

September 8 : Scriptures Ezekiel 33-35

SUMMARY

What's unique about a watchman (or watchwoman for those who are gender-sensitive)? Watchmen stand on positions higher than their compatriots so they can see oncoming trouble in the distance, like advancing armies. Because of their perceptual orientation, watchmen perceive things relative to time and space differently than those on the ground. They see things earlier and farther off than the crowds, especially when the crowds have their faces welded to their phones and social media. (Okay, so the ancient people didn't have phones and social media. Whatever. But you get my point.)

There are watchmen, and there are watchmen. The physical senses' capabilities limit the average watchman. A human being can only see so far. *But a prophet of God qualifies as a unique category of a watchman.* Why? Because God exists outside of time and space and is aware of it all simultaneously. That's God's unique characteristic which we don't share *unless* He communicates that knowledge to His prophet, like Ezekiel. Therefore, Yehovah is the Ultimate Watchman, and those with whom He shares His intel have the advantage over those who observe with their physical eyes alone.

This God-given ability to receive information before an event's time or its arrival is what made Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, and all of the Lord's prophets (both before and after Jesus) a valuable resource to God's people *if they would just listen to those genuine prophets and heed their words from God!*

If you've been *Cruisin' Through The Bible*, you'll likely know that being God's prophet wasn't a picnic. It carried great responsibility and more than a little abuse. God commanded His prophets to listen and faithfully transmit precisely what the Lord wanted His people to know, either by *forth-telling* (speaking a "now" word) or *fore-telling* (speaking a "future" word.) After that, the responsibility for that word was on the receivers, not the transmitters. Being God's watchman is what Ezekiel was called to do (Ezekiel 3:16-17, 33:7-9).

Today's first chapter (33) is about personal responsibility. Watchmen are responsible for warning people of oncoming trouble. The people are responsible for responding correctly to the warning, especially if it concerns what the Lord is bringing against the people, such as advancing armies. If the watchman fails to warn the people, any fatalities are on him. If the people refuse to listen, their deaths are on them, but not the watchman (33:2-6).

In the same way, a watchman/prophet is responsible for warning people of their wickedness, which draws God's judgment. If the watchman fails to warn the wicked person, the Lord will hold the prophet responsible for the wicked person's death. But if the wicked person refuses to listen, their death is on them, and the watchman is in the clear for faithfully discharging his duty (33:7-9).

Why does Yehovah say this to Ezekiel? Because the people have finally realized their sin and rebellion have caused their suffering (33:10), they want to know how to survive. (The cause of suffering isn't always sinning, but in this case, it is.) Yehovah's solution is simple – "Stop it and turn back to Me." And I love this verse especially, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked person should turn from his way and live" (33:11). What a beautiful revelation of God's heart, especially for people who think God is just waiting to catch them sinning so He can smite them!

As we saw in Ezekiel 3, the Lord is willing to forgive the evil person and let them live if they repent, make things right, and walk God's way. But the Lord will judge the righteous person if they turn from Him and persist in their wickedness (33:12-16).

"But Lord, that's not fair!" the people say. "Why would you disregard all that evil and let the former scoundrel live? Why would you ignore all the good things a person did and judge them when they turn from you?" Answer: *God is a God of the now, not the past.* If God judged solely on our pasts, we would all perish. God is the God of merciful new beginnings if we'll embrace forgiveness His way, and even the vilest person can be forgiven. Don't get me wrong. That doesn't mean a formerly wicked person doesn't have to make things right. God commands them to make restitution. That's fair. God's judgment and merciful forgiveness are always fair. To hold a person's past against them after the Lord grants them forgiveness and approval makes us unfair, not God. And that's what Yehovah calls out His people for doing (33:17-20).

Well, the day of reckoning has arrived. Just as Ezekiel prophesied, he would stay mute, only speaking when God told Him to speak, until word came via a fugitive that Jerusalem had fallen. Ezekiel must have known the news was coming because the Lord pressed on him the evening before (33:21-22). As soon as the word comes, Ezekiel gives a prophetic word that relates directly to the principles the Lord just revealed. The people living in Jerusalem's ruins say, "Abraham was one man, but God gave him this land. We're many (Abraham's descendants – implied), so surely God has given it to us as well." Nope. Yehovah's response is what He just said to Ezekiel. "You turned from righteousness and are wicked right now. Therefore, don't think your former ways or Abraham's righteousness guarantees you this land. You've had your chance to turn back to Me, but

now you've crossed the judgment line, and you get what the wicked deserve according to the covenant – death by war, wild animals, and plague" (33:23-29). The people of Jerusalem are suffering because they refused to listen to the watchman.

Also, this kind of talk and refusal to "heed the watchman" isn't just happening in Jerusalem. Even among the exiles, the people gather to listen to the watchman but refuse to "heed" him. But when the watchman's word comes to pass, they'll know a prophet was among them, yet they refused to listen.

Ezekiel's prophecies of judgment aren't over. We're about to launch into a special section of scriptures which, in my humble opinion, rank right up there with Isaiah 53, the Gospels, and many others in the amazement factor.

Ezekiel has a word for the shepherds of the flock (Israel's leaders) and the flock (the Israelites). This prophetic illustration hits home for a society that raised sheep and goats! Yehovah's point is that the leaders have been living off the people. Rather than working for the goodwill of the people and helping them meet their basic needs, the leaders have been "shearing the sheep," living off the people with violence and cruelty. The leaders' neglect has caused God's people to scatter, looking for help where neighboring peoples have victimized them even to the point of being exiled far and wide by Assyria (the Israelites) and Babylon (the Judahites) (34:3-6).

God's word to the shepherds? Say this in your best Donald Trump "The Apprentice" voice: *"You're fired!"* Yehovah will get rid of those leaders and prevent them from ever again taking advantage of the people (34:8). Instead, God Himself will search for His people as a good shepherd would (34:11). God will find His people and bring them back to their land where He will comfort, nurture, and heal them. He will make them so secure that they'll live without fear and in peace under God's justice.

God's word to the flock? "I'm going to ensure real social justice among my people. I will deal with the prosperous, strong, greedy people whose actions deny others the basics for survival. They take what they want and leave undrinkable, muddy water like sheep. You greedy "sheep" have pushed others around to get what you want. I won't tolerate those predatory practices anymore." Yehovah adds this: *"I will not only be your God, but my servant David (Jesus) will be a prince (Messiah King) among you.* When that day comes, My people will know peace, security, and prosperity with no more threats or insults from the nations, for you are Mine!" (34:25-31).

Finally, in chapter 35, we read Ezekiel's prophecy against Edom. Mount Seir is in Edom, and the mountain's name is often used to refer to the Edomites. Yehovah promises to punish them for their "perpetual hatred" and that they "gave the Israelites over to the power of the sword in the time of their disaster, the time of final punishment" (35:5). First, this hatred goes back to when Esau and Jacob were in Rebecca's womb and were jostling with each other. It escalated when Jacob wrangled the firstborn's birthright and blessing (the double portion of the family estate) from Esau. It continued throughout Israel's history as the two nations fought against each other during the Israelite monarchy and culminated when Edom joined Babylon to attack Judah. Got all that?

