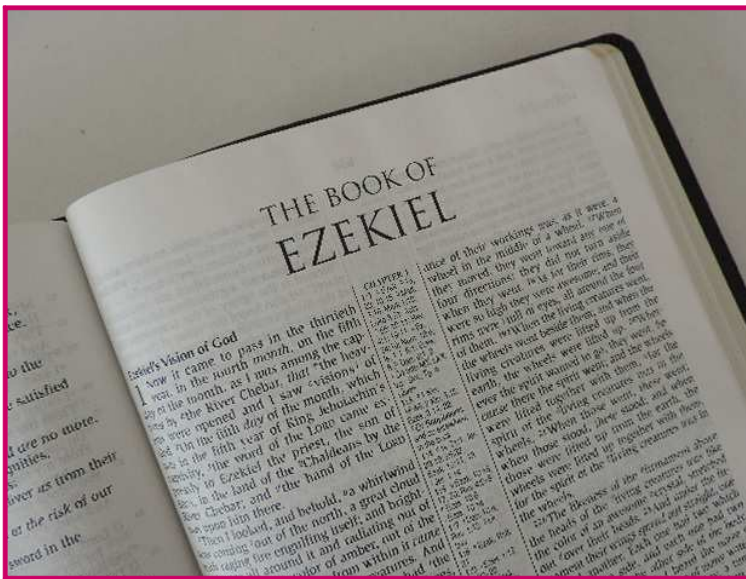


# PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



**August 2018**

Bible readings from Ezekiel chapters 21 to 39

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*Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered*

This second oracle is a poem about the ‘sword of the Lord’ which is polished and sharpened *to make a dreadful slaughter* of the princes and people of Israel (9–12). The striking of the thigh was an expression of grief (12; cp. Jeremiah 31:19). Can you imagine the force of Ezekiel’s words as he spoke like a battle commander? ‘*Swords at the ready! Thrust right! Set your blade! Thrust left — wherever your edge is ordered!*’ (16).

In the next oracle God told Ezekiel to draw (on sand?) a picture showing a road going from Babylon, dividing into two, one road leading to Rabbah, capital of Ammon, and the other to Jerusalem. The king of Babylon is described as using divination to determine which of the two roads he should take and he is directed to Jerusalem (19–22). The elders, unable to imagine that Jerusalem would be destroyed, assumed the divination to be false (23). God overrules occult practices and the prophet showed that the kingdom would be overthrown. The Lord had solemn words for Zedekiah, ‘*Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered in that your transgressions are uncovered ... you shall be taken in hand*’ (24). Zedekiah was the last of Judah’s kings. His kingdom was to be removed from him *until he comes whose right it is* (that is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, 27).

The fourth parable was directed against the Ammonites. They had long been bitter enemies of God’s people; they would not escape judgment, but be destroyed in their own land (28–32). There was a future for Judah (27) but not for the Ammonites.

The lesson that the elders of Judah (and all of us) have to learn is that God does not overlook our sin. The day of judgment will reveal all the sinful deeds of every man and woman (Romans 2:16; Revelation 20:12). The Christian does not have to fear judgment, however. The wonderful thing about God’s forgiveness is that our sins are remembered no more (Hebrews 10:17). **Do you know this forgiveness in your life?**

*Then you shall know that I am the LORD*

Jerusalem is described by the psalmist as being ‘*beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth ... the city of the great King*’ (Psalm 48:2). How things had changed since those days when pilgrims flocked to bring their joyful praises to God! The exiles were sentimental about the holy city, but the Lord showed them that Jerusalem was now ‘*the bloody city*’ which was ripe for judgment (2–4). There are seven references to bloodshed (1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 12, 13). The leaders in Jerusalem were guilty of this wickedness (6).

The people had forgotten God (12) and when this happens, holy things are despised (8); bloodshed, violence, oppression, immorality, injustice, extortion and dishonesty soon become common in society (3–16). God is seen as beating his fists as he calls attention to the sins of Jerusalem (13). The Lord warned that he would deal with them in judgment and that they would be sent into exile (14–15). He said that when this happened, ‘*You shall know that I am the LORD*’ (16).

The Lord then told Ezekiel that Israel was like the dross that was left after the process of smelting as unrefined ore which when smelted in the furnace should produce silver or some other metal at the end of the process (17–20). All that Israel produced was worthless dross (19; cp. Isaiah 1:21–22). The Lord warned that he would gather the people into the midst of Jerusalem where they would go for safety, but it would be a furnace where he would blow on them with the fire of his wrath (19–22). They would then know that the Lord had poured out his fury upon them (22).

**Do you wonder what relevance this has to us in the twenty-first century?** The sins listed in verses 3 to 13 are prevalent all around us in the western world. In past centuries we have known the blessing of God and our laws were based followed the teaching of the Bible. We have forgotten God (12) and rejected his holy Word and opposed Christian teaching. Those of us who love the Lord must seek to shine as lights in the darkness and proclaim the gospel to those who are lost.

*I sought for a man ... but I found no one*

The chapter closes with a scathing denunciation of Judah's establishment. Priests were disgracing their office, profaning holy things; princes were using their power to kill, destroy and to get dishonest gain; false prophets were misleading the people with lies; the poor and the needy were oppressed (23–29).

God said, '*So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall and stand in the gap before me on behalf of the land, ... but I found no one*' (30). The prophet Jeremiah was persecuted and there was no one in any position of power or influence in Jerusalem to take a stand for righteousness and plead with God for the people. Moses' intercession for Israel was eloquent and moving as he pleaded with God for the people (Exodus 32:11–13, 31–32). No intercessors could be found for Jerusalem to stand between her sin and the wrath of God.

We live in desperate times with godlessness and wickedness rapidly increasing in our society. Many evangelical churches are weak and doctrinally confused and we are making very little impact on those who are in darkness. In many of our churches, the prayer meetings are poorly attended. Let us pray that God will be pleased to raise up godly men to '*stand in the gap*'. **We desperately need men and women who will intercede for our wicked nation so that God's judgment will be turned away from us.** Are you concerned enough to pour out your heart in prayer?

