chapter, the sword is referred to as “the sword of the king of Babylon” (verse 19). While the Babylonian invasion of Judah would initially come from the north, it is interesting to note that the Babylonians would withdraw from their siege of Jerusalem to march south to face oncoming Egyptian forces—and then turn around, wreaking devastation from south to north, in a final onslaught against Jerusalem.

God says to the land, “I will draw my sword...and cut off both righteous and wicked from you” (verse 3). “This pairing shows that God was going to allow the dreadful temporal consequences of sin to affect everyone in the land, both faithful and unfaithful” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 3-5). Yet it should be pointed out that if the faithful are allowed to die, that does not mean they are being punished as the wicked. Indeed, since they will be resurrected later, this could well be a way to spare them further suffering (compare Isaiah 57:1-2). There are many examples in Scripture of God allowing His true servants to be killed. However, the cutting off of the righteous from the land by the sword does not necessarily mean their death. This could also mean that they are deported—physically taken away from the land—as a result of military invasion. Indeed, this must at least be included in the meaning, as verse 4 says the sword is against “all flesh” in the land, and yet we know that many people were not killed. In any case, the removal of the righteous, through either death or deportation, removes the possibility of God preserving the nation for their sake (compare Genesis 18:16-33).

God tells Ezekiel to make a big display of emotion, sighing in great agony and distress, to illustrate what the reaction of the people will be when they receive news that their country is invaded and being destroyed. The phrase “breaking heart...translates words that literally mean, ‘breaking loins,’ suggesting great emotional upheaval” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 6). The feeble hands and weak knees of the people (verse 7) are also foretold in Ezekiel 7:17—in a passage representing ancient Judah’s destruction as typical of end-time destruction (which may be a hint of some duality in Ezekiel 21 even though the message was primarily for Ezekiel’s own day).

There are five sword oracles in chapter 21: verses 3-7, 8-17, 18-24, 25-27, 28-32. Again, the sword signifies the military power to make war. God says the sword belongs to Him (verse 3) but He gives it “into the hand of the slayer” (verse 11)—revealed in verse 19 to be the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. God says this sword is set against “the scepter of My son” just as it is set against “all wood” in the country (verse 10) or, put better, “every tree” (KJV), bringing in again the figure of the forest that was to be cut down and burned. God had earlier explained that the nation of Israel was His “son” (Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1). And the “scepter” was the symbol of the nation’s rulers. “The sword has no more respect to the trivial ‘rod’ or scepter of Judah (Gen. 49:10) than if it were any common ‘tree.’ ‘Tree’ is the image retained from ch. 20:47” (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary, note on Ezekiel 21:10).

Indeed, verse 12 explains that the sword will be against the people and princes of the nation. For this reason, Ezekiel is told to “cry and wail”—either as a lament or, perhaps more likely, as a further demonstration of the future reaction of the people to “terrors.” He is to “strike his thigh,” a sign of deep anguish and grief, “because it is a testing” (verse 13)—that is, a “trial,” as the word has been alternatively rendered. And if the trial of this invasion is directed against the scepter, would the scepter survive? This is a crucial question, as God had promised in Genesis 49:10 that the scepter would remain with Judah until the time of the coming of the Messiah to claim it. He had promised King David an unbreakable dynasty that would rule from a throne in all generations (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89:4). The Davidic throne’s survival is addressed later in the chapter.

In Ezekiel 21:14, God tells Ezekiel to strike his hands together, perhaps clapping to gain attention or making a gesture of anger or readiness to fight similar to the modern fist punched into an open palm (compare Numbers 24:10). “Let the sword strike twice, even three times” (Ezekiel 21:14, NIV) may be idiomatic for the intensity of punishment (compare Proverbs 6:16). Yet it could signify an actual number of strikes. Ezekiel 21:12 had stated that the sword would strike the people and the princes (two strikes), and many who went into captivity would be struck later (a third strike to finish the job). It is also conceivable that the three strikes meant the three periods of destruction against the Jews in the Holy Land—the Babylonian invasion of Ezekiel’s day, the Roman destruction in apostolic times and the end-time destruction the Bible foretells. Of course, it may be that something else is intended. Commentators have offered a number of possibilities.

