

# JUDGEMENT ON ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

Ezekiel 15—32

## JUDGEMENT ON ISRAEL Ezekiel 15—24

### The Necessity for the Exile (15—24)

The rationale for judgement had been expressed in Ezekiel 14:12-23; furthermore, the judgement on wicked Jerusalem would not be averted by the righteousness of a few godly members of the community. Even so, there would be a remnant who would show by their lives the just judgement of Yahweh. The judgement motif was similar to that of Ezekiel 8; however, the ones visiting Ezekiel were now “elders of Israel” (Ezek. 14:1) rather than those of Judah as in the earlier chapter (Ezek. 8:1). The reason for the later visit is not given; nevertheless the message is not what they wish to hear. They do not visit the prophet with a sincere desire to know the will of Yahweh: secretly, their commitment is to their idols (Ezek. 14:4). The judgement theme continues: why was there a necessity for judgement and the Exile? The answer is stated clearly in Ezekiel 18:4: “The soul who sins will die.” With literary artistry, the prophet describes first the inevitable punishment on the people in general and then on the leaders.

### The sin and punishment of the people in general (15—16; 20—23)

*The allegory of the useless vine (15:1-8).* Just as a useless vine has no value, so are the inhabitants of Jerusalem the wild vine (vv. 2-8). The city will be consumed as “fire for fuel” (vv. 6,7).

*The allegories of unfaithfulness (16:1-63; 23:1-49).*

(1) “The allegory of the unfaithful woman” (16:1-63).

In dramatic fashion Israel’s history is shown to be one of unbroken apostasy.<sup>1</sup> The allegory also contains vituperations (cf. vv. 19,30) and a threat (v. 35ff.). The theme is not original: Judah has become a harlot (cf. Isa. 1:21; Hos. 9:1; Jer. 2:20). The source is probably taken from the near eastern fertility cults. The introduction (vv. 1-7) gives Jerusalem’s immoral pagan geneology rather than her ethnic background. Even so Abraham was historically a part of the west Semitic “Amorite” (v. 3) movement. “Your mother was a Hittite,” a non-Semitic people from Asia Minor (cf. Deut. 20:17-19; Josh. 1:4), i.e., you are pagan children, not of God and Abraham. At birth the child was abandoned and faced certain death (vv. 4,5; cf. Deut. 26:5;

The \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ visited  
Ezekiel (14:1).

*(elders, Israel)*

Why was there a necessity for judgement and the  
Exile? \_\_\_\_\_

*(The soul who sins will die)*

The inhabitants of Jerusalem are declared to be as  
useless as a \_\_\_\_\_ and in  
like will be \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_ for

*(wild vine, consumed, fire, fuel)*

In the allegory of the unfaithful woman, Israel’s  
history is portrayed as one of \_\_\_\_\_

*(unbroken apostasy)*

Abraham historically associated with the west

movement.

*(Semitic Amorite)*

Ezekiel says Israel’s mother was an \_\_\_\_\_, a  
\_\_\_\_\_ people from \_\_\_\_\_

*(Hittite, non-Semitic, Asia Minor)*

also the Egyptian slavery and deliverance). God rescued the child, a girl, and because of His care she grew to be a beautiful woman (vv. 6,7).<sup>2</sup> Later, God fell in love with the object of His mercy, and she became His bride (v. 8). Under His care she was lavishly adorned (vv. 9-13) and as she became even more beautiful, her fame spread abroad (v. 14; cf. the splendour of Solomon's reign, 1 Kings 10). In time, trusting in her beauty, she betrayed Yahweh and took as a lover "every passer-by who might be willing" (v. 15). She gave the gifts received from Yahweh to her lovers (vv. 16-19) and even offered her children, born to Yahweh, to be burned as idol sacrifices (vv. 20,21). In addition to idolatry (vv. 24,25), she engaged in political intrigues and alliances (vv. 26-29). Her depraved condition was worse than that of a professional prostitute, for she gave gifts to her lovers (vv. 30-34). Consequently, punishment is coming as on those who commit adultery (vv. 35-43): her former lovers who now hate her would turn and be the instruments of destruction. Tragically, her wickedness is far greater than that of her notorious sisters: Samaria and Sodom (vv. 44-52). The concluding words of restoration (vv. 53-63) are of little comfort to Jerusalem: she could only be restored along with Samaria and Sodom. Historically, this had not happened and their destruction had occurred many years ago (ca. 722 BC and 1900 BC respectively). The only clear word of love is found in verse 60: "I will remember My covenant with you . . . and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you."

