

Triennial Torah Study – 2nd Year 18/02/2012

By Joseph F. Dumond

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

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

Lev 16	Ezek 1-3	Prov 29	Acts 25
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Leviticus 16

The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)

While the term "Day of Atonement" is nowhere mentioned in this chapter, we know that this Holy Day is the one referred to here based on the fact that the events described were to transpire on the 10th day of the seventh month (verse 29). And according to Leviticus 23:27, this is the date of the Day of Atonement. There is, of course, a clear "atonement" theme running throughout Leviticus 16, that very word being used 16 times in the chapter. Further explanation of the rich meaning behind the actions that were carried out on this day is given in the supplementary reading.

Ezekiel 1-3

Introduction to Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1)

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" (1:1), southeast of Babylon. "Ezekiel 1:1-3 and 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 (24:15-18; 3:24; 8:1). Elders of Judah frequently consulted him (8:1; 11:25; 14:1; 20:1; etc.).

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" (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, 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. (1:125:17); 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 (3:1, 4, 3, 7, 17; 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" (Ezekiel 1)

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 earlier read, 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 (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 (1:28; 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 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 (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, 11) and the Lord answered Job out of a whirlwind (Job 38:1; 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" (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” (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 Bible Reading Program comments 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 Bible Reading Program comments 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 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, 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, 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; 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.

Ezekiel's Calling and Commission (Ezekiel 2-3)

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 (8:17; 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; 3:1)—and prophet (Acts 3:22, 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 descendent 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 in the previous Bible Reading Program comments, 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 (3:1-2). However, remember that the account is still that of a vision (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; 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 rockhard forehead), he would be able to face them down (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 in the previous Bible Reading Program comments, 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 (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. (33:21-22). However, as we will see, there were several times during this period that God directed him to speak.

Proverb 29

Hezekiah’s Solomonic Collection Continued (Proverbs 29:3-14)

“(7) Squandering Wealth and Squandering a Nation (29:3-4)...TYPE: PARALLEL.... In both [of these proverbs]...lust or greed destroys a heritage” (NAC).

“(8) Beware of the Traps (29:5-6)...TYPE: THEMATIC” (NAC). Flattery in verse 5 refers to praising another, often falsely, when the real objective is to promote oneself. It is not clear from the wording of the second line if the flatterer entraps the one he flatters or himself, as both ideas would seem to be true (see also 26:28). Verse 6 is usually translated to mean that an evil person is snared by his own sin. However, The New American Commentary says it should be translated, “There is a snare in an evil man’s iniquity...” This could refer to a wicked person’s self-entrapment, but it could also be a warning to the righteous against joining the wicked in their sin?with the second colon in either case showing the joyful outcome of the righteous escaping the snare of evil.

“(9) Concern for Justice (29:7)...TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB....

“(10) Order in the Court and in Society (29:8-11)...TYPE: PARALLEL, CATCHWORD....Verse 7, since it concerns justice for the weak, may serve as a heading to this set of proverbs. The proverbs of this collection parallel each other as follows:

“The unity of this text is indicated by the presence of catchwords arranged in a chiasmic sequence” (NAC)?compare “wise” and “foolish” (v. 9) to “fool” and “wise” (v. 11) as well as “men [enoshi] of scorn” (v. 8, The Interlinear Bible) to “men [enoshi] of blood” (v. 10, The Interlinear Bible).

“(11) The Throne Secured by Righteousness (29:12-14)...TYPE: THEMATIC, INCLUSIO....Two proverbs on integrity in royal government sandwich a proverb on the poor and their oppressors here. In turn there is a kind of progression. A proverb that mentions wicked officials is followed by one that refers to the oppressors of the poor, which in turn is followed by a third on the need of the king to protect the poor from oppression” (NAC).

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains verse 12 this way: “Once a ruler begins to listen to lies, his court will be corrupted. The point is...that courtiers adjust themselves to the prince...? when they see that deception and court flattery win the day, they learn how the game is played” (note on verse 12). The contrast in verse 14 is the king who judges with truth.

Verse 13, which declares that God is the source of life and consciousness for both the poor and the oppressor, is identical in meaning to 22:2 in the major Solomonic collection. Besides making the point that all are equal before God, the words here are meant to comfort the downtrodden and alarm the oppressors. God naturally cares about those He has made?yet those who abuse His gift of life are still dependent on Him for existence and had better heed all that He has to say (or else!).

End of Hezekiah’s Solomonic Collection (Proverbs 29:15-27)

“(12) Discipline at Home and in the Nation (29:15-18)...TYPE: PARALLEL....Discipline must be maintained at home and in society at large. In this parallel text vv. 15, 17 concern the former, and vv. 16, 18 concern the latter” (NAC).

The first line of verse 18 is perhaps best known by its King James Version rendering: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Read this way, the verse is often thought to mean that if people have no forward outlook or personal goals, they are doomed. While true in principle (and the principle can even be inferred here), the King James wording does not precisely convey the sense of the verse in the Hebrew. The New King James rendering is better: “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.” The word for “vision” or “revelation” is used elsewhere in Scripture for a direct prophetic revelation from God (e.g., 1 Samuel 3:1; Isaiah 1:1; Ezekiel 12:27; Daniel 1:17; 8:13; Nahum 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1). This need not refer to prophets speaking for God at a particular time. It could refer to the people not being aware of or not having access to God’s prophetic messages in Scripture. And the word rendered “cast off restraint” is also translated this way in Exodus 32:25, where the Israelites sank into sinful rebellion during Moses’ absence. The New Century Version translates the first line of the proverb as, “Where there is no word from God, people are uncontrolled.” The New Living Translation says, “When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild.” Note how being uncontrolled apart from God’s messages contrasts with the second line of the verse: “But happy is he who keeps the law.” Want to avoid miserable chaos? Then obey God’s instructions?the path to true happiness.