In verses 18-19, God tells Ezekiel to represent two possible routes of Babylonian conquest. This probably means he “drew a map, perhaps in the dirt or on a brick, on which he made a road from Babylonia toward Canaan. He placed a signpost in the road where it forked, one branch leading toward Rabbath-Ammon, the capital of Ammon [known today as Amman, Jordan], and the other branch descending to Jerusalem (vv. 18-20). Damascus was the normal junction where the road divided. The king of Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar, was shown standing at the fork in the road, using all manner of magic and divination in order to determine which nation he should attack first (v. 21). The combined conspiracy of Judah and Ammon against Babylonia in 589 B.C. undoubtedly precipitated this coming of the Babylonian army. Shaking arrows inscribed with personal or place names (belomancy) was a form of casting lots. Each arrow was marked with a name, the arrows placed in the quiver, the quiver whirled about, and the first arrow to fall out was the gods’ decision. Household idols were intimately related to ancestral inheritance. Perhaps also they were consulted as mediums, representatives for their forefathers, who were supposed to give guidance (necromancy). The liver, being the seat of the life, was commonly examined with a decision of divination being determined from its color or markings (hepatoscopy). Nebuchadnezzar used all three means of divination with the same result. Though God did not condone divination in any form, he was the sovereign God who controlled all things. He could control these pagan practices to accomplish his will (cf. Jer 27:6)” (Expositor’s, note on verses 18-21).

God says the signs will point to Jerusalem, so Nebuchadnezzar will give the order to besiege the Jewish capital (verse 22). Verse 23 in the New Living Translation reads: “The people of Jerusalem will think it is a mistake, because of their treaty with the Babylonians. But the king of Babylon will remind the people of their rebellion. Then he will attack and capture them.”

Verses 25-32 are written against Zedekiah. He is to “remove the diadem and take off the crown” (verse 26, KJV). Some see diadem here as a reference to the miter of the priesthood, but that would not apply to Zedekiah. Rather, the imagery here is of stripping Zedekiah of the Israelite crown—of the kingship. Yet what of God’s scepter promise?

God continues in verse 26, “This shall not be the same” (KJV). There was a change occurring in regard to the national crown. Then notice: “Exalt him that is low and abase him that is high” (KJV). The abasement of the high is easy to understand: Zedekiah being brought down. But what is meant by the exaltation of him that is low in the same context? It must refer to crowning someone else with Davidic kingship. As explained in our online publication *The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future*, the Jewish monarchy continued through a daughter of Zedekiah who married into Israelite royalty, transplanting the Davidic scepter from Judah to Israel in ancient Ireland. As was noted in Ezekiel 17:22-24, the abasement of the high and the exaltation of the low concerned not just the rulers themselves but their nations— Judah, losing the Davidic monarchy, was brought low and Israel was raised up.

Where the New King James version repeats the word “overthrown” three times in Ezekiel 21:27, other versions repeat the word “ruined.” The King James Version has “overturn”—a toppling or pulling down to be sure but allowing for a shift and replanting elsewhere. Jeremiah’s commission was to pull down but also to plant and rebuild (Jeremiah 1:9-10)—and he was the key figure in transferring the throne.

Verse 27 then seems to say that the throne would “be no more” (KJV)—i.e., cease to exist—until centuries later with the coming of Him to whom it belongs, Jesus Christ. But remember that God had promised that David would have a descendant reigning on his throne in every generation. So, it seems that a better translation of the verse would be: “I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more [overturned] until He come whose right it is.” The mentioning of overturn three times would seem to imply that the throne would be pulled down and moved three times. As our online publication explains, the first transfer was from Judah to Ireland. The second was from Ireland to Scotland. And the third was from Scotland to England. The monarchy of Great Britain is the chief monarchy of David.