*Where unclean men in filthy dress  
Parade their foul unrighteousness,  
And strive Thy gospel to suppress,  
In judgment, Lord, come down.*

*But who among us truly prays,  
Or stirs himself to seek thy face?  
We sleep, so slumbers yet thy grace,  
To wake us, Lord, come down.*

(From hymn 'A Cry for Revival', written 2014 by John Armstrong  
of Cowley Hill Free Church, Borehamwood)

*Because you have forgotten me ... you shall bear the penalty*

We have already seen (chapter 16) that unfaithfulness to God is spiritual adultery and this theme is again taken up in this chapter. The Lord pulls no punches in his condemnation of the people. After Solomon's death the nation was divided into two kingdoms. Their capitals are here pictured as two sisters, Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem). Both sisters flirted with ungodly nations and played the prostitute, becoming polluted with their idolatry (5–21,30). The Lord had delivered Oholah (Samaria) into the hand of her lovers who had destroyed her (9–10).

Jerusalem was aware of the judgment that God had brought upon the northern kingdom (taken into Assyrian captivity in 721 BC), but she had become more corrupt than Samaria (11). The Lord uses ungodly nations in his purposes of judgment. He said that he would use the very nations with whom Jerusalem had flirted to destroy her (22–24,29). Jerusalem would drink of the same terrible cup of judgment as Samaria (32–35). Why did Samaria and Jerusalem sink into idolatry? Because God was forgotten! The Lord said to Jerusalem, *'Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, therefore you shall bear the penalty of your lewdness'* (35; cp. 22:12). The Jews had been repeatedly warned about the peril of forgetting God before they entered the promised land (eg. Deuteronomy 6:12; 8:11,14,19).

Many people who once appeared to be keen Christians are no longer found in the house of God. They were once full of enthusiasm and they prayed fervently in the prayer meetings, but now they are cold in heart. I grieve over some who are known to me. What is the problem? The Lord was gradually crowded out of their lives and they became taken up with worldly pursuits. **If we forget God, we are asking for trouble.** Oh, let us take to heart the warning of this passage! We must discipline our lives and maintain a daily walk with the Lord. If you have been drifting in your Christian life, come to the Lord and repent of your sin. He will then restore to you the joy of your salvation.

*Moreover they have done this to me*

The words ‘*harlot*’ and ‘*harlotry*’ are used fourteen times in this chapter to describe the sin of Israel and Judah. Their unfaithfulness is also described as adultery (37,43,45). When God’s people forsook him for idolatry and pagan religious ritual, it was spiritual adultery. They had sacrificed their children as food to idols (37; cp. 16:20; 20:26). They had defiled God’s sanctuary and profaned his sabbaths, and he said, ‘*Moreover they have done this to me*’ (38). All sin is against God and he is not indifferent to it.

Under the law of Moses adulterers were stoned to death (cp. John 8:4–5). Jerusalem was an adulteress and would suffer the penalty of the law (46–47). The Babylonian army would rain rocks and boulders upon the city, ‘stoning’ her to death.

Derek Thomas writes, ‘The sinfulness of Israel and Judah, focused on their respective capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem, has been portrayed in terms of an allegory of two fallen women: Oholah and Oholibah. The depth of treachery, sinking into the mire of prostitution and adultery is shocking. God’s Old Testament church has committed the gravest of transgressions against the covenant. She has violated the bond of marriage ’ (GOD STRENGTHENS, page 173).

What lesson is there here for us? Our relationship to God is like that of a bride to her husband (cp. 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23–27). He is the Lover of our souls and *we love him because he first loved us* (1 John 4:19). You may wonder why the people of Judah could be so foolish as to turn to the lewd worship of dumb idols? Do you ever wonder how many Christians can become infatuated by the world and its ways, which is spiritual adultery (James 4:4)? Let us remain faithful to God’s Word, to his truth, but most of all, we must be faithful to him as a wife is to her husband. **That is no problem if we truly love him!**

*You will not be purged of your filthiness any more*

The Lord gave Ezekiel a final message of doom concerning Jerusalem on the very day in 588 BC that the Babylonians began their siege of the city (1–2; cp. 2 Kings 25:1–2). The precise timing of Ezekiel’s message would have had a profound effect on the exiles when they later heard that the attack on Jerusalem had begun on that very day. The message was in the form of a parable (3). The prophet poured some water into a cooking pot, placing in it pieces of meat and choice *cuts* (better translated ‘*choice bones*’ as in the ESV). The pot was rusty (‘*scum*’, better translated ‘*rust*’; 6). Ezekiel then heated up the pot on a fire, and as it was heated, its impurities came out into the water and polluted the contents.

The people of Jerusalem had become very complacent in their sin. They said that they would be protected by the walls of the city just as meat is protected from the fire in a cauldron. God had told them that he would bring them out of Jerusalem to be slain (11:3–11). In this chapter the pot represents Jerusalem and the fire the judgment of God. The contents are burned up and then taken out piece by piece (4–6, 9–10) which symbolised the scattering of the people. The scum (rust) stood for the filth and bloodshed of the city which would not be removed. The pot is to be emptied of its contents and then melted in the fire – Jerusalem had to be destroyed (11–14).

The people of the city had continually despised God’s warnings and had persisted in their rebellion against him. They had refused to repent and to forsake their sin and it was now too late. The Lord said, ‘*Because I purged you, and you were not purged, you will not be purged of your filthiness any more*’ (13). **If we refuse to repent of our sin and continue to ignore God’s warnings to us, we are playing with fire!** There will be no second chance after death as the chilling words of Revelation 22:11 confirm, ‘*He who is filthy, let him be filthy still.*’ May this solemn passage of Scripture drive us to pray for those who are lost, that they will seek the Lord and turn from their sin.



*I did as I was commanded*

Can you imagine how Ezekiel must have felt when the Lord told him that he was going to remove his wife by death? She had been his beloved companion in the loneliness he had experienced as a prophet. God described her as *'the desire of your eyes'* (16) and told him that he was to hide his grief and refrain from the ritual associated with mourning (16–18). Ezekiel was unswerving in his obedience to God. He was not bitter about his wife's sudden death and God's command not to mourn her. He writes, *'I did as I was commanded'* (18). He trusted and obeyed in his sorrow. If you are passing through a perplexing trial, trust in the Lord, remembering that he is wise and kind. He will always love you (Romans 8:35–39).

After the death of his wife the people were naturally puzzled at the apparent lack of grief and they asked him what meaning lay behind the tragic situation: *'Will you not tell us what these things signify to us, that you behave so?'* (18–19). God's word to the people was that Ezekiel was a sign to them. When judgment came upon Jerusalem they would not mourn or weep even though the city was *the desire of their eyes* (20–25). It is possible that Ezekiel meant that they would be in such a state of shock when Jerusalem was destroyed that they would not be able to express their grief.