(2) "The allegory of Oholah and Oholibah" (23:1-49). The parallel allegory in chapter 23 deals with two unfaithful women: Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem). Several variations of the theme are included: the women were harlots in Egypt before God married them. When Oholah "played the harlot" with Assyria she just reverted to her old way of life: she fell for the attractive "young men" (v. 6). Oholibah was even more corrupt than her sister: even knowing what happened to her, she too fell for the Assyrians and grew tired of them (vv. 11-13). Then she lusted after images of the Chaldeans "portrayed on the wall" (v. 14; cf. the power of pictures to incite desire), and when she saw them she sent messengers and invited them to come to her "bed of love" (v. 17). Once defiled she grew tired and "disgusted" with them (v. 18). After having her affair she thought she would return to her husband but Yahweh had become "disgusted with her" (v. 18). It was too late then: God would arouse her former lovers against her, and they would attack her "from every side" (vv. 22-49). The message is clear: the Exile would be the punishment due to Judah's (Jerusalem) unfaithfulness.

*The history of unfaithful Israel past and future (20:1-49).* The situation is similar to that of Ezekiel 14:1; the date is about seven months later (July-August, 591 BC). The people would be judged because of the abominations of their past (v. 4). Israel's history is interpreted as one of continued failure; however, Yahweh is sovereign Lord of history past and future.

(3) "The interpretation of the past" (vv. 1-32). The

The symbolism of birth and abandonment is a reflection on Israel's experience in \_\_\_\_\_ and her \_\_\_\_\_.

*(Egypt, deliverance)*

The child rescued is referred to as a \_\_\_\_\_ who, under the care of the Lord, developed into a \_\_\_\_\_.

*(girl, beautiful woman)*

Ultimately, the rescued one became the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

*(bride, God/Yahweh)*

Israel offered children to be \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_; she engaged in \_\_\_\_\_.

*(burned, idol sacrifices, political alliances)*

Judah's wickedness was greater than that of two "notorious sisters," \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

*(Samaria, Sodom)*

Following God's judgement on sinful Judah, God would ultimately establish an \_\_\_\_\_ with a remnant of Israel.

*(eternal covenant)*

DRAW a line to show the relationships.

Oholibah	Jerusalem
Oholah	Samaria

*(Compare your answers with the text)*

Is the following statement true or false?

Oholibah (Jerusalem) was more corrupt than Oholah (Samaria). \_\_\_\_\_  
*(true)*

Israel had a past of \_\_\_\_\_.  
She failed in \_\_\_\_\_, in the \_\_\_\_\_,  
and in the \_\_\_\_\_.

*(continual failure, Egypt, wilderness, Palestine, present)*

section is outlined as follows: failure in Egypt (vv. 5-9), failure in the wilderness (vv. 10-26), failure in Palestine (vv. 27-29), and failure in the present (vv. 30-32).

(2) "The interpretation of the future" (vv. 33-44). Yahweh is sovereign Lord of the future; even as His judgement on Israel is purposeful and redemptive.<sup>3</sup> So there would be a future purposeful and purging wilderness experience, i.e., a new exodus (vv. 33-38; cf. Isa. 41:17-20; 43:16-21; Jer. 23:7,8; Mic. 7:15-17).<sup>4</sup> Following the purging of the apostate, the surviving righteous remnant will return to the land and faithfully worship Yahweh (vv. 40-44). The nations (v. 41) and Israel (v. 42) will know that Yahweh is Lord. The concepts of a new exile (Babylonian) and a new exodus, a new wilderness wandering, and a new Israel have clearly emerged and will be developed more clearly by Ezekiel (cf. also the second section of Isaiah, chs. 40-66).

*The fire and sword of the Lord (20:45—21:32).* In the Hebrew text the new chapter begins at 20:45; five oracles treat the judgement of Yahweh in terms of coming fire and sword: fire on the South (negev, 20:45-49); the sword against Jerusalem (21:1-7); the song of the polished sword (21:8-17); the sword of the king of Babylon (21:18-27); the sword against Ammon (21:28-32). The oracles date from approximately 588 BC when Nebuchadnezzar began his march against Jerusalem.