Another reason Edom attacked Israel was to regain the double portion, which the Edomites still believed belonged to them, "Because you said, 'These two nations and two lands will be mine, and we will possess them'" (35:10). Yehovah promises to desolate Edom for their anger fueled coveting and warfare.

INSIGHT

Do you think it was by chance that Jesus declared, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). By saying that, Jesus was teaching the people using a technique called *remez*, which uses a reference to call up an entire section of scripture. *Remez* = alluding to something. When Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd, imagine what He was saying to His listeners. Based on Ezekiel 34 alone, Jesus revealed, "I am God. I am your Messiah. I will bring all of My fellow Jews home and care for them personally. As for our Jewish leaders? Many of them act like the wicked shepherds about which Ezekiel prophesied. They'll be removed so they can no longer exploit the people." Amazing, huh?

September 9 : Scriptures Ezekiel 36-37

SUMMARY

Man, O man, O man! This is a juicy section of scriptures! No kidding. We read that God's fury against Israel's oppressors is rising, He will call His people home and restore them, we get more information about Jeremiah's New Covenant as seen by Ezekiel, we see the Dry Bones prophecy, and read about Yehovah's promise to give Israel her Messiah King. How's that for a summary? Okay, I'll go a little more in-depth as we go *Cruisin' Through the Bible* in Ezekiel.

In chapter 36, we feel Yehovah's anger rising against those nations He used to discipline His people through war and exile. The oppressing nations rejoice because they control the heights of Israel and have caused the land to become an "object of gossip and slander" (36:3). Because the nations have claimed Israel's land and "rejoiced with utter contempt" over Israel, in His "burning zeal," the Lord will cause the nations to endure the insults they lavished on Israel (again per Genesis 12:3).

Though desolate, Yehovah will speak His word, a divine promise, over ravished Israel about her future restoration. Although the Lord turned away, He will turn back and restore Israel's land, population, cities, livestock, and agriculture. Not only will Yehovah restore them, but Israel will come back better than before (36:11). Because the land lay desolate, the surrounding nations slandered it, saying that it couldn't support the nation God had planted there. Yehovah replies, "This will be said no more" (36:15).

Ezekiel returns to the cause of Israel's exile. It was because they chased after other idols, and their actions rendered them impure as when a woman has her menstrual cycle (36:17). According to the Torah, when a woman experiences her cycle, she must abstain from intimate relations with her husband. This impurity requires a time of separation lest her husband also becomes ritually impure due to physical contact. When she has completed her cycle, she signifies its end and her ability to reestablish intimacy by immersing herself in water (the *mikveh* or immersion pool). This process illustrates what happened to Yehovah's wife, Israel, when she became "impure" through wickedness and idolatry. Yehovah separated Israel from Himself because He was pure and the Israelites became impure. There had to be a time of "no intimate contact" until God's "wife" had ceased to be impure. According to Yehovah, the time for renewing intimacy with His wife would eventually arrive.

Another reason the Lord is so intent on bringing His people home is that His reputation is tarnished as long as His people are out of their covenant land. Although the Lord and

His people know why Israel and Judah were exiled, the nations don't. They all know that Yehovah promised to bring His people out of Egypt and give them their land. But as long as Israel is in exile, God looks like He's too weak or unable to keep them in their land. It's as if the nations were proven stronger than Yehovah, and this is a terrible smear on His reputation, His name. Therefore, Yehovah will bring His people home not for their sake but His name's sake (36:20-23).

So, this is what Yehovah will do. He will bring his people home, forgive and cleanse them, transform them, fill them with his Holy Spirit, help them stay obedient, and be their intimate God (36:24-28). He will also bless them so abundantly that famine will never be a cause of the nations' reproach against Israel (36:29-30). Israel will realize how badly they had fallen and how gracious God had been for His great name's sake, and Israel will recognize there's no cause for pride. God will so bless them and their land that the cities will be filled with people, and the land will be like the garden of Eden (36:35, 37). What a remarkable promise.

So, now I want to look closely at what God promises to do for His people when He brings them home. As I wrote regarding Ezekiel 11, what's described here in Ezekiel 36 is a confirmation and expansion of Jeremiah's New Covenant. Below are all the elements brought together to give us the complete picture of the New Covenant. The bold words are what is shared between all three sections, and the non-bold words are what is unique to each one:

Jeremiah 31:

People Regathered, Restored, Internal Torah, Covenant Relationship, Forgiveness/Purifying.

Ezekiel 11:

People Regathered, Restored, Covenant Relationship, Forgiveness/Purifying.

New heart/spirit, heart of stone to flesh (unresponsive to responsive), Torah obedience.

Ezekiel 36:

People Regathered, Restored, Internal Torah, Covenant Relationship, Forgiveness/Purifying.

New heart/spirit, heart of stone to flesh (unresponsive to responsive), place My Spirit in them, Torah obedience.

This is the New Covenant that Jesus sealed with His death and resurrection, and which began on the Day of Pentecost. As God's kingdom began to grow within people

generation after generation, the Gentiles were being joined to the Commonwealth of Israel (meaning a relationship with our Creator and His covenant promises and blessings). When the time comes, God will complete the New Covenant by bringing *all of Abraham's physical descendants' home to their Promised Land, they will experience the blessings of the New Covenant, and all of God's promises and prophecies to national Israel will be realized.* WOW! What a day that will be.

In chapter 37, we walk back a few steps in Yehovah's restoration process. Ezekiel gets another one of the Lord's visionary transports to a valley filled with dry bones. Dry bones are dead bodies that have so wholly deteriorated that even the marrow within the bone is dry and lifeless. The body is not "mostly dead. It's all dead" (hat tip to *The Princess Bride*). Therefore, Ezekiel sees an utterly dead people of God, Israel, scattered among the nations, with no hope of helping themselves and entirely at the mercy of the elements. Israel's only hope is for Yehovah to resurrect them. But God's word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12), and it will make God's will happen (Isaiah 55:11). God spoke, and the universe was created. Of course, He will speak, and His people will be resurrected!

"This is what the Lord God says to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you will live. I will put tendons on you, make flesh grow on you, and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you so that you come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord" (37:5-6). It happens just as the Lord wants. The entire landscape of bones reconnects into bodies and are covered with flesh, but they're just dead people standing (37:8). In his vision, Ezekiel prophesies as the Lord tells him and God's breath enters all the bodies and the people come to life. God's point? God will find and regather the "whole house of Israel" (37:11), restore every one of them to their land, and put His Spirit in them, that is, each Israelite.