Finally, we see that Nebuchadnezzar’s decision to destroy Jerusalem had not gotten the Ammonites off the hook. They were still slated for punishment by the sword of invasion and slaughter. The first part of Ezekiel 21:30 is clearer in the King James Version: “Shall I cause it to return to its sheath?” The answer is no—not without first destroying Ammon.

A number years prior, “while Jehoiakim was king (608-598 B.C.; 2 Kin. 24:2), the Ammonites joined other nations east of the Jordan in raiding Judean territory, in return for protection from

Nebuchadnezzar. Later, during the reign of Zedekiah (c. 593 B.C.), Ammon, Moab, Edom, and others conspired against Babylon, but with false hopes of help from Egypt (Jer. 27:3-11)" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Ezekiel 21:28). The people of Ammon mocked the Jews, delighting in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple—happy that they were not the subject of Babylon's conquest. Yet "the fall of Jerusalem meant only that Judah would be judged first. Some Judeans took refuge in Ammon (see Jer. 41:1-3). God remembered Ammon's animosity and foretold its future as a place that shall not be remembered. The events of Jer. 41 led to a Babylonian expedition against Ammon in which the capital city Rabbah was sacked and many inhabitants deported (see 25:1-7). Ammon was later invaded by Arabs and its autonomy ceased. Eventually it was absorbed into the Persian Empire" (note on Ezekiel 21:31-32).

Again, it is possible that there is some duality here regarding the end time, when Ammon will initially escape devastation at the hand of the future Roman/Babylonian dictator (see Daniel 11:41) but will later suffer judgment (see Amos 1:13-15; Jeremiah 49:1-6). Another prophecy against Ammon is given in Ezekiel 25:1-7.

The Bloody City; Dross in a Furnace; Standing in the Gap (Ezekiel 22)

Chapter 22 presents us with three messages from God. The first is a record of national abominations as the basis for judgment (verses 1-16). The second is metaphor of metal smelting to demonstrate that God's judgment reveals the entire nation to be spiritually worthless (verses 17-22). And the third decries the wickedness of every stratum of society, from the nation's religious and civil leaders to the average person (verses 23-31).

The first section concerns "the bloody city" (verse 2). It is not stated here what city is meant but the context shows it to be Jerusalem as representative of the entire Jewish nation in Ezekiel's day—and probably of all Israel and Judah of future ages, especially the end time. That Jerusalem of Ezekiel's day is intended is clear from the fact that when the Babylonian siege against the city begins, God tells the prophet to proclaim, "woe to the bloody city" (see 24:1-3, 6, 9).

This is a horrible designation, given previously to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh (Nahum 3:1). The Assyrians had received this distinction for brutalizing other nations, but Jerusalem "sheds blood in her own midst" (Ezekiel 22:3). One way this came about was in connection with the nation's terrible idolatry. The Valley of Hinnom was a renowned place for idol worship, where children were sacrificed to Molech. The nation's leaders used their power to have others murdered (verse 6). Many people made false accusations against others to have them put to death (verse 9). In later centuries, Jesus Christ explained that Jerusalem was guilty of the blood of the righteous, putting many of God's servants to death (Matthew 23:34-37). Indeed, Jesus Himself was killed there.

Throughout the nations of Israel today, murder rates are high—and the guilty are not justly punished. A million and a half unborn infants are murdered in the United States alone every single year—through the determination and ruling of many of our national leaders and judges.

And the entire culture is taught a way of life leading to personal destruction and, ultimately, national suicide.

A whole host of sins, particularly among the nation's leaders, are listed in this section. "Whenever the attitudes detailed here appear in a society, it is near collapse. What are the signs? The undermining of parental authority (v. 7a). Injustices that take advantage of the poor and helpless (v. 7b). Indifference of leaders to the best interests of those they rule, as well as indifference to the things of God (v. 8). A legal reign of terror, including murders (v. 9a). Leaders engaging in sex sins (vv. 9b-11) and seeking illicit personal profit (v. 12). When any society forgets God and strays from its spiritual foundations, its leadership will become corrupt and the nation will ultimately fall. Where is our society today? Apply Ezekiel's criteria and decide for yourself" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on verses 7-12).