### **The sin and punishment of the leaders (17:1-24; 22:23-31)**

*The allegory of the eagles: Zedekiah's unfaithfulness (17:1-24).* Ezekiel not only interpreted Israel's past history (cf. Ezek. 16; 20; 23), he also was concerned with her contemporary affairs. He was firmly convinced of Yahweh's universal sovereignty and recommended submission to Babylon (cf. Jer. 27). The historical references cover the period of 597-588 BC.<sup>5</sup>

(1) "The riddle of two eagles" (17:1-10). The first "great eagle" (v. 3) was Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar deported the "top of the cedar" (v. 3), the leaders of Judah, along with its "young twigs," Jehoiachin, to the "land of merchants," Babylon (v. 4). He planted Zedekiah and a puppet regime that flourished (vv. 5-7). The second eagle, Egypt, made overtures to Judah (vv. 7-10). Zedekiah broke his treaty with Babylon and appealed to Pharaoh Hophra for help.

(2) "The interpretation of the riddle" (17:11-21). The prophet clarifies the above interpretation. Ezekiel feels that Zedekiah's violation of the Babylonian treaty was morally and politically wrong (v. 15). Consequently, the king would die in Babylon (v. 16). The prophet denounces the Egyptian aid as futile and the victory of Babylon over Egypt (vv. 17-21).

(3) "The allegory of the cedar sprig" (17:22-24). These verses are not directly related to the above allegory. They constitute a messianic parable adding a note of hope to the above dismal picture. The "young . . . tender" twig (v. 22)

UNDERLINE the correct answer.

The coming judgement of Yahweh was vengeful, redemptive.

(redemptive)

The Exile would \_\_\_\_\_ Israel and a \_\_\_\_\_ would return to the \_\_\_\_\_ and faithfully worship Yahweh.

(purge, remnant, land)

Through the return the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ would know that Yahweh is Lord.

(nations, Israel)

MATCH the following:

first eagle                      Babylon

second eagle                    Egypt

(Compare your answers with the text)

UNDERLINE the correct answer.

The planted puppet regime was headed by Zedekiah, Jehoiachin.

(Zedekiah)

The second eagle, Egypt, made an overture to \_\_\_\_\_ ; Zedekiah appealed to \_\_\_\_\_ for help.

(Judah, Pharaoh Hophra)

The allegory of the cedar sprig is a \_\_\_\_\_ promise.

(messianic)

is the Davidic Messiah (cf. Jer. 23:5ff.; 33:15) who will be planted on Mount Zion by Yahweh (v. 23). Although the kingdom established is not explicitly universal, it is open to "birds of every kind" (v. 23), and "trees of the field" will recognize Yahweh as sovereign (v. 24; cf. Ezek. 31:6; Dan. 4:12; Mk. 4:32).

*The corruption of the Judahite leadership (22:23-31).* Ezekiel accuses the prophets (vv. 25,28), the priests (v. 26), the princes (v. 27) and the people of the land (v. 29, the landed gentry) of corruption and moral depravity. Tragically, Yahweh could not find a person to "build up the wall and stand in the gap" so that the land would not be destroyed (v. 30; cf. Ezek. 13:5; Gen. 18:22ff.; Jer. 5:1ff.; Isa. 59). Because of the corruption, doom is certain (v. 31).

*Lament over the kings of Judah (19:1-14).* In poetic form, using the *qinah* or lament metre, the prophet chants a mournful song of ineffective and sinful leadership. The "mother" (v. 2) was Judah; the first "lion" was Jehoahaz (v. 3); the second was Jehoiakim (v. 5), and the last was Jehoiachin (v. 9). As in the allegory of the two eagles, Judah's turbulent history is recalled.

### **The Purpose of Judgement and the Exile (18:1-32; 16:53-63; 20:33-44; 22:17-22; 24:1-14)**

#### **The judgement and the Exile would reveal the nature of God's judgement (18:23-32)**

Was the Exile an expression of God's wrath? Was this an expression of anger that would placate His hurt over Judah's infidelity? The answer is "No!" The principle idea found in chapter 18 (and the other passages indicated) is that Judah's punishment would soon come because of God's love for His people. "Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked" "Is it not" (lit.) "that he should turn from his ways and live?" (v. 23). "Therefore I will judge you . . . Repent and turn away from all your transgressions . . . For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies . . . Therefore, repent and live" (vv. 30-32). The price of sin is exceedingly high. If the price were never paid, the world would not learn the seriousness of the matter. Therefore, the purpose of the Exile was to lead the people, individually and collectively, to repentance and life. The Exile would be an expression of divine mercy.