Now here's a question. Do you remember that two kingdoms were exiled, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah? If you read through 1, 2 Kings and 1, 2 Chronicles, you should know there was a lot of hate between the divided kingdoms. There were attempts to reconnect the two kingdoms into one through marriage alliances, but it never worked. However, Yehovah intended to have them separated for a while and then make Israel whole again (1 Kings 11:39). That has never happened. But it will.

Chapter 37 is about the resurrection, regathering, reconstituting, and reunification of the nation of Israel! We've already read about the resurrection and regathering prophecy. Now comes the reconstituting and reunification prophecy. Yehovah tells Ezekiel to take two sticks, write "For Ephraim" and "For Judah" on them, and then hold them together

in his hands (37:15-19). This prophetic action illustrates God's promise that He will finally recombine the separate kingdoms into one. When that happens, God and His people will reunite fully (the New Covenant), and something remarkable will occur. "My servant David will be king over them, and there will be one shepherd for all of them. They will follow my ordinances, and keep my statutes and obey them" (37:24). Israel will be united with each and with God, they will have one king (King Messiah). They will walk faithfully according to their New Covenant with Yehovah. When will this take place? See the insight.

INSIGHT

The question is, "Did this resurrection, regathering, reconstituting, and reunification happen after the Babylonian Exile during which Ezekiel received these prophecies?" Yes and no.

Thousands of Jews returned to their land from Babylon, but many didn't. The Jews that remained in Babylon established great centers of learning. Some Israelites of the other ten tribes had joined Judah after Israel's exile, but the remnant of the Israelites of the northern kingdom was exiled east of Israel into Asia and never returned.

Some, like the Bene Menashe (Sons of Manasseh) tribe of India, who trace their lineage back to the tribe of Manasseh, have been recognized in recent years and returned to Israel. However, many Israelites of all twelve tribes still live around the world in the Diaspora, the Roman exile, and have not made the return (called *aliyah*, "going up") to their land.

While some aspects of Ezekiel's resurrection and reunification prophecy did occur, it hasn't been fulfilled, even to this day. Therefore, this tells us what Ezekiel received was an End Time prophecy. When the time of the Gentiles ends (Gentile control over the land of Israel and Jerusalem), the world will transition into the time of the Jews. Again, we see the big prophetic signs of Israel becoming a nation (May 1948) and the Jews taking Jerusalem (June 1967) as prophetic mile markers. According to Jeremiah, the transition period will be one of turmoil, with waves of trouble increasing in frequency and intensity like a woman in labor (Jeremiah 30). Suddenly, Jesus will return after the Time of Jacob's Trouble, as a baby appears after prolonged labor, and the messianic age will begin.

Ezekiel's words about the regathering after the exile is not about the Babylonian exile (586 B.C.) but the Roman exile (A.D. 70), and it will involve the "whole house of Israel" (37:11), not just *some* or *most* who belong to Israel.

September 10 : Scriptures Ezekiel 38-40

SUMMARY

Since the previous two chapters, 36 and 37, are about the End Time, do you think the context determines that today's three chapters are also about the End? If so, I believe you're correct.

Chapter 38 begins a cryptic prophecy that ends in chapter 39 – the infamous God-Magog war (38:2). There are a ton of interpretations out there, from “It's only mystical” to “Russia will invade because Meshach and Tubal sound like Moscow and Tobolsk.” After reading these various interpretations, I refer you to Joel Richardson's *Mideast Beast* and *The Islamic Antichrist*. In short, he believes the End Time empire is not Europe with a European Antichrist ala the *Left Behind* series (the 1990s) and Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* (the 1970s).

Joel proposes, backed up by well-researched and presented scholarship, that the End Time beast empire is a revived Islamic Caliphate led by a Caliph. Since the area of Gog-Magog is known to have existed in Asia Minor, Joel also proposes that the Antichrist (the one who opposes Jesus in the End) will be a Turkish Caliph who will successfully reconstitute what the last Islamic Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire. I'll leave reading Joel's books up to you. For now, let's simply look at what the text says is coming.

According to Ezekiel, God will “put hooks in (Chief prince Gog's) jaws” and draw him into battle sometime in the future. Gog will bring other nations with him – Persia (Iran), Cush (Ethiopia), Put (Lybia), Gomer (in Turkey), and Beth-Togarmah (in Eastern Turkey). Isn't it interesting that all these nations are solidly Islamic except Ethiopia, which is growing in extremist Islam? Just sayin'.

This coalition will invade “a land that has been restored from war and regathered from many peoples to the mountains of Israel, which had long been a ruin. They were brought out from the peoples, and all of them now live securely” (38:8). What place does this sound like to you? Israel. Israel has been restored from war, and Jews from nations around the world are returning to their biblical homeland. Because of the IDF's strength, Israel enjoys security despite threats from its neighbors and terrorist organizations like Hamas in the Gaza strip and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

Gog's alliance of troops will advance like a thunderstorm, covering the land. They'll go after Israel because they think it'll be easy pickings with their large coalition (38:11-12). Sheba and Dedan (Saudi Arabia) and Tarshish (Spain?) will object to Gog's attempt. But

what is God's overall purpose for allowing Gog's invasion? "So that the nations may know me, when I demonstrate my holiness through you in their sight" (38:16).

And just how will that be done? When Gog sweeps over Israel, Yehovah will unleash a massive earthquake (38:19), cause the army to fight amongst itself (38:21), and pour out "torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and burning sulfur on him" (38:22). Now, it's possible that the Lord may drop fire and sulfur on Gog's alliance *ala* Sodom and Gomorrah. However, God uses things we're familiar with to accomplish His work. For example, the Ten Plagues of Egypt weren't unknown to the Egyptians. Nile floods, frogs, bugs, cattle disease, and fierce storms did occur through the yearly climate cycle. What makes them unique is that 1) Moses started and stopped them on command, and 2) the intensity and frequency were over the top. It could be that part of the storm God unleashes on Gog's coalition is a nuclear attack by Israel or one of its allies. I'm leaving my options open. Again, God's point is that even if such events are human-caused, His fingerprints are seen when people realize the events were foretold over 2,500 years. This way, "I will display my greatness and holiness, and I will reveal myself in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord" (38:23).

Chapter 39 continues the vivid prophecy. Yehovah will push Gog to storm into Israel from the north (Turkey?). When Gog's hoards have reached the right spot, Yehovah will, as a friend of mine says, "drop them like a toilet seat," and their corpses will feed the birds and predatory animals (39:4). If you've been following *Cruisin' Through The Bible*, this is what I said is known as the End Time "Feast of Leviathan."

In 39:6, it seems that either the Lord will rain fire on Turkey (if Joel is correct) or Israel will answer with a nuclear strike. Regardless, it will make a big impression on the world's nations. After Gog is destroyed, the Israelis will head to the battlefield to burn/destroy Gog's weapons and retrieve the spoils of war. Israel will take seven years to bury the dead and need special burial teams to identify every scrap of human remains (39:12, 14-15) so the land can be cleansed from corpse contamination.