God had told Ezekiel to remain dumb and only speak when he had a word from the Lord (3:22–27); this probably meant that he was to refrain from normal day-to-day conversation. God now told the prophet that when he heard the news of the fall of Jerusalem from a fugitive who had escaped the city, he would no longer be mute. *'Thus you will be a sign to them, and they shall know that I am the LORD'* (24, 26–27; cp. 33:21–22). To be a sign to Judah was a costly business for Ezekiel. Those who serve God will not find an easy pathway. It means dying to our own self-interests and it can lead to suffering. **May God give us the grace and strength to follow the Lord Jesus who suffered and died to save us.**

*Then you shall know that I am the LORD*

Chapters 25 to 32 are taken up with prophecies concerning foreign nations. Ammon, Moab and Edom had encouraged king Zedekiah to rebel against the Babylonians (Jeremiah 27:1–11). When Jerusalem fell, the Ammonites gloated with joy over its destruction and the captivity of its people (3,6). They also instigated the assassination of Gedaliah whom the Babylonians had appointed as governor of Judah (Jeremiah 40:14). When God punishes his people, it is no reason for others to mock them. The principle that God will curse those who curse his people still applies (Genesis 12:3). The blessing of Abraham now comes upon all Christians, both Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:13). No weapon formed against us shall prosper (Isaiah 54:17).

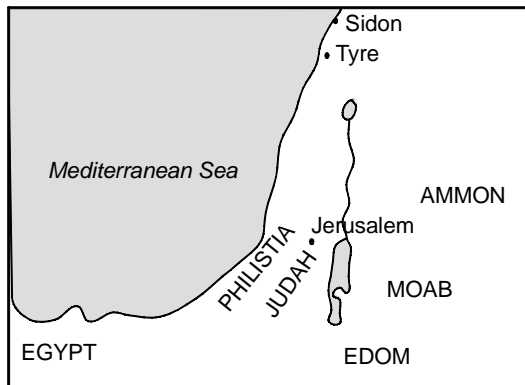
Moab was denounced because they refused to accept that Judah was special to God. With ‘Seir’ (another name for Edom) they said, ‘*Look! The house of Judah is like all the nations*’ (8). They derided Israel and were proud against God (Jeremiah 48:26–29). The Edomites were also condemned for their hatred of Judah (12–14; cp. 35:1–15; Obadiah 10–15). The Philistines had long been enemies of the Jews and had taken vengeance against them *with a spiteful heart* (15). This may refer to an earlier period in Judah’s history when they invaded during the reign of King Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:18).

God brought judgment upon these nations to punish them for their wickedness and to show them that he is the LORD (‘Yahweh’ or ‘Jehovah’), the only true and living God: ‘*Then you shall know that I am the LORD*’ (5,7,11,17; cp verse 14. See also the notes on chapter 6). Many people scoff when it is suggested that God still acts in judgment upon sinners. They are foolish and are ignorant of the fact that God is absolutely sovereign and just. God does avenge his persecuted and afflicted people. **There are many enemies of the gospel in the twenty-first century but the sovereign God lovingly cares for us. Suffering is for a time but glory awaits us (Romans 8:18).** Let us be encouraged and seek to make known the gospel, that many may come to acknowledge Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

*I am against you*

The next three chapters are taken up with prophecies concerning Tyre which was the main seaport on the Phoenician coast. The city had two harbours, one of them being on an island about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile off-shore. Ships came to Tyre from all over the world and she became a very prosperous trading centre. One of her kings, Hiram, had supplied Solomon with timber for the temple as well as craftsmen to assist in its construction (1 Kings 5).

Jerusalem was now on the point of falling to the Babylonians and the people of Tyre gloated over the impending doom of the city, seeing it as an opportunity to expand their trade by land as well as by sea (2) Though God used the Babylonians to punish unfaithful Judah, it was no time for gloating by her ungodly neighbours. The Lord's message to Tyre was, '*Behold, I am against you*' (3). He loves his people and woe betide those who rejoice when they are in trouble! The Lord warned Tyre that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would also come against them, bringing such destruction that the foreign merchants would be astonished and lament (3–21). If God is against us, we have no hope. **He is against all those who refuse to submit to him, but is for all those who embrace the gospel of Christ.** *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31). On whose side are you?

**Prophecies against the nations — Ezekiel chapters 25 to 32**

*Destroyed in the midst of the sea*

The Lord told Ezekiel to take up a lamentation for Tyre which is here pictured as a splendid merchant ship (3–9). Mercenaries from various nations served in her army (10–11). A description of her trade and traders then follows with an impressive list of many nations and all kinds of merchandise (12–24). Tyre also traded in slaves (13) whose misery would have stood in stark contrast to her luxury-loving people who enjoyed all the latest comforts.

You may wonder what relevance these prophecies against ancient nations have to us in the twenty-first century. The sins of Tyre are much in evidence today:

- **Pride.** Arrogant Tyre had boasted, *'I am perfect in beauty'* (3). She considered herself able to get along quite well without God and had gloated over the fall of Jerusalem (26:2). Many people would be astonished at the collapse of Tyre and merchants with whom she had traded would hiss at her (35–36).
- **Materialism.** Her splendour and wealth were such that she was considered unsinkable (25). Her trading partners and admirers would be astonished and would lament that she had been *destroyed in the midst of the sea* (32). There is a warning here about the dangers of living for pleasure and acquiring possessions. Tyre had *satisfied many people* with her wares (33), but material things do not bring lasting joy. In our 'consumer society' we are constantly being persuaded that the latest gadgets and fashions are 'a must' if we are to get the best out of life. The Lord Jesus said, *'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses'* (Luke 12:15). The quest for possessions can soon possess us and ensnare us, bringing much misery (1 Timothy 6:8–10). The Saviour warns us, *'You cannot serve God and mammon'* (ie. 'riches', Matthew 6:24). **Where is your treasure (Matthew 6:19–21)?**

*Will you still say ... ‘I am a god’?*

The king of Tyre stood condemned for his arrogance. He had become so powerful and prosperous that in his pride he claimed to be a god. The Lord said, *‘Because your heart is lifted up, and you say, “I am a god, and sit in the seat of the gods” ... Yet you are a man, and not a god’* (2). God appears to be taunting him in saying, *‘Behold, you are wiser than Daniel! There is no secret that can be hidden from you!’* \* (3). Man’s quest to become like God stems from the sin of pride. Remember how the serpent tempted Eve, promising, *‘You will be like God’* if only she would eat of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:5).