#### **Judgement and the Exile would illustrate the nature of retribution and individual responsibility (18:1-22)<sup>6</sup>**

Verse 20 sums up the teaching of the chapter. In the context of the total book it vindicates the justice of God and reveals His merciful purpose in punishing evil (individual and collective). The importance of individual responsibility can never be overly emphasized, for it is a foundational principle in biblical revelation (religion). Nevertheless, the principle can be abused if the individual becomes divorced from society. Ezekiel was careful to keep the individual in the context of Israel's collective society. It is wrong for a

The "tender twig" is the \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ who will be placed on \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.  
 (Davidic Messiah, Mount Zion, Yahweh)

MATCH the following symbolisms in the lament over the kings of Judah:

first lion	Jehoahaz
second lion	Judah
mother	Jehoiakim

(Compare your answers with the text)

UNDERLINE the correct answer.

God's judgement would come because of God's love, wrath.

(love)

God has no \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_  
 of the \_\_\_\_\_.

(pleasure, death, wicked)

believer to consider personal feelings, thoughts, or interpretation to be inspired and revelatory, and consequently become detached from a believing community. This action makes the individual of ultimate importance and contradicts both Old and New Testament teachings of the community of faith: the individual is responsibly related to the body. The error in Old Testament times contributed to the popular conclusion that personal prosperity and/or adversity were direct reflections of divine approval or disapproval. The book of Job was written to correct the mistaken theology.<sup>7</sup>

### Judgement and the Exile would be a call to return to their former state (16:53-63)

*The humiliation of the Exile would convince all Israel to return (vv. 53-55).*

*The Exile would open the way for the establishment of an everlasting covenant (vv. 59,60).*

*The covenant would be established on Yahweh's conditions, not man's (vv. 61-63; cf. Ezek. 20:33-44).*

### Judgement and the Exile would be a time of purification (22:17-22)

Jerusalem is likened to a huge smelter with her inhabitants as dross. They must be melted so that the heat could consume the impurities, leaving the pure silver (vv. 20-22; cf. Isa. 1:22,25; Jer. 6:28-30; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:2ff.).<sup>8</sup> The suffering of national defeat and the humiliation of the exile would produce a refined remnant.

### Judgement and the Exile would be a time of cleansing (24:1-14)

The allegory of the boiling pot (cauldron) is delivered on the very day (588 BC) that Babylon began the siege of Jerusalem:<sup>9</sup> the fire is set; the pot would "boil vigorously" with "bones in it" (v. 5). Choice ingredients are placed in the pot (vv. 4,5); however, the pot is not clean (vv. 6ff.) and a scum forms, making the stew inedible. The good would have to be removed piece by piece (v. 6b); the scum would have to be destroyed and the pot cleansed by the fire (v. 11). However, the pot, Jerusalem, would not be totally destroyed (v. 12): a cleansed remnant would result. Nevertheless, the Lord said: "You will not be cleansed from your filthiness again, Until I have spent My wrath on you" (v. 13b). Judgement is coming as a act of divine mercy. (How tragic is the high price that sin exacts!)

### Judgement and the Exile would be a time of deep, unexpressed mourning and reflection (24:15-27)

Ezekiel is warned of the imminent death of his wife, "the desire of" his eyes (v. 16). This coincides with the final siege of Jerusalem, the desire of the people's eye. He is not to engage in any of the usual mourning customs (cf. 2 Sam. 15:20; Jer. 16:7; Mic. 3:7) but rather is to carry out his usual occupation, i.e., act out his messages, causing his

The individual is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ to the community of faith.  
(responsibly related)

A popularly-held error in Ezekiel's time was that prosperity or adversity were direct reflections of divine \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.  
(approval, disapproval)

UNDERLINE the correct answer.

The book of Job, Jeremiah, Ezekiel was written to refute the false dogma of a purely "material religion."  
(Job)

The Exile would be a time of \_\_\_\_\_.  
(purification)

Because the pot was \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_ formed.  
(unclean, scum)

The \_\_\_\_\_ would be destroyed; the \_\_\_\_\_, Jerusalem, would be \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ but not \_\_\_\_\_ destroyed.  
(scum, pot, cleansed, fire, totally)

Judgement would be accompanied by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
(mourning, reflection)

UNDERLINE the correct answer.