When Gog is annihilated, the nations will finally know Yehovah is the One True God, and everyone in Israel's house will also know it. The world's people will know that the Jews had been scattered among the nations "on account of their iniquity, because they dealt unfaithfully with me," so the Lord exiled them and hid from them. But after the tremendous Gog-Magog battle, all of Israel will be regathered, and every Israelite will be filled with God's Holy Spirit per the New Covenant promise (Ezekiel 36). (Mic drop!)

Okay, take a deep breath and mull over what you just read. This prophecy is why I surf various news sources from around the world. I like to watch prophecies fulfilled in real-time.

Okay, now we significantly shift to *after* the End Time war and into the messianic age. Consider this. Ezekiel's ministry covered when Babylon first appeared on Israel's threshold, did some conquering, and conducted their first Judahite deportation. Ezekiel and Daniel were among those first exiles. As we saw in the first part of Ezekiel, the prophet foretold Jerusalem's fall and the Temple's destruction. Now Ezekiel prophesies the Temple's rebuilding. However, the layout and dimensions of Ezekiel's temple don't match the 2nd Temple that was built after the Babylonian captivity, the Temple that Herod the Great took years to augment and complete. Combined with Ezekiel's End Time context leads me to believe this is a 3rd Temple that will be built either in the End Time or after Jesus' return. For reasons I'll explain later, I think the 3rd Temple will be built after Jesus returns and under His supervision. I'll talk about that when we get to the Book of Zechariah.

Ezekiel's date in 40:1 is significant. His previous dates were calculated from the year King Jehoiachin was exiled. This date is "the fourteenth year after Jerusalem had been captured." Therefore, this is c. 572 B.C. Ezekiel sets his month and day as "at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month," which makes it Aviv 10 (late March-Early April by our solar calendar), the start of the Passover preparations. Passover began at sundown on Aviv 15. From Aviv 10-14, preparations were started with the Passover Seder prep during the afternoon of Aviv 14. It fits that Yehovah gave Ezekiel this Temple prophecy during the lead-up to Passover, commemorating Israel's release from their Egyptian captivity. That would make this a poignant prophecy anticipating the Jews' release from Babylonian captivity in about 54 years.

The Lord sets Ezekiel down on a "very high mountain," which has a city on the south side. This picture describes Jerusalem, where the Temple was built on the top of Mount Zion, with the City of David lower on the southern slope. The man, "whose appearance was like bronze," stood there with a linen cord and a measuring rod (about 10' 4") and told Ezekiel to note what he was about to be shown for posterity.

I must admit that my eyes glaze over when I read the measurements. What helps is to do an image search on the internet to find a picture or drafting design people have made to show the floor plan of the 3rd Temple. It's a big help for us visual learners. Here are some noteworthy details:

- The eastern gate of the Temple complex is 17.5' wide v 22.75 feet high with a 10.5' threshold (40:6, 11). That's a big gate!

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- Within the wall, 30 chambers lined the wall's interior (40:17).
 - The distance between the outer wall's eastern gate and the inner wall's eastern gate was 175'. Likewise, the distance between the north and south outer and inner wall gates was 175'.
 - Ezekiel notes a chamber used to wash sacrifices after butchering (40:38).
 - The inner courtyard is 175' square and has rooms for the sons of Zadok, a Levite family line that stayed faithful to the Lord and received a special honor from Him to be the priests who are to ser in His presence. Room #1 is for the priests who guard the Temple, and room #2 is for the priests who guard the Bronze Altar (40:46-47).
 - Ezekiel's final measurement in chapter 40 is the gate leading from the inner court into the Temple's Holy Place.

INSIGHT

How close to the End are we? After playing with a bunch of calculations since I became a Christian as a junior in High School, I'm more convinced than ever that I just don't know. I'm also convinced that Jesus' return is tied to the Fall Feasts of the Lord because His first time on earth was connected to the Spring Feasts of the Lord, as I've noted previously. So yes, I believe Jesus will return during September-October in an extraordinary year.

What year will that be? Not a clue. Well, actually, I do have a clue. I believe God sets His calendar according to His determination but gives us signs and markers for which to look. Signs would be "wars and rumors of wars... famines and earthquakes in various places" (Matthew 24:6-7). Markers would be individual events, such as Israel reconstituted as a nation after a nearly 2,000-year exile (1948) and the Jews taking Jerusalem in 1967 (Luke 21:24).

The Lord also works in 7, 40, 50, and 70-year cycles. 7 is a Sabbath year cycle, 40 is typically a time of judgment, 50 is a Jubilee year cycle, and 70 is a cycle the Lord uses to complete a purpose. I've found it best to watch for world events first, then think about year calculations. Too many date/year-setters have blown it and slathered mud on the Christian church's face (check out the *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Happen in 1988* book by Edgar Whisenant). Many believed Mr. Whisenant, quit their jobs and did other foolish things that caused havoc in their lives. We're still here.

In my opinion, we need to keep one eye on the Lord's work and the other on world events rather than indulge in wild speculation and esoteric calculations. I also believe the Holy Spirit will speak to His people as time draws near, and Jesus' return and the onset of the messianic kingdom is too critical an event for His people to miss. Don't worry. He'll let us know just as He let Joseph and Mary know, along with the shepherds, Jewish sages

from Babylonia, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, and all those whose hearts were turned toward God.

September 11 : Scriptures Ezekiel 41-43

SUMMARY

In today's *Cruisin' Through the Bible* reading, we continue with Ezekiel's description of the 3rd Temple and finish with a momentous event. Again, I recommend an online search for a "3rd temple" or "Ezekiel's temple" drawing to help you visualize past all the numbers.

Chapter 41 starts with the dimensions of the Holy Place, 70'x35', and the adjacent room, the Holy of Holies, is 35'x35' (46:1-5).

As Ezekiel moves to see the exterior of the Temple, he notes the walls are 10.5' thick! Why? Because rooms are built into the wall. The side rooms have three levels of 30 rooms. What? 90 side rooms? The rooms on each tier widened from the bottom to the top level. Yes, I know. A bit strange. These are storage rooms for temple equipment and valuable materials donated to the Lord. A final measurement of the entire Temple exterior is 175' square (41:15).

The entire interior of the Temple was paneled with wood and decorated with alternating palm trees and cherubim. The Cherubim had two faces, a human and a lion face. One face was turned toward one palm tree and the other toward the opposite palm tree (41:18-19). Now, why would Ezekiel see cherubim in the Lord's Temple? Because cherubim dwell in the presence of God. Remember they appeared under Yehovah's throne and moved it around (Ezekiel 1, 10)? What does this picture tell you? Right! This 3rd Temple will be the place of God's throne on earth when it's built. The 5.75' high, 3.5' wide table referred to in verse 22 is likely the Table of Showbread in the Holy Place, on the right side of the room. The massive double doors to the Holy Place and the outer court doors were also carved with the same cherubim/palm tree motif (41:23-25).