The king of Tyre was warned that he would be slain because he had set his heart *‘as the heart of a god’* (6–8). Circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant that God had made with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis chapter 17). The king of Tyre would die as one who was uncircumcised at the hands of foreigners. He would die outside of the covenant, without hope and without God. The Lord asked him, *‘Will you still say before him who slays you, “I am a god”?’* (9–10).

The Mormons believe that we can progress to become gods. Extreme charismatic teachers of ‘the name it and claim it’ type also embrace the blasphemous heresy that Christians are gods now, and are able to speak ‘a creative word’ to bring into being whatever they desire. Let us beware of such a blasphemous heresy! It is true that we are adopted into God’s family when we are saved and that the church is the bride of Christ. **Being children of God does not make us divine! We are still creatures subject to his will.** The Lord dwells *with him who has a contrite and humble spirit* (Isaiah 57:15). We rejoice in the Almighty who has saved us by grace. Let us worship and adore him!

\* Many Bible commentators believe that the Daniel mentioned here was not the prophet who was a contemporary of Ezekiel. They believe that he was a man with the same name who was famous in Ugaritic literature and who was renowned for his godliness.

*Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty*

These verses are a lamentation for the king of Tyre. The wealthy king had his garments studded with precious stones and like a cherub he guarded his people (13–14). In his quest for riches he became filled with violence. God said of him, ‘*Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty*’ (16–17). Pride is the terrible sin which brought the fall of Satan (cp. 1 Timothy 3:6) and the ruin of Adam and Eve as we were reminded in yesterday’s notes.

Some take these verses to refer to the fall of Satan since the king of Tyre is likened to an angelic being (‘*the covering cherub,*’ 14,16). Others see a reference to Adam who was ‘*in Eden, the garden of God*’ and was created perfect and untainted by sin (13,15). I believe that the main reference is to the proud king of Tyre, verse 16 containing a reference to his trading. We must not become side-tracked into fruitless speculation in our understanding of Scripture, though these verses may well contain a secondary reference to the fall of the devil.

The obvious warning for us in today’s reading is that we must beware of pride which has been the ruin of many a person (cp. Proverbs 16:18). King Hezekiah was a good king over Judah, but he fell into sin through his pride (2 Chronicles 32:24–26). The sin of pride has also caused trouble in many a church. The problems of the Corinthian church were rooted in pride (1 Corinthians 4:18; 5:2) The Lord Jesus humbled himself to suffer shame and death in order to save sinners (Philippians 2:5–8) and humility is a quality found in the elect people of God (Colossians 3:12). *Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (1 Peter 5:5). **Do not allow pride to spoil your Christian life and witness.**

*When I execute judgments on all those around them  
who despise them*

The chapter continues with a prophecy against Sidon, the second largest city of Phoenicia and situated about twenty-five miles north of Tyre. The Sidonians were devoted to the worship of the god Baal. In earlier times the wicked Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, had been a fanatical follower of Baal and a persecutor of God's prophets (1 Kings 16:30–33; 18:4).

The Sidonians despised God's people and were like a painful thorn which pierced them (24). The Lord said that he would judge Sidon and be glorified in her midst (22). The people of Judah would be taken into exile in Babylon because of their rebellion against God but he now had a word of hope and encouragement for them. The chapter ends with a promise that Israel will be restored to the land (a foretaste of what is to come in chapters 33 to 48). God promised that his people would dwell safely when he executed judgments on all those around them who despise them (26). They will then know that the Lord is God (24). Notice that God's people will know that the Lord is '*their God*' (26). On the day of judgment everyone will know that the Lord is God, but only those who know the Lord as their God will escape condemnation and be welcomed to be with the Lord Jesus for ever. **Do you know the Lord as your God? Do you love him and gladly obey his Word?**

Derek Thomas writes, 'The charge that Ezekiel is "full of judgment" is imbalanced. The prophecy certainly does contain some of the strongest notes of God's anger towards sin found anywhere in the Scriptures. In that sense it is not an "easy" book to read. But it is also suffused with statements of God's grace. The sentiment in verses 25–26 is yet another of many such in Ezekiel (cf. 11:17; 20:34,41–42; 29:13; 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; 38:8; 39:27). Though God is justly angry with Judah, his anger lasts only for a while, and once the lesson has been learnt he will restore them to their land again' (GOD STRENGTHENS, pages 198–199).

*No longer shall it be the confidence of the house of Israel*

The next four chapters consist of prophecies of doom against Egypt which were uttered just before and after the fall of Jerusalem (587 to 585 BC). Verses 17 to 21 of this chapter are the exception, being written in 571 BC. The years date from the exile of 597 BC, which was also the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah in Judah. Egypt is pictured as a monster lying in the midst of the streams at the mouth of the River Nile (3). The Lord was against Egypt on account of her pride (3,9). He warned that the Egyptians would be scattered, but restored after forty years. The once proud nation would become a lowly kingdom, no longer ruling other nations (12–15). We must never fear arrogant men for God has brought down many a tyrant and has destroyed great empires. *The LORD reigns* (Psalm 93:1). We have seen the unthinkable happen in the last three decades. Fearsome Communist regimes which defied God and opposed the gospel have crumbled.

The Lord was also against the Egyptians because they had encouraged Zedekiah to rely on them for help, but when needed they were useless, ‘*a staff of reed*’ (6–7). The Lord said of Egypt, ‘*No longer shall it be the confidence of the house of Israel*’ (16). **How foolish to trust in men when we should be trusting in God who is the almighty, sovereign, eternal, wise and merciful Lord of the universe!**

*Why should I make a man my trust?  
Princes must die and turn to dust!  
Vain is the help of flesh and blood:  
Their breath departs, their pomp and power,  
And thoughts all vanish in an hour,  
Nor can they make their promise good.*

*Happy the man whose hopes rely  
On Israel's God! He made the sky,  
And earth, and seas, with all their train:  
His truth for ever stands secure;  
He saves the oppressed, he feeds the poor,  
And none shall find his promise vain.*

(Isaac Watts)



*When I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon*

The first prophecy in this chapter (1–19) describes the Babylonian attack on Egypt and her allies (5). Some of the main towns are singled out for mention in verses 13 to 19. ‘*The day of the LORD*’ (3) is often used to describe the coming of God in judgment (eg Joel 2:1). It is also used with reference to the second coming of Christ and the great day of judgment (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

God warned that a sword would come upon Egypt (4). It would be his sword: ‘*When I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon*’ (25). This theme is taken up in the second prophecy which was uttered in the eleventh year of Ezekiel’s exile, 587 BC (20–26). The Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem at this very time and many of the Jews were expecting help from Egypt against the invaders. The Egyptian army had earlier approached Judah to help and the Babylonians had left Jerusalem for a while to deal with this threat (Jeremiah 37:5–11).