As in chapter 20, Sabbath breaking is shown to be a big reason for national punishment, being mentioned in both Ezekiel 22:8 and verse 26. Eating on the mountains in verse 9—as in 18:6 and verse 11—refers to participation in pagan worship.

God concludes that He will scatter the people of the nation in line with other prophecies of national deportation. This certainly happened to the Jews of Ezekiel's day. It had already happened to the northern kingdom of Israel more than a century earlier. In early Christian times, it would again happen to the Jewish nation. And at the time of the end, it will happen to the nations of Israel and Judah together. Notice that God says that through this he would remove the nation's filthiness, its spiritual defilement of sin, "completely." While the removal of sinful behavior was accomplished by degrees through previous captivities, the complete removal of the nation's sins would seem to point mainly to the captivity of the end time, in which the severe humbling of the people will pave the way for their acceptance of Jesus Christ. For only the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice provides a true atonement for sin, and only His life within a person through the Holy Spirit enables that person to truly obey God as God requires. The Jewish people obviously have yet to accept Christ. But so, do the supposedly "Christian" nations of modern Israel, as they have not really submitted to the true Christ and His ways.

The next section of Ezekiel 22 concerns the "house of Israel" being placed "into the midst of a furnace." This applied on one level to the invasion and destruction of ancient Judah by the Babylonians. But as with other prophecies in Ezekiel, it also seems to point to the fire of the terrible Great Tribulation that will engulf Israel and Judah shortly before the return of Christ.

The focus of this section is the parable of the metal in a furnace being revealed as all dross. That is, the impurity is so pervasive that there is nothing of value left. Similar imagery was given in Jeremiah 6:27-30, where Jeremiah, as an "assayer," was to label the nation "rejected silver." In Isaiah 1:21-22, God had likewise lamented: "How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross."

Trials leading up to final destruction served to reveal the widespread corruption. “Judgment displays the people’s impurity ([Ezekiel 22] vv. 17-22)... Just as the hot fires of the smelter’s furnace cause the dross to come to the surface and reveal the purified silver, so in times of divine judgment human beings are driven to act according to their character. The selfish become more cruel and self-centered; the godly more compassionate and caring. Remember this when troubles come to you, and let the fires of God’s judgment on society bring out the best in you!” (note on verses 1-31).

Indeed, besides the focus on the destruction God would ultimately bring, the verses here “also point to the fiery ordeals and trials that force all of us into a more perfect relationship with our Lord (see v. 22; Ps. 66:10; Jer. 9:7; Dan. 11:35; 12:10; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:1-3; James 1:2-4)” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Ezekiel 22:17-22).

Verses 23-31 show that corruption pervades the entire society. The civil rulers use their positions for harm and personal gain (verse 27). The prophets and priests—the religious preachers and teachers—are causing the people to be destroyed (verse 25-26). They violate God’s law, setting an evil example. Moreover, they fail to distinguish “between the holy and unholy” or “between the unclean and the clean.” They do not teach the people of God’s Holy Days or of His holy tithes. They do not teach what God declares food fit for human consumption and what he forbids to be eaten. God even says that they have “hidden their eyes” from His Sabbaths—refusing to even look into the possibility that they should be observed. How true all of this is today throughout the churches of the nations of Israel!

Verse 28 repeats a theme from Ezekiel 13—prophets falsely claiming to be relaying God’s teachings or message, whitewashing over the sins of the nation and giving the people a false sense of security. The results are apparent. “The people of the land” (22:29)—the common people, average citizens—stand guilty of severely mistreating others, oppressing and robbing them.

Verse 30 reflects God’s continual hope that His wrath may be diverted. He does not rejoice in punishing even those deserving of punishment. So, He looks for those who might “stand in the gap” for the people. This also repeats imagery from Ezekiel 13, where God said of Israel’s prophets, “You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the Lord” (verse 5). This gives us further reason to see an end-time application of Ezekiel 22. Again, as pointed out in chapter 13 and 22:28, rather than repairing the gaps in Israel’s moral condition, which would give the nation real security, the false prophets effectively plaster over the gaps with a thin whitewash, leaving the people defenseless but deluded and complacent.