Frankly, as you may be, I'm getting lost in the numbers. So I followed my advice and looked for a picture of Ezekiel's Temple, and I found some nice ones to print off and follow along as I read. After detailing the measurements and location of these chambers/rooms, Ezekiel's companion tells him that the rooms are for the priests who serve the Lord in the sacrificial service (42:13-14) so they can eat their holy portion and store what's left over, especially if it's the grain offerings (*minchah*).

The bronze man takes Ezekiel outside the Temple complex for the complete measurement, and it's 875' square. For perspective, each side wall is almost three American football fields long!

Chapter 43 is the high point. *God's glory, which Ezekiel saw leave the 1st Temple in chapters 9-11, now returns!* Ezekiel sees the same vision of God's throne as he saw by the Chebar Canal in Chapter 1. God's glory approaches from the east, enters the eastern gate and takes up residence again in the Holy of Holies (43:1-5). God then speaks wonderful words to Ezekiel. Let them sink and ponder the day when we'll be able to visit Jerusalem with God's presence resting in the Temple and over the city. "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet, where I will dwell among the Israelites forever" (43:7). What He goes on to say reminds Ezekiel of the vision the prophet received in chapter 9-10 where the king and the leaders in Jerusalem set up their idolatrous practices within God's holy Temple.

It still blows my mind how dangerous doing that was. Imagine, with Yehovah's holy presence inhabiting the Holy of Holies in the 1st Temple, Jerusalem's leaders had the nerve to worship idols so close to Him. Considering what Yehovah had done to others who violated His holiness (frying Nadav and Abihu, for example; Leviticus 10:2), these leaders were blessed that they only got off with famine, plague, and dying by the sword! But in this 3rd Temple, all idolatry is gone, and God's glory fills its environs.

The bronze man tells Ezekiel to write down the description of the Temple and its measurements and tell it to the Israelites. Why? To shame them over their idolatry that caused the Lord to call for Babylon to destroy Solomon's magnificent Temple (43:10).

My Study Bible has an interesting take on this section: Chapters 40-42 describe the Temple as a structure. Beginning in chapter 43, the Temple is filled, first with the Lord's glory and then with the Temple furnishings, starting with the Bronze Altar. The altar will be about 25' square according to the ledge around the top (43:17). On the day the Bronze Altar is set up, the Levitical priests of the house of Zadok (yes, we'll learn why these people are so special) will cleanse and purify the Bronze Altar for duty for seven days, much as the priests are sprinkled with blood to prepare them from service (43:20-27).

INSIGHT

The correlation between the Temple and us becoming the "temple of the Holy Spirit" is amazing (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19). When we're born-again, the Lord's presence fills us via His Spirit. Then the Holy Spirit begins to outfit us with realities that parallel the articles in the Temple:

- Bronze Altar – the reality of Jesus' forgiveness.
- Laver – the reality of the Spirit's cleansing.
- Menorah – the reality of God's word in us.
- The Table of Showbread – the reality of God's sustenance within and without.

- The Altar of Incense – the reality of communion through prayer and worship.
- The Holy of Holies and the Ark of the Covenant – the reality of Jesus reigning in us.

September 12 : Scriptures Ezekiel 44-46

SUMMARY

After the previous chapter describes the Bronze Altar's consecration, our first chapter of the day begins with a special command for Israel's Prince. Don't worry. We'll speculate who that might be, but let's first look at the verses.

The gate that Ezekiel refers to is known as the Eastern or Golden Gate on today's Temple Mount. Go ahead and take a moment to search online for a picture or two. As you'll see, the Eastern Gate is impressive, and it's also odd because it's sealed closed.

Here's some interesting background information about the Golden Gate. "It is reputed to be the oldest gate of the Old City with times of construction varying from 520 A.D. (the 6th century) or in subsequent years amid the 7th century A.D. The term "Golden Gate" was taken from Christian sources and traditions. In Hebrew, it's known as Sha'ar Harachamimi, the 'Gate of Mercy.' The gate in its present form was sealed by the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman in 1541" (theculturetrip.com/middle-east/israel/articles/the-story-behind-jeruselems-sealed-golden-gate).

Ezekiel relays God's command regarding the Prince and the Eastern Gate. The gate is closed and is to remain so because the Lord's holy presence reentered the Temple (44:2). Only Israel's Prince may enter the gate and only for worship purposes (44:3). This Prince is not Jesus the Messiah because the Prince must make a sin offering for himself and the people (45:22). There you go. Likely, this Prince is a high-level overseer of Jerusalem or even restored Jerusalem who lives in Jerusalem and serves under Israel's Messiah-King.

The Lord moves Ezekiel to the north gate of the Temple complex, and the prophet sees God's glory. Again, as usual, Ezekiel hits the ground. As Yehovah speaks, remember that Ezekiel saw Israel's sin in the 1st Temple before it was torn down by God's command (Ezekiel 9). The leaders, the Levitical priests, and the people were heavily involved in defiling the Temple. This idolatry is what Yehovah addresses here.

No more will unqualified people serve in God's Temple. During the idolatry stage, foreigners and foreign god idols were allowed within the Temple precincts. The only people to serve Yehovah were supposed to be priests of the Levite family line, with Aaron's family providing the High Priests. However, many Levites turned from God and facilitated pagan worship. So, God's judgment is their family lines will carry on with their "household duties" in the Temple, but they don't get to come near the Lord's holy items,

food, or service. They get to serve the House of the Lord but not the Lord of the House. Such is the punishment for those who create idols within their ministry.

I write this because so many Christians and Christian leaders get caught up in the work of the Lord while ignoring (or even sinning against) the Lord of the work. Their punishment is measure for measure. You'll get to draw close to the work of the Lord but not the Lord of the work (44:10-14). We serve without intimacy, and that's a job, not ministry.

However, there was a family line that stayed faithful to the Lord during Israel's idolatry – the family of Zadok, the Zadokite Levites. Zadok means "righteous one," related to the Hebrew tzedeq, "righteous, rightness." The Zadokite priests remained right with God amid the 1st Temple's defilement, so God rewarded them after the Babylonian Exile and will do so in the 3rd Temple. These Zadokite priests will conduct the sacrificial service (44:15) and serve as Israel's judges (44:24). They'll still have to observe the Torah's priestly requirements regarding their personal lives, and their inheritance will be the Lord, i.e., access to Yehovah Himself in a unique way.

When Jesus returns and the 3rd Temple is built, a large section of land will be set aside where the 3rd Temple will stand. This area of land will measure 8.3 miles long and 6.6 miles wide. The Temple complex (875' square) will rest within its boundaries. Additional portions within this sacred landscape will be allotted for the priests and Levites who serve the Temple to build their towns and houses (45:4-5). Imagine a big rectangle. At the bottom of the rectangle, there's a large square where the Temple sits. North of the Temple square, the remaining land is cut horizontally in two, one for the priests and one for the Levites. On either side of the Temple square, there are two sections for the city. And west of the city/Temple, there's a section for the Prince (45:6-7). If this is hard to follow, search online, and you'll see what I'm trying to describe.