Those who were hoping for deliverance through Egyptian help would be disappointed. The Lord said that he would scatter the Egyptians and would break Pharaoh’s arms so that he would be unable to hold a sword. He would, however, strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon who would conquer Egypt (21–25). ‘*Then they shall know that I am the LORD*’ (25, 26). God is sovereign over all nations and uses ungodly men to further his purposes. **As we ponder the historic events of our time, we can be sure that God’s purposes will come to pass.**

*The Lord is King! lift up your voice  
O earth, and all ye heavens, rejoice!  
From world to world the joy shall ring:  
The Lord Omnipotent is King!!*

*The Lord is King! child of the dust,  
The Judge of all the earth is just;  
Holy and true are all his ways.  
Let every creature speak his praise.*

(Josiah Conder)

*I made the nations shake at the sound of its fall*

This prophecy against Egypt came only a month before the fall of Jerusalem (1; cp. Jeremiah 52:5–6). Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is here likened to Assyria which is described as a majestic cedar in Lebanon. This cedar dwarfs all the other trees and is beautiful in its greatness (3–14). Kings were often pictured as great trees (see Daniel 4:10–12, 22–27), but trees are not immortal and neither are rulers, however powerful they may be. The Lord soon brings them crashing down.

God said that the fall of Egypt would bring fear and mourning among its neighbours: *‘I made the nations shake at the sound of its fall’* (15–16). Death respects no one and is the great leveller, reducing the mighty to the same state as the insignificant. The Egyptians practised circumcision and were lavish in their burial rites. The Lord warned that when he killed Pharaoh and his army, they would lie in the midst of the uncircumcised – a great disgrace in Egyptian eyes (18).

We must always remember that God will surely deal with the wicked in judgment. Tyrants may strut around inspiring fear in men, but the Lord in heaven laughs at their roaring (Psalm 2:1–5). Christian, are you fearful? Do you feel intimidated by proud scoffers? Are you anxious about the potential terror that could be unleashed by powerful, godless nations? Look to your God and King! Think about his greatness and worship him. Encourage yourself in God who loves you and who will always care for you.

***Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.***

(1 Timothy 1:17).

Note. The word *‘hell’* (15) translated *‘grave’* in the AV and NIV is from the Hebrew word *‘sheol’*. The same word is also found in verses 16 and 17 and in chapter 32:21,27. *‘Sheol’* is the abode of the dead and is different from the other Hebrew word *‘qeber’* which is used to denote a grave where the body is laid to rest (as used in Ezekiel 32:22,23,25,26).

*They ... bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit*

This chapter contains two prophecies which contain lamentations for Pharaoh (1–16) and Egypt (17–32). The date of the first prophecy is the end of February 585 BC, eight months after the fall of Jerusalem. The second prophecy was uttered two weeks later.

The first prophecy is similar to that in chapter 29, verses 1 to 16. In this lamentation (for Pharaoh) God again declares that his sword of judgment upon Egypt is the sword of the king of Babylon (10–11). Egypt is likened to a ‘monster’ (3; cp.29:3) which has been ensnared in a net and left bleeding to death on the land (3–6). Notice that it is God who brings this calamity upon Egypt (*‘I will’* repeated in each of verses 3–10).

The second lament describes the slain of Egypt and of several great nations *who have gone down to hell* (‘sheol’, 27). That dreadful place is also called *‘the Pit’* (18, 23–25, 29, 30; see also 26:20; 31:14,16). The prophet uses the language of poetry to depict the dreadful doom of the ungodly nations but their plight in hell is real enough! They were not annihilated at death but were conscious of their shame. – *‘They ... bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit’* (30). How could Pharaoh *be comforted* in hell (31)? He sees that his nation is joined by the slain of other nations. Such comfort is illusory, however. What satisfaction is there in not being alone among the doomed? When Christ returns, our bodies will be resurrected. *The resurrection of condemnation* (John 5:28–29) will bring *shame and everlasting contempt* (Daniel 12:2).

**How will you do in the day of resurrection when the Lord Jesus returns?** Only those who know Christ as their Lord and Saviour have any hope. How is it with you? If you are not a Christian, you are lost! I urge you to consider your ways, repent of your sin and come to the Lord Jesus today. He will not turn you away.

*His blood I will require at your hand*

Chapters 33 to 48 contain the third and final section of the book of Ezekiel. The prophecies in this section were recorded after the fall of Jerusalem. Today's reading has some verses similar to those found earlier in the book (3:16–21; 18:21–29). We have read chapter after chapter in this prophecy which warn of judgment. The Lord had appointed Ezekiel as a watchman for the house of Israel to warn them that he would surely punish them for their wickedness. God told him that if he did not warn the wicked to turn from his way, *'his blood I will require at your hand'* (7–8). The Bible message of the wrath of God against sinners, of judgment and of hell, is missing from much evangelistic preaching today. If sinners are not warned of their desperate plight they will hardly repent of their sin. **Do you realise that if we hide the message of the gospel, God will require the blood of sinners at our hand?**

When the Holy Spirit works in a person's life, bringing conviction of sin, he sees his own helplessness and will say something similar to the words found in verse 10. — *'If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?'* To such a person, the Lord has a reassuring message, *'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?'* (11).

The Lord warned that if a righteous man forsakes his righteousness for a sinful way of life, his former righteousness will count for nothing, but if a wicked man turns from his sin, he will be forgiven and his former sins forgotten. This seemed unfair to many who complained, saying, *'The way of the LORD is not fair'* but God charged them with being unfair (17; cp.18:21–29). Many refuse to believe in God because they view him as being unfair in allowing suffering. They do not understand that suffering is in the world because of the sin of Adam and of his descendants (all of us). Human reasoning would claim that God is unfair to allow the Lord Jesus to suffer for our sins. **What they see as unfair is a source of wonder and praise for the believer!**

*They hear your words, but they do not do them*

The Lord had told Ezekiel that a fugitive from Jerusalem would bring news of its fall to him and then the Lord would open his mouth (see 24:26–27). Six months after the fall of Jerusalem a fugitive from Jerusalem arrived with the news of its fall (21–22). The hand of the Lord came upon Ezekiel the evening before. God opened Ezekiel's mouth and gave him a message for those who had escaped the Babylonian captivity and had been left in Judah.