Standing in the gap is the mark of a man of God. It involves trying to protect others through interceding for them in prayer and seeing to it that they are told what God really wants them to know. Sadly, God says He cannot find anyone to fill this responsibility. Yet when Ezekiel wrote, did not he and Jeremiah both fit that description? And in the end time, will there not be true Christians with the proper mindset? Yes, but “a qualified leader is useless if the people refuse

to be led” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 30). What God must be saying is that He is not able to find anyone to repair the society’s spiritual gaps because anyone who might actually be able to would be rejected by the people.

So, God says He will pour out His fury on the nation (verse 31). Tragically, people today do not even conceive of God as ever being wrathful and righteously indignant. They make fun of that concept as backward and unenlightened. So many today see God as always gentle, always forgiving no matter what—never judging or punishing people for even the greatest crimes. People have forgotten about the God who flooded the earth, rained destruction on Sodom and Gomorrah, slew the firstborn of Egypt and brought famines, diseases and military invasion on ancient Israel and Judah as punishment for sin. The same God stands ready to justly punish our evil society today—not to punish for punishment’s sake, but rather for the sake of turning the collective hearts and minds of people away from the sin that destroys them, to lead mankind into a lawful way of living that will bring rich and abundant blessings for all who will submit to Him.

James 3:19-5:20

Fighting’s and strivings. Where do they come from in the assembly? James tells us: pleasures that battle in your members! What are the members used here? The word indicates that James is speaking of “parts of the body” as in a limb. Also, the eyes and ears are members of the body that lust and feed the selfish passions of the soul. We look around and compare what we do not have to what others do have and covet. Then with our words, we murder out of jealousy and judgment upon others in our assembly who we are supposed to love as ourselves. Someone else has something we want and we ask Elohim for it. James tells us this is asking evilly! This word evilly means: badly (physically or morally): – amiss, diseased, evil, grievously, miserably, sick, sore. We ask for physical things into order to spend it on our own pleasures.

Then James tells us, this activity is adultery. Why? Because we are desiring things of the world over and above the things of Elohim! Pray and ask for Righteousness and the fruits of the Spirit. Friendship with the world is enmity with Elohim. He resists the proud, but gives favor to the humble. If we resist the adversary, he will flee from us.

Do not speak against one another. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against Torah and judges Torah. If we judge Torah, we are not a doer of Torah, but a judge. There is One Lawgiver and Judge, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are we to judge another?

In Chapter 5, James turns his attention to speak to the wealthy. He speaks of hardships coming their way, especially in the last days. The riches will rot, the garments will become moth-eaten. Their gold and silver will become rusty and the rust will be a witness against them. The word “rust” here is a corrosion or corruption and is likened to poison or venom of a viper! This kind of treasure is heaped up and will not deliver in the last days!

James admonishes those ones who live in luxury while the brothers of service are not paid, who condemn and murder the righteous. Elohim hears their cries and He remembers. He is waiting like a farmer for the precious fruits that are brought forth due to the early and the latter rain. We are to also be patient (as He is patient) for His coming. Each day it is nearer than the day before.

We are not to grumble against our brothers because our Master is the Judge and He is near. In grumbling against our brothers – we are judged! Remember the prophets in their suffering, endurance, and patience. We now call them blessed. Remember all they endured who spoke in the Name of YHWH.

Do not swear. For an honest person does not need this. Just say yes or no and let your word stand on its own merit and worth. Are you suffering evil? Pray. Are you in good spirits? Sing songs. Is any among you sick? Call for the elders to pray, anoint with oil in the Name of Yeshua. The prayer of the belief shall save the sick, Yeshua raise them up, and sins forgiven.

Confess to one another trespasses, pray for one another. Brothers, if anyone among you goes astray from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the straying of his way shall save a life from death and cover a great number of sins.