There follows a rebuke for the leaders of Ezekiel's day and a promise for the future. It relates to the leaders taking lands from the people in Ezekiel's day and to this future land allocation.

Next comes the people's sacrificial requirements for "grain offerings, burnt offerings, and fellowship offerings, to make atonement for the people" (45:15). The remaining community offerings for the Feasts of the Lord, burnt offerings (Tamid, the morning and evening offering), etc., are the Prince's responsibility to provide. The remaining part of chapter 45 deals with preparing the Temple for Passover and the Prince's provision for the celebration. The first of the month is Aviv (aka Nisan, March-April). On the first day

of Aviv, cleansing and purification commence. On the 14th of Aviv (Preparation Day for Passover), sacrifices are presented, and Passover begins at sundown (the 15th). The Passover is one day, but the celebration lasts for a week per the 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Speaking of the Feasts of the Lord, the Prince has particular duties on the weekly Sabbath and the monthly New Moon. The famed Eastern Gate will remain shut throughout the week except for the Sabbath and the New Moon observances. During this time, the Prince will come to the gate and present his burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and bow toward the Lord, which is the opposite of what the corrupt idolatrous leaders did in Ezekiel's previous vision (Ezekiel 8:16). Before, they had turned their backs on the Lord to worship the sun. In the 3rd Temple, Israel's leader will rightly bow in the Lord's direction, whose presence fills the Temple. On days when the Prince wants to offer a Thank offering, the Eastern Gate may be opened for Him, but then it's to be shut when he leaves (46:12). The people aren't allowed to enter the Temple complex via that gate, but by either the north or south gates and whatever gate they enter, they must leave by the opposite gate. Sounds like a good traffic control measure to me.

Chapter 46 turns toward land gifts for whatever sons he produces (Aha! Having children means the Prince is not Jesus) and describes the massive kitchens required for the priests to prepare the sacrificial foods for themselves and the worshippers.

INSIGHT

This section of Ezekiel confuses many people and causes consternation to pastors who try to preach about it. The question is this, "Why does this section about the 3rd Temple, the Messianic Age/Millennium Temple, describe an active sacrificial service? I thought Jesus was the end of all sacrifices." Yes, and no.

- 1) Yes, in the sense that He's seen as representing all the sacrifices and their purposes (*Olah* – whole burnt offering, *Mincha* – the grain offering, *Shelamim* – *Peace or Fellowship* offering, *Chatta'ah* – sin offering, *Asham* – guilt offering; see *Cruisin' Through The Bible* on Leviticus 1-4).
- 2) Yes, in the sense that He is the only sacrifice for sin, guilt, and cleansing (*olah*, the whole burnt offering; *chata'ah*, the sin offering, *asham*, the guilt offering).
- 3) No, in the sense that not all of the sacrifices were meant to remove sin and guilt. Some were to celebrate our peace and fellowship with God (*shlamim*, *shelemim*, the peace offering, Leviticus), and some to thank God for His provision – daily and yearly (*mincha*, the grain offering, Leviticus).

Since Jesus died for our *atonement* and reconnection with our Heavenly Father, we have no further need of those sacrifices *for that purpose*. However, there are other sacrifices whose objectives are valid – celebrating our peace and fellowship with God and thanking Him for His provision. So this brings up some exciting possibilities:

- Ezekiel says there will be a 3rd Temple with a sacrificial service if you take this section at face value.
- Our theology determines if this prophecy is about a literal 3rd Temple or is figurative language. Some Christian theologies see Jesus doing away with the Law and, thus, the subset of ritual/ceremonial laws, including the sacrifices. But as you can see, some sacrifices don't apply to atonement, so they can be practiced.
- Many of these theologies work backward. Because these theologies believe Jesus removed all need for sacrifices (because He “did away with the Law”), this 3rd Temple prophecy is null and void. However, if we just let scripture say what it says, God (*whose word cannot be broken*, John 10:35, *and whose word must be fulfilled if the prophet is genuine as Ezekiel is*, Deuteronomy 18:22) tells us *clearly* there will be a 3rd Temple with a sacrificial service. Therefore, those other theologies must adjust their understanding of Jesus and the Torah's sacrifices rather than twist scripture to fit their thinking. (Sounds brutal, I know.) And if these theologies are doing away with the sacrifices that the Torah commands and the prophet Ezekiel affirms, then aren't the theologians doing away with the Law and the Prophets, the very thing their Messiah said He wasn't going to do (Matthew 5:17)? Are they in effect nullifying Jesus' words? The Torah *commands* sacrifices. Jesus said He wasn't going to do away with the Torah. Therefore, the theologians better get on board with Jesus rather than expect Jesus to get on board with them.
- If the 3rd Temple is rebuilt (which I believe it will be), then the sacrifices will not need to be offered for atonement because Jews and Gentiles will have been born-again at Jesus' return and not subject to sin. However, they could be mandatory and optional to cover holiness infractions, celebrations, observing the Feasts of the Lord, and other Torah requirements. *But could the atonement sacrifices still be offered to commemorate what Jesus did for us?* That's a reasonable possibility.
- And here's a wild final argument for an ongoing Temple sacrificial service. When Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation (we'll discuss that later), those saved Jews and Gentiles alive will be changed and caught up to join Jesus's entourage (as His army?) in the air. The dead bodies of all those born-again people will be raised,

rejoined with their spiritual bodies that were with the Lord after death (2 Corinthians 5:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), and join Jesus' entourage. So what about those unsaved people remaining on earth?

- Scripture indicates that some will fight against Jesus and His army as He returns as Israel's Messiah and King. They will die (the Gog-Magog battle) and suffer the same fate as all lost people. I think some will realize Jesus is the Who He said He is and will embrace Him, thus receiving the Holy Spirit under the New Covenant. But since they weren't saved at the Rapture conversion, they will be Spirit-filled *mortal* humans walking around with Spirit-filled *immortal* humans who will have their final glorified bodies. Why do I say mortal? Because when Isaiah describes the messianic age, some people will live very long but still die (Isaiah 65:20). Perhaps, and this is pure speculation (I'll let you know when we get there!), *the sacrificial service will be needed for the mortal people who sin, but not immortal people who can't and won't*. Again, this is just speculation, but it seems to pull together the loose ends I've been pondering for years.
- So what can we conclude? Ezekiel points to a 3rd Temple, unlike the 2nd Temple built by the returning Babylonian Jews, completed by Herod, and destroyed by the Romans. There will be a sacrificial service; we'll understand this when Messiah explains it to us.