Those left in Jerusalem believed that their escape from captivity indicated that the Lord had given them the land (23–24). They were very wicked, however, with bloodshed, idolatry and immorality rife among them (25–26; see also Jeremiah chapters 42 to 44). They were deceiving themselves, for there can be no blessing apart from repentance, and God told them that they would not inherit the land (27–29).

Ezekiel was by now the talk of the exiles. They had seen the fulfilment of his prophecies concerning Jerusalem and they knew that he was speaking as the mouthpiece of God. They encouraged each other to hear the prophet because his preaching was as pleasing to them as listening to someone with a good voice singing a lovely song (30, 32). They gladly heard the Word of God but that was not good enough. The Lord said to Ezekiel, *'They hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain'* (31–32).

We should all delight in hearing good preaching but there are dangers even in this holy exercise. We may vigorously assert the inerrancy and reliability of the Bible, but what is the use of hearing God's Word if we do not obey it? If this describes us, we are like the foolish man who built his house on the sand (Matthew 7:26–27). Satan is quite happy for us to listen to faithful preaching seven days a week as long as we do not obey God's Word. **Let us beware of mere sermon-tasting!**

*So they were scattered because there was no shepherd*

The word of the LORD came to Ezekiel telling him to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel (1–2). These shepherds were the wicked kings, not the religious leaders (cp. Psalm 78:70–72). They were condemned on several counts:

- They were only concerned for themselves and they failed to care for the flock and to feed it (2–3).
- They were heartless and lacking in compassion (4).
- They allowed the sheep to be scattered and thus to be exposed to danger (5–6). The wicked kings were responsible for the oppression that came from foreign nations such as Assyria and Babylon. The Lord warned that he would take the flock from the shepherds (22). This was fulfilled with Zedekiah being the last Jewish king to rule Israel. The Lord punished the wicked kings because he was concerned for his people. His judgments are always just and fair. God later entrusted the care of his people to priests and prophets such as Ezra and Nehemiah.

Christ is the Head of his church and has appointed pastors (elders) to shepherd his people (Acts 20:28). They have an awesome responsibility before God and must give an account on the day of judgment (Hebrews 13:17). When a church lacks a faithful pastor, the people will be like Israel and Judah of old. *So they were scattered because there was no shepherd* (5). We live in very confusing times when many evangelical churches have lost their grip on truth and have lost their way. **There are many churches without pastors. Let us pray for such churches known to us, that God will raise up faithful men to serve him in them and let us pray for our pastors.**

The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd. We read of him, *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest’* (Matthew 9:36–38).

*They shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture*

The Lord now turns our thoughts away from the wicked shepherds of Israel, the kings who had neglected their people, to himself the Good Shepherd. Several well-known passages of Scripture are brought to mind as we read these verses which show the love and compassion of God, the true Shepherd:

- The true shepherd loves his sheep and seeks for those who are lost and scattered (11–12; cp. Luke 15:4–7 – the parable of the lost sheep).
- The true shepherd is concerned for the well-being of the flock. *They shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture* (14–15; cp. Psalm 23). A healthy local church is a good fold where God’s people can ‘*lie down*’ in safety and peace and be richly fed.
- The true shepherd binds up the wounds of those in the flock who are sick (16).

There are those among the flock who are not the Lord’s sheep and he will *judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats*. These wicked sheep consume the best pasture and in their selfish pursuit to find the best grazing-land, they trample over the rest of the pasture and spoil it. They also pollute the clear water with their feet and hurt the weak ones (17–21). On the day of judgment the Lord Jesus will separate the true from the false as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31–46).

Let us compare these other passages of Scripture with today’s reading and meditate upon them. Let us turn our thoughts to the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep (John 10:1–16). **If you are passing through some bewildering trial or loss, remember that the Lord Jesus loves you, that he watches over you and cares for you.** Come to him with your burdens and cares, and cast them on him because *he cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7). Let us worship him and give him our grateful praise.

*There shall be showers of blessing*

The promise referring to *my servant David* (23) does not mean that David will himself return to be God's shepherd, but that the Messiah, the Good Shepherd, will be descended from David (cp. Romans 15:12; Revelation 5:5; 22:16). God promised that when Jesus comes *there shall be showers of blessing* (26). Christians are richly blessed by God. Let us ponder some of the blessings described in today's reading:

- We have over us the most wonderful Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, who provides for us (23–24; cp. John 10:16). The *one flock* spoken of by the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of John consists of Jews and Gentiles.
- God has given us the new covenant in Christ (Hebrews 12:24) which is *a covenant of peace* (25). We have peace with God *through the blood of his cross* (Colossians 1:20) and the peace of God rules in our hearts (Philippians 4:7; Colossians 3:15).
- We are secure in Christ and no one can pluck us from his hand (27–28; cp. John 10:27–29).

*Showers of blessing* and the best is yet to come! God also promised, '*I will make them ... a blessing*' (26). **Pray that the Lord will make you a blessing today. Seek to help and encourage your fellow-Christians.** Be a blessing to those who are not saved, by being Christlike in your attitude and conduct!

Note: The promises of the restoration of Israel point to the return of the Jews from captivity, but they are completely fulfilled in Christ and his church. Some Christians sincerely believe that the promises in Ezekiel chapters 33 to 48, and in Isaiah's prophecy, refer to a future glory for the nation of Israel in a millennial reign of Christ. I believe that they are mistaken. The church is the *Israel of God* (Galatians 6:16) and these promises are for the church (compare Isaiah 54:1 with Galatians 4:26–27).



*I have heard all your blasphemies*

Ezekiel chapters 35 and 36 contrast Mount Seir and the mountains of Israel (36:1). *Mount Seir* (2) is in the mountain range south of the Dead Sea and is often used in the Old Testament to describe the nation of Edom. There is also a short prophecy against the Edomites who were descendants of Esau in chapter 25, verses 12 to 14. They had hated the Israelites from ancient times (5; cp. Genesis 27:41).

The Edomites were condemned by God because they had assisted the Babylonians in the slaughter which accompanied the taking of Jerusalem in 586 BC *at the time of their* (Judah's) *calamity, when their iniquity came to an end* (5). Psalm 137 poignantly describes the heartache of the Jewish exiles who were taunted by their captors and asked to sing. They were unable to sing in their sorrow and they asked, *'How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a foreign land?'* (Psalm 137:4). The treachery of the Edomites was still fresh in their memory and they prayed, *'Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, "Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation"'* (Psalm 137:7).