“(13) Controlling the Servant and Controlling the Self (29:19-22)...TYPE: PARALLEL [arranged in A-B-A-B form].... Verses 19, 21, on controlling one’s servant, seem to have nothing to do with vv. 20, 22, on self-control. The link is the issue of control and discipline with the implication being that one must give as much attention to governing one’s own passions as to governing one’s servants” (NAC). The second colon of verse 21 is difficult because the meaning of the Hebrew word *manon*, rendered “son” in the King James and New King James, is uncertain, being found nowhere else in Scripture. The result of pampering a servant, especially in light of verse 19 (“A servant will not be corrected by mere words...”), is likely a negative one. Some translate *manon* to mean insolent?others as causing grief. The idea behind the translation “son” is that a possible Hebrew root of the term connotes continuance?a successor. Some accept this meaning in a negative sense?that the pampered servant ends up parading about as an inheritor of the master’s estate.

Verse 22 shares one line in common with a verse in the major Solomonic collection (15:18).

(14) The Proudful Humbled and the Humble Exalted (29:23). “TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB”(NAC). Compare Christ’s words in Matthew 23:12 (and 19:30).

(15) Complicity in Crime (29:24). “TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB” (NAC). Leviticus 5:1 says that if someone fails to give testimony when there is a legal call for it, then the silent witness will bear guilt?bringing a curse on himself. “This proverb, using the same word for oath or curse, describes someone who has befriended a thief [probably representative of any criminal], becomes aware of his wrongdoing, but remains silent when he hears a call to come forward and give evidence. He has brought a curse down on his own head” (New American Commentary, note on Proverbs 29:24).

(16) For Deliverance Look to God (29:25-26). “TYPE: THEMATIC” (NAC). Verse 25 says that it’s dangerous to be overly concerned about what others might think about us or do to us in the context of this book about living a righteous life. God will look out for us if we serve Him in faith (compare Psalm 118:6). Jesus also said not to fear what man can do to us (see Matthew 10:28). The next verse, Proverbs 29:26, does not mean that we should not try to get help from human authorities. The point is that we must always be looking ultimately to God to take care of us?even in matters we bring to other people. Consider Nehemiah seeking help for Jerusalem from the Persian emperor?yet praying to God all the while, knowing that God is in control of human affairs. “These two verses, coming near the end of so many proverbs on corruption and injustice in society, call the reader back to the reality that the Bible after all is not a book about social reform but calls for committed faith in Yahweh” (NAC, note on verse 26).

“(17) The Sum of It All (29:27)...TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB” (NAC). The Jewish Soncino commentary says in its note on this last verse of the Hezekiah collection of Solomon’s proverbs: “We may read into the statement the conflict of right and wrong which, throughout history, has been conspicuous in human experience. The virtuous refuse to compromise with the wicked and look upon evil with detestation. Wrong-doers regard the upright as their natural enemies because they condemn their practices.... {This mutual hostility [showing that the two ways of life are totally incompatible] is the central theme of the Book, and the moral that runs through it is that the fight must continue to a finish, with victory for the righteous in the end.} With this verse, proclaiming the antagonism of vicious men towards the virtuous and the abhorrence of the evildoer by the righteous, the Book of Proverbs closes [at least as far as the collections of short, two-line sayings go]. But three addenda are appended: chapter [30], The words of Agur; [31].1-9, The words of king Lemuel [from his mother]; and [31].10-31 Praise of a woman of valor [i.e., of noble character]” (though the last section may be part of the second).

Acts 25

We left off last week with Sha’ul in prison and Felix being succeeded in rule by Festus in Caesarea, opting not to release Sha’ul but to keep him in prison so as to not upset the Jews. This new governor, Festus decided to travel to Jerusalem, and while there, the Jews (Pharisees and Sadducees) along with the high priest begged him to transfer Sha’ul to Jerusalem so that they could try him there. All along, plotting secretly to kill him while in transition.

Festus resisted their request and plan, but agreed to allow another trial of Sha’ul in Caesarea. And so it came to be – another trial where the Jews came down from Jerusalem and charged against him many false things of which none they could prove. Once again, Sha’ul proclaims that he has not sinned against the Torah, the Set-apart Place, or against Caesar. Festus was desiring some way, though, to please the Jews. He asked Sha’ul if he would like to go to Jerusalem to stand before his judgment there. To this, Sha’ul states there is no need. He is where he belongs to be

judged as a Roman. Why go to Jerusalem to be tried before a religious council when he is not guilty of any religious crime. Additionally, Sha'ul appeals to Ceasar himself! Festus obliges him in his request, and after a few days Sovereign Agrippa and Bernike came to Caesarea to greet Festus.

Festus spoke to them concerning Sha'ul and the situation. Agrippa expressed also a desire to hear Sha'ul and hear the things upon which he was preaching and telling the people – the resurrection of Yeshua Messiah. The next day, Festus introduced Sha'ul to the assembly of noblemen, along with Agrippa and his wife. He states that the Jews want him dead according to breaking of their claimed religious laws, although without proof. Festus cannot kill a Roman with just cause, and that since Sha'ul has appealed to Caesar – his request is granted. However, Festus does not even have words in which to write as to why he is sending the Caesar this prisoner. He has asked the audience of nobles to assist him in what to write after they have heard Sha'ul speak.