September 13 : Scriptures Ezekiel 47-48

SUMMARY

Chapter 47 is a thrilling prophecy about God's River of Life and speaks of Eden's recreation on earth. In Genesis, we read of abundant rivers that divided up Eden and provided water throughout the region (Genesis 2:10-14). Note the language, "A river went out from Eden to water the garden" (Genesis 2:10). That means there was a single water source that divided to hydrate the garden environment and beyond. Here in Ezekiel, we start with a single water source originating from the Temple's threshold (the Holy Place entrance) and flowing east to the Jordan River valley and the Dead Sea. This description is problematic today because of Jerusalem's current topography. The Temple Mount is on the west side of the north-south Kidron Valley, and the Mount of Olives is on the east side. The towns of Bethany and Bethphage were situated on the top of the Mount of Olives. To get into Jerusalem, a traveler needed to follow a road to the west, cross a long bridge and enter Jerusalem's east side.

So given Ezekiel's description of a river starting on the Temple Mount, how does it flow due east to the Dead Sea? How do you keep the water from reaching the Kidron Valley and flowing south? It's simple. God has to make a path through the Mount of Olives. Do you think I'm kidding? Check this out, "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. The Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, forming a huge valley, so that half the mountain will move to the north and half to the south" (Zechariah 14:4). When Jesus returns to Jerusalem, as the angels promised (Acts 1:11), the Mount of Olives will split and form an east-west valley that will help the River of Living Water flow east, down the Judean wilderness, and into the Dead Sea. Again, do an online search and see how the terrain drops away to the east from the heights of the Mount of Olives.

While I believe this will undoubtedly happen when Jesus returns, I also see it as God's way of saying Eden has been restored, and its epicenter will be the Temple in Jerusalem. Revelation 22:1-5 describes the same scene with the new creation, the new Jerusalem, and the edge of eternity. What started in Genesis will be restored and relaunched in Revelation 22.

The River of Living Water will expand as it flows, telling us God's life never diminishes. It expands. The healing trees also speak of Eden and its Tree of Life. Notice there's no indication of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Why? *Because redeemed humanity will forever know what it means to live right (God's way) and wrong (against God's way), and having been transformed, we will always choose right.* Humanity will have finally

matured to the full stature of Jesus, who never violated His Father's will (John 6:38; Ephesians 4:13).

The Dead Sea is called dead because "dead water" is water that has only an inflow or outlet, and living water has an inflow and outflow. Living water moves, and dead water stagnates. This is why Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as Living Water flowing in and out of us. That's God's life coming into us and working through us to benefit other people if we "open the spigot." God's life touches the recipient as we do good things for others in Jesus' name. So let the Holy Spirit move through you in any way He wants.

The River of Living Water has so much life flowing through it, the water rejuvenates even the most stagnant water. The Dead Sea will become as fresh as the Sea of Galilee upstream along the Jordan River. However, some marshes will remain salty because the Dead Sea was one of the sources of salt in Israel's history.

Next, in chapter 47, we read about the land's division. We've already covered the Temple's, priests', Levites', city, and Prince's divisions. The part covers the tribal divisions north and south of the allotted central portion. The western border is the Mediterranean, the eastern border is the Jordan River, the northern border extends beyond Damascus, and the southern border is deep in Israel's Negev desert. A heartwarming part of this chapter is that the non-Israelite residents are welcomed to live in the land and are to be treated as "part of the family" (47:22).

Ezekiel's concluding chapter establishes the tribal lands from the northern sections to the central allotment and the central allotment to the southern sections. From the north down, the tribal lands are Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, and Judah. Then there's the core division with Jerusalem and the common-use areas. Then from the center to the south, the divisions run Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad.

Finally, Jerusalem has 12 gates (not one for the Levites, though) with a perimeter of six miles. This dimension is similar to the book of Revelation, where the new Jerusalem is a cube. The link between Ezekiel's and John's vision of Jerusalem is everything focuses on God's presence (Ezekiel 48:35; Revelation 21:22).

INSIGHT

God wants to live with us. What began in Eden ends in Eden. The trees, the rivers, and God's presence. That's why Jesus did what He did: we can all come home if we want to. When we're in the body (alive), the Holy Spirit lives with us. When we're out of the body

(dead), we live with the Lord. The day is coming when we will all live together with the Lord and His marvelous creation forever!

September 14 : Scriptures Daniel 1-2

SUMMARY

This part of *Cruisin' Through the Bible* will be tough to summarize because I created a class on the book of Daniel with extensive notes. I should just cut and paste the notes and leave it at that. However, doing so would add time and lead to many questions. So, I'll try hard to hit the high points, and you can check out my Daniel class online. Fair enough?

When I studied Daniel, the central theme that grabbed me, the theme that wove through the entire book, is that God is sovereign. There's nothing He can't do, no empire that can stand against Him, and no person who can defeat Yehovah or His plans for humanity. Period.

Daniel was one of Judah's exiles that left for Babylon during the first deportation in 605 B.C. when Daniel was around 15 years old. Daniel's prophetic ministry continued until he was an old guy, about 84 years of age. He was about that age when he had his little sleepover in the lion's den (chapter 6). Not long after that scary adventure, Daniel received his earth-shaking prophecies of kingdoms rising and falling to the time of the End of human sovereignty on earth.

Because of the uncanny accuracy of Daniel's prophecies regarding world events, some scholars claim Daniel didn't write this book, but a later writer did so in Daniel's name. The precision prophecies about the Greek empire caused these same skeptics to think Daniel's book was written during the 2nd or 1st centuries B.C. because the main bad guy of the prophesied Greek empire caused havoc in Judea around 165 B.C. To me, all this shows is the scholars' lack of faith. There are so many other prophecies that foretell events far into the future. Isaiah's messianic prophecies, for example. Why couldn't God inspire a supremely devoted and faithful Jew to prophesy about world events in the near and far distant future? Further, Jesus declares Daniel wrote his book (Matthew 24:15). So that settles it. Let's start *Cruisin' Through the Bible* with Daniel.

Chapter 1 begins with King Nebuchadnezzar's first arrival in Jerusalem. He takes King Jehoiakim and some of the Temple's vessels to Babylon along with some of the Israelites "from the royal family and from the nobility – young men without any physical defect, good-looking, suitable for instruction in all wisdom, knowledgeable, perceptive, and capable of serving in the king's palace" (1:3-4). That gives us an initial look at who Daniel was as a person. As new arrivals in a foreign land, Daniel and the others were to learn the Chaldean language and literature. They were given a royal diet and enrolled in a three-year degree program at the University of Babylon, after which they would enter the

king's service. Frankly, it doesn't sound too bad considering what was happening back home in Jerusalem.