Edom had also claimed the territory of Judah and Israel for her own possession, *although the LORD was there* (10). God would surely punish Edom because of the hatred that she had shown against Israel (11). He said, *'I have heard all your blasphemies ... thus with your mouth you have boasted against me and multiplied your words against me; I have heard them'* (12–13). He would make all of Edom desolate just as he had warned and they would know that he is the LORD (12, 14–15). The Lord hears all the words spoken against him and against us. **The enemies of the gospel may hate us and mock us, but God hears them. We are not alone in the world and if God is with us, what have we to fear (Hebrews 13:5–6)?**

*Then fear thou not what men can do,  
Nor what they say in spite:  
Rejoice to stand alone with Christ;  
Be steadfast in his might.*

(T.C. Hunter Clare)

*I will ... do better for you than at your beginnings*

The Lord now turns from *Mount Seir* with a word for *the mountains of Israel* (1). Before the fall of Jerusalem God had told Ezekiel to prophesy against these mountains (6:2), but he now says, ‘*I am for you*’ (9). *The enemy* (2; Edom and other neighbouring nations, cp. chapter 25) had presumed that these mountains would become their possession. They had gleefully and spitefully claimed the land to plunder it, but the Lord jealousy guards his people and his possessions (3–7).

The Lord promised the Jews that they would return to their country to farm the land (8–15). The scene of desolation would be no more and God said, ‘*I will ... do better for you than at your beginnings*’ (11). The ruins would be rebuilt and the people would return to the land not just from Judah, but from *all the house of Israel* (10). We know that later, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people returned to rebuild their cities, overcoming opposition to them.

These verses which are full of hope also have a message for the backslider. If we stray from God, he does not lightly let us go. He will chastise us because he loves us, and we will never know his peace until we return to him. He promises, however, to *do better for you than at your beginnings*. All is not lost because God will heal our backsliding and will love us freely if we return to him (Hosea 14:4). The wasted years will give way to fruitful service again (Joel 2:25). **Have you been wandering away from the Lord? Why continue in such a wretched state?** Repent of your backsliding and return to the Lord! He will have mercy on you and he will abundantly pardon you (Isaiah 55:7). He will ‘*do better for you than at your beginnings*’.

*O Jesus, full of truth and grace,  
More full of grace than I of sin,  
Yet once again I seek thy face;  
Open thine arms and take me in,  
And freely my backslidings heal  
And love the faithless sinner still.*      (Charles Wesley)

*I will give you a new heart*

The Lord here gives the reasons for the judgment that he had brought upon Israel (16–23). The people had defiled the land by their wickedness and idolatry and they had dishonoured his name. The Lord said, *‘But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned’* (21). God’s name is bound up with his holy and glorious character (see notes on Ezekiel 20:1–32). Jesus taught us to pray, *‘Hallowed be your name’* (Luke 11:2). We must lead godly lives if our witness is to have any effect on those around us. God said, *‘The nations shall know that I am the LORD ... when I am hallowed in you before their eyes’* (23). So much that passes for Christianity today is very man-centred, but if we are to hallow the name of the Lord, we must be God-centred in our worship, in our preaching, and in our witness. Let us pray that he will sanctify his *‘great name’* (23) so that the pagans with whom we have to do will know that he is the Lord.

God promised the restoration of the Jews to their land for his *holy name’s sake* (24–38), and that he would cleanse the Jews from their wickedness and idolatry. This he promised to do by changing their lives. He promised, *‘I will cleanse you... I will give you a new heart ... I will put my Spirit within you’* (25–27; cp 37:14). Blessing follows cleansing from sin (23) and if our hearts are not right we will not enjoy God’s blessing. **How is your heart? Is it hard (‘a heart of stone’)?** Oh, turn from your sin to Christ and call upon him to save you. He will then give you a new heart and he will put his Holy Spirit within you.

Notice that the Jews were to pray for the fulfilment of these promises. God said, *‘I will also let the house of Israel inquire of me to do this for them’* (37). Daniel in his old age remembered the promises God had given through the prophet Jeremiah and he prayed earnestly for their fulfilment (Daniel 9:1–19). Again God declares, *‘Then they shall know that I am the LORD’* (38; cp (35:15) These verses look further ahead than the return of the Jews to their land following the captivity in Babylon. They also look ahead to the new covenant which was sealed with the blood of Christ.

*Can these bones live?*

The hand of the Lord came upon Ezekiel and he was transported by the Spirit of God to a valley where a great army had encountered a sudden disaster and had been wiped out. All that remained of this army were the bones which had been dried out in the heat of the sun. God asked the prophet, ‘*Can these bones live?*’ and he replied, ‘*O Lord GOD, you know*’ (1–3). God then told him to prophesy to them saying, ‘*O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!*’ (3–4). When Ezekiel did this, there was a noise and the bones came together but they were still lifeless (7–8). God then told him to prophesy to the breath (that is, the breath of God), ‘*Come from the four winds (the ends of the earth), O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.*’ Life came into the corpses after hearing the word of the LORD and there was a very great army (9–10).

What was the meaning of this vision? The bones represented the whole house of Israel. The Jews were in captivity in Babylon and they were full of despair. They were saying, ‘*Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!*’ (11; cp. Psalm 137). The Lord told them that just as the bones were brought to life, they would be restored to their land and Israel would again live as a nation (12–14).

There are encouraging lessons for us in the raising of the dry bones. We seem to make little impact in our gospel witness and we long for God to show his great power by saving many who are dead in their sins. They are like the dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision. – ‘*Can these bones live?*’ (3). The preaching of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit remain essential for the success of the gospel (14). It is tragic that so many evangelicals have turned to worldly methods to promote the gospel. **Let us now pray that God will make the ‘dry bones’ live as his Word is preached among us and that he will be pleased to revive his church.**

*O Breath of life, come sweeping through us;  
Revive thy church with life and power.* (Bessie P. Head)

*I will set my sanctuary in their midst*

The Lord told Ezekiel to take two sticks and to write on them so that they represented the southern and northern kingdoms of Israel (Judah and Joseph, being their chief tribes). He was then to join them together and tell the people that this action was a symbol of their return to their land from captivity. The two kingdoms would again be one nation with one king from the house of David and they would never again defile themselves with idol worship (and they did not, following the captivity in Babylon).