But this kind of prosperity, coupled with being disconnected from one's upbringing, can bring about terrible behaviors. I'm thinking of young people who go away to college at 18 after living a reasonably disciplined life in their formative years. Even if they're strong Christians, I've seen some young men and women spin out of control now that the immediate spiritual boundaries don't bind them. Our character erupts from within when we're loosed from external influences and constraints. So what will happen to the foci of chapter 1 – Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

Daniel is determined to follow the Torah's dietary laws (keeping kosher) and to avoid the royal wine, likely to stay clear-headed. It's encouraging Yehovah gives Daniel favor with the chief eunuch, the guy in charge of the "new students," but it does worry the eunuch. What if he agrees to the request and the four guys look worse? I like to say the Lord entrusted Babylon to keep safe His treasures – Judah's material and human treasures – and the king knows this group has already proven their worth. What would happen to King Neb's eunuch should he happen to damage the king's treasures via malnutrition? You can see why the chief eunuch is hesitant (1:10). But Daniel prevails. Rather than a permanent change, how about a 10-day vegetarian test case? *Viola!* Daniel and crew emerge looking healthier than their compatriots feasting on the king's fare. So, away with the rich food and wine and in with the veggie platter!

Daniel and his guys not only thrived on their kosher diets, but the Lord helped them thrive intellectually and spiritually. "God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind" (1:17). When King Neb interviewed them for their future service. Daniel and the gang smoked the competition! They even outclassed Babylon's entire brain trust. "In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them *ten times better than all the magicians and mediums in his entire kingdom*" (1:20, italics author). From that point on, Daniel remained in service to the Babylonian royal house until King Cyrus of the Persians conquered Babylon.

Chapter 2 opens with a quandary. If it's King Nebuchadnezzar's 2nd year as king, and Daniel was in school for three years before he entered the king's service, how do you square this? "By Babylonian reckoning Daniel's second year of training occurred during what was considered the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (604-603 B.C.)" (HCSB commentary). Therefore, this first test as a Jewish Babylonian wise guy came right after Daniel graduated.

King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. In ancient times, dreams are often regarded as a communique from God, and many are prophecies. Of course, the king wants to know what his god is saying. Yes, yes, yes. I know it's Yehovah, Israel's God, who gave King Neb the dream. But stay with me. At this point, King Neb doesn't know that. What he does know is the dream made him anxious (2:3), so he calls for his spiritual and intellectual team to interpret it. What follows is rather funny.

King: "I... have a dream." (Wait! That's a different King, Martin Luther King.)

King: "I had a dream, and I wanna know what it's about."

Occult Advisors: "No sweat, big guy. Tell us what it was, and we'll tell you what it means."

But King Neb sets a high bar. He's serious about knowing the accurate interpretation of the dream and wants to make sure nobody snows him.

King: "Okay, here are my terms. "If you don't tell me what it means because you can't or won't, or you die in an ugly way, and your home becomes a garbage dump. Tell me the dream *and* its interpretation, and I'll reward you beyond your wildest imaginations. So spill it." (2:5-6).

Can you tell Nebuchadnezzar's serious? Why does King Nebuchadnezzar want the dream *and* the interpretation? *Because if you can reveal what's known to the king and hidden from you, you can accurately reveal what's known to you but hidden from the king!* However, his team tries to weasel out of a potentially fatal spot.

Occult Advisors: "Sure, King. Like we said, tell us what it was, and we'll tell you what it means."

King: "Oh, no, no! Not so fast, you scammers. I know you're just playing for time, and those are my terms. I know you've all conspired to fake me out until the whole situation changes, but it ain't gonna happen! So tell me the dream and then its interpretation – now!" (2:8-9).

You have to give the king credit; he knows who serves him and how things work in the royal system. The advisors freak out.

Occult advisors: "There isn't anyone on earth that can do that! (True.) No king has ever asked this before. Only the gods, who gave you the dream, can tell you what it means."

As you can read, this doesn't sit well with the king. Nebuchadnezzar orders every wise man in Babylon to be immediately executed. Sadly, that means Daniel and his friends (2:12-13). Thank God for Daniel! When he hears about this, he graciously and humbly approaches the captain of the king's guard to find out why the executioner is sharpening his sword. Daniel agrees that the king went a little overboard with his response and goes to Nebuchadnezzar to ask for more time to seek His God. You know, who gives dreams and tells people what they mean? Daniel's team prays, and the Lord reveals it all.

Daniel's praise reveals his deep respect for Yehovah and His God's sovereignty. Yehovah alters events on earth, determines who rules and doesn't, gives wisdom and understanding to those seeking Him, and reveals the hidden things no one knows. And so, "I offer thanks and praise to you, God of my ancestors, because you have given me wisdom and power. And now you have let me know what we asked of you, for you have let us know the king's mystery" (2:23). *That's the mighty God we serve.*

When Daniel is hustled before the king, Nebuchadnezzar asks if he can do what he asked, telling the dream and the interpretation. You have to admire Daniel's courage. He says the same thing to King Neb that his occult advisors said, "No person can do that. *BUT* there's a God in heaven who can."

Daniel is wonderfully humble and brilliant. First, he tells the king the purpose of his dream – what will happen in the last days. As I've pointed out before, the Hebrew words for "last days" are *acharit yom*. This phrase is often used for the End Times, just before the Day of the Lord. Second, Daniel begins to identify his God as the "revealer of mysteries" (2:29). Finally, Daniel takes no credit for what's been revealed to him. His God did it to tell the king what's coming.

What the king saw was a statue with layers of differing materials – a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, a torso of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of mixed iron and clay (2:35). Suddenly, "a stone broke off without a hand touching it," (indicating God's work, not a person's) and struck the statue's feet, obliterating it (2:35). The stone grew into a mountain (much larger than a statue) and filled the whole earth. So there's the dream, and now for the interpretation.

First, Daniel makes sure King Nebuchadnezzar knows the source of Neb's authority and power. It came from God, and Yehovah gave him "sovereignty, power, strength, and glory—he has handed them over to you and made you ruler over them all" (2:37). Period. This announcement is King Neb's introduction to God, who is sovereign over everyone

and everything. Yehovah has made Nebuchadnezzar the gold head. Pretty nifty, huh? The sad thing is such information could feed the king's pride. Next, Daniel reveals the layers represent a succession of kingdoms in the Fertile Crescent region. Following Babylon, there will be three empires (chest, torso, legs), the last of which will be divided (legs) and reconstitute as a weakened remnant of itself (feet). In the days of the feet, God will smash human dominion on earth (empires) and set up a global kingdom that will never be destroyed and will never pass to human rule forever.

King Nebuchadnezzar is impressed and rewards Daniel with a provincial governorship and the top wise guy position. Being the gracious and prudent man that he is, Daniel gives leadership positions to his equally talented friends.

How does the king know that Daniel's interpretation is correct? Because Daniel revealed *what was known to the king and hidden from him. Therefore he could accurately reveal what was known to him but hidden from the king!*

INSIGHT

Does God still communicate through dreams today? Why not? But more importantly, we need people like Daniel, men and women of great character who are devoted to God and who stand ready to receive dreams and interpretations. As I've written, "To those whom God trusts, great things can be entrusted to them." That includes the hidden things of the future, which God reveals when He needs to.