We have already seen that these prophecies look beyond the return of the Jews from Babylon. Israel was never again united under one king (22). The fulfilment of this prophecy is in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the promised King and Shepherd (24–25; cp. 34:23–25; John 7:42; Acts 13:22; Romans 1:3; Revelation 3:7; John 10:11–16). The prophecy speaks of the new covenant of which Christ is the Mediator (26; Hebrews 9:15; 12:24). Jew and Gentile are united when they follow Christ and both are partakers of the covenants of promise (Galatians 3:26–29; Ephesians 2:11–13). The church is the Israel of God (28; cp. Romans 2:28–29; Galatians 6:16).

God also promised, *‘I will set my sanctuary in their midst for evermore’* (26). The sanctuary speaks of the presence of God among his worshipping people. It is a sad fact that although the Lord promises to be among us (Matthew 18:20) and to dwell within us (John 14:23), we do not feel his presence as we ought. We can so easily fall into a rut in our Christian lives. **Do we really expect to meet with God when we come together to worship him? Are we expecting him to work among us?** When the Jews of old knew the presence of God in their midst the nations around them acknowledged God (28; cp. 1 Kings 10:9). When the Lord is among us, he works by the Holy Spirit in bringing sinners to new life in Christ. Let us never be content with a dead form of religion that is lacking in vitality and in meaningful fellowship with God!

*Thus I will magnify myself and sanctify myself*

It would be foolish to pretend that chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel are easy to understand because they are not!

- Did the events described happen between Ezekiel’s time and the coming of Christ? The great Bible commentator Matthew Henry approaches these chapters with caution. He writes, ‘This prophecy, it is most probable, had its accomplishment some time after the return of the people of Israel out of their captivity; whether in the struggles they had with the kings of Syria, especially Antiochus Epiphanes, or perhaps in some other way not recorded, we cannot tell.’ Antiochus Epiphanes, a bitter enemy of the Jews, desecrated the temple in 169 BC. He stole some of the sacred gold and silver vessels from the temple. Following the revolt of the Maccabees the temple was cleansed and the worship of God was restored in 165 BC.
- Who is Gog of the land of Magog? He is the prince of Meshech and Tubal (1–2; 39:1–2). He was joined by a coalition of Persia, Ethiopia (or Cush) and Libya (or Put) to fight against God’s people (5). Derek Thomas points out that the people of Meshech and Tubal lived in an area south-east of the Black Sea (GOD STRENGTHENS, page 254). They traded with Tyre (27:13). and were slain with other enemies of Israel (32:26). Magog, Tubal, Meshech and Gomer were sons of Japheth, long before Ezekiel’s time (Genesis 10:2).

The Lord declared, ‘*Behold, I am against you, O Gog ... I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws... Prepare yourself and be ready*’ (3–4,7). Gog and his allies will come against God’s people, but the Lord would destroy them (16–22). **It is comforting to know that God is sovereign and that he is against those who hate his people!** The nations may rage against the LORD and his Anointed (Christ), but he laughs at them (Psalm 2:1–5). We have a crafty, powerful enemy who may come against us ‘*like a storm*’ (9) but with God is on our side and He will be exalted. The Lord says, ‘*Thus I will magnify myself and sanctify myself*’ (23). Let us worship him!

*‘On the day that I am glorified,’ says the Lord GOD*

Old Testament prophecy often refers to more than one event. There was a message here for the captives that their enemies would be defeated. This chapter describes the destruction of the huge army of Gog and the Lord repeats that he is against Gog and that he would turn him around (1–2; 38:3–4). We have already seen that the verses may have reference to the time when the Maccabees revolted against Antiochus Epiphanes, but the prophecy also points to the final battle between God and Satan (referred to as ‘*Armageddon*’, Revelation 16:16).

Some people wildly speculate (eg. followers of the Scofield Reference Bible) that Rosh, Meshech and Tubal (2) refer to Russia, Moscow and Tobolsk. Such a notion is given no credence whatever by reliable Bible scholars. Verses in chapter 39 are taken up in the book of Revelation to describe events at Christ’s second coming. Ezekiel, like the book of Revelation, is rich in symbolic language which cannot be understood literally. The symbolic language found in Ezekiel and Revelation is not easy to unravel. Verses 11 to 16 speak of the burial of the dead taking seven months, but at the same time the book of Revelation shows that there is a reference to events at Christ’s coming again in these verses. We know that when he comes, the day of judgment also comes. Verses 17 to 20 are taken up in Revelation 19:17–18 and Gog and Magog are also mentioned in Revelation 20:7–8 where they symbolically represent the godless nations of the whole world.

The message for us is that God will allow Satan to unleash his fury, as never before, against the church prior to the second coming of Christ. There will be persecution and suffering (*‘tribulation’*; Matthew 24:29–31) but Satan and the forces of evil will be defeated. The Lord Jesus is coming again for his church and he will banish Satan and his servants for ever to the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7–10). The Lord describes the defeat of evil as *‘the day that I am glorified’* (13). The Lord Jesus will *in that day ... be glorified in his saints* (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). What a glorious day that will be! **Are you looking forward to the return of Christ?**

*I will not hide my face from them anymore*

In the closing verses of this chapter, Ezekiel has a message of comfort for the captives in Babylon. God promises, *'I will set my glory among the nations; all nations shall see my judgment which I have executed, and my hand which I have laid on them. So that the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day forward'* (21–22, 28). What a wonderful privilege it is to know that the Lord is **our** God and that the Lord Jesus is our precious Friend! The Gentiles would know that God had sent the Israelites into captivity because of their sin and unfaithfulness to him (23).

The Lord promised that he would bring back the captives and have mercy on the whole house of Israel. He would be jealous for his holy name which had been reproached because of his peoples' unfaithfulness (25–26). God would then be hallowed in them before the nations and Israel *shall know that I am the LORD their God* (28). God promised, *'And I will not hide my face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out my Spirit on the house of Israel'* (29).

Matthew Henry comments: 'The indwelling of the Spirit is an infallible pledge of the continuance of God's favour. He will hide his face no more from those on whom he has poured out his Spirit.' **God will not hide his face from us and that encourages to come to him in prayer, to have communion with him.**

*Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat,  
Where Jesus answers prayer;  
There humbly fall before his feet,  
For none can perish there*

*O wondrous love! to bleed and die,  
To bear the cross and shame,  
That guilty sinners such as I  
Might plead that gracious name!*

(John Newton)

**The notes for 31 August are with those for September**