The "desire" of Ezekiel's eyes was his nation, Jerusalem, his wife.  
(his wife)

fellow exiles to ask the meaning of his actions (vv. 17-19). His personal loss is to be an object lesson for them: their response to national bereavement is to be the same as his in the face of his intense grief (vv. 20-24). As for Ezekiel, when he would finally receive the information of the fall of Jerusalem, the restrictions on his ministry would be lifted (v. 27; cf. 3:26; 33:21,22). From that day forward he would be a prophet of hope and reconstruction rather than one of doom and destruction. In the agony of his loss (personal and national) the prophet is freed to become the person that God needed to fill the gap. The death of his beloved wife and the fall of Jerusalem mark the watershed in his ministry.

## JUDGEMENT ON THE NATIONS Ezekiel 25:1—32:32

The prophecies against Jerusalem cease. Now attention is given to foreign nations who were traditional enemies of Israel (cf. Amos 1—2; Isa. 13—23; Jer. 47—51). Prior to Ezekiel's oracles of restoration (Ezek. 33—48) the enemy opposition must be eliminated so that the glorious future (new age) could be inaugurated.

Israel's pagan enemies are traditionally criticized for their arrogance and oppression. The larger nations, e.g., Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Tyre are accused of arrogance, i.e., exalting themselves above God, while the smaller nations, e.g., Moab, Ammon, Philistia and Edom are condemned for preying on Israel for personal advantage<sup>10</sup> (cf. Ezek. 36:5-7; 28:26).

Ezekiel denounces seven nations: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon and Egypt. Since the oracles come from the same general period of Jeremiah's words, reference to the shorter oracles can be compared with those evaluated previously in this study.

Unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel contains no condemnation of Babylon. Bunn suggests three possible reasons for the omission: (1) Ezekiel understood Babylon to be the instrument of God's wrath; (2) Babylon was not a traditional enemy; or (3) Ezekiel feared possible Babylonian reprisal on the exiles.<sup>11</sup>

### Prophecies against Tyre (26:1—28:26)

Historically the Babylonian army was about to lay siege to Tyre (585 BC, cf. 26:1). What would be the result? What was the sin of Tyre? Why did the Jewish Exile feel so involved in the struggle? For Ezekiel, there was no doubt that it would end Tyre's commercial dominance. Three major themes are developed: The Destruction of Tyre (26:1-21); A Lament over Tyre (27:1-36); and The Fall of the King of Tyre (28:1-19). A lesser oracle against Sidon is included (28:20-24) along with a short oracle of the

The nations were basically condemned for their \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
(arrogance, oppression)

The larger nations were \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Egypt, Assyria, Tyre)

Four smaller nations were \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Moab, Ammon, Philistia, Edom)

restoration of Israel (28:25,26).

Tyre was a famous commercial port city built on a rock island about one-half mile from the mainland. It was almost impregnable: the Babylonian siege lasted thirteen years, and although the city agreed to pay tribute, it was not taken then. In 382 BC Alexander the Great was able to conquer the city by building a causeway from the mainland to the island. The city was finally destroyed totally during the crusades and today is a small fishing village.

### The sins of Tyre

*Tyre exulted over the fall of Jerusalem (26:2).* One aspect of Tyre's rejoicing was commercial. Geographically, Palestine was strategically located on the overland trade route from the South and Southeast. As caravans passed through Israelite territory they were taxed. In addition, the Israelites became adept as traders (middlemen; cf. 1 Kings 10:28,29). With Jerusalem destroyed, Judah was no longer a competitive power. Tyre was able to monopolize the land and sea trading routes.

Another, and more serious, aspect of Tyre's rejoicing was religious. "Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken." Jerusalem, the mountain city, was not geographically situated on any major caravan routes. As a capital city, she did not represent major commercial interest; however, as an Assyrian, and then Babylonian vassal, the commercial aspect increased, but this was not Tyre's primary concern.

Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah had prophesied that one day the nations would flow to Zion (cf. Isa. 2:3; 60:3-14). Tyre was aware of these prophecies. At such a time Jerusalem would be the religious centre of the world. Tyre was jealous of her commercial and religious position. Therefore, the phrase reflects a sarcastic spirit of ridicule for Israel's prophets: Jerusalem was destroyed and could never be the centre of the religious world. Then, as now, it was a dangerous thing to ridicule God's Word.

*The self-glorification of Tyre (27:3; 28:1-6).* Tyre considered herself to be "perfect in beauty" (27:3). Furthermore, the king of Tyre, personifying the city, exalted himself to the status of a god and claimed to sit in the seat of gods (28:2). His self-glorification was a sure step to destruction.

To whom was the prophet referring in 28:1-19? Various opinions have been suggested through the ages:

(1) The reference is allegorical, referring to Babylon. Since Ezekiel is an exile in Babylon he could not openly condemn his captors for fear of reprisals. The famous poem of the ship of Tyre includes the materials by which the vessel was constructed (27:4ff.). These materials were also used in temple construction, and Babylon was famous for her temples built with the riches from distant lands. The book has no formal prophecy calling Babylon by name; however, in allegorical fashion the infamous city is condemned to destruction.

What are the objections to the interpretation? (a) Ezekiel, in his attempt to describe a beautiful ship, used

Tyre was a \_\_\_\_\_ city famous for \_\_\_\_\_ ; the city was built on a \_\_\_\_\_ about \_\_\_\_\_ mile from the mainland.

*(port, commerce, rock island, one-half)*

The sin of \_\_\_\_\_ is a sure step to \_\_\_\_\_ .

*(self glorification, destruction)*

Ezekiel 28:1-19 has been interpreted variously as an allegory against \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ .

*(Babylon, Satan, king, Tyre)*

terms precious to the Hebrew mind. The most precious materials were those used in the Temple, his Temple in Jerusalem. The imagery of the chapter deeply impressed the author of Revelation 18 who artistically applied the figures to the evil empire of his day. (b) The prophet announced that Tyre would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 26:7). If Tyre represented Babylon, why would the king of Babylon be sent against the city to destroy it?

(2) The reference is to Satan (28:2). Various arguments have been proposed for the interpretation: (a) he was wise and perfect when created (28:11,12,15); (b) he was in Eden on the day of his creation (28:13); (c) he was a cherub in the presence of God (28:14); (d) he sinned and fell from his perfect state (28:15,16); and (e) he was punished with fire (28:18).

Following the projection of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, this is suggested as Satan's history (cf. the taunt song against the king of Babylon, Isa. 14:4-21, that is also used, especially v. 12ff.).

Various objections to the interpretation have been presented: (a) the oracle is addressed to the "prince of Tyre," who was "a man and not God" (28:2b); (b) he would die as any man (28:9,10); (c) as a sinful mortal he would die and "be no more" (28:19).

(3) The reference is to the king of Tyre (Ithobal II). (a) The general consideration: the grammatical context and the character of the book make this the preferable interpretation. The particular king is the personification of all the rulers and is the representative of the city. The language is poetic and symbolic. The form is allegorical and refers to geographic and historic relations. It is remarkable that Ezekiel is so well versed in historical facts, geographic locations, commercial interest, nautical terminology and theological understanding. He was divinely inspired and systematically disciplined in his life and thought. (b) The interpretation: verses 11-19 are best understood as an allegory treating the historical relationship between Israel and Tyre. The Old Testament refers to past friendships between the two nations (cf. 1 Kings 5:1,7; 9:13,14), and the Phoenician role in the building of Solomon's Temple is well documented (cf. 1 Kings 5-7). Even Isaiah predicts Tyre's restoration and future wealth (Isa. 23:17,18, though wicked). At one time, Tyre, "the seal of perfection . . . in Eden" had been richly blessed (28:12). Her original beauty and prosperity had been like that of "Eden," having all she desired (v. 13). The literary allusion to Eden was well known.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the king had been protected like a "cherub" and placed in a favoured position on "the holy mountain of God" (v. 14). "You walked in the midst of the stones of fire . . . You were blameless in your ways . . ." (vv. 14b,15): Tyre, a Semitic people, had also experienced her "Mount Sinai." God evidently had revealed His truth to her; she had been instructed in the ways of the Lord. Nevertheless, she too, like Israel, had rejected the Lord and sinned in her wealth (v. 16a). Consequently, she was cast "as profane from the mountain of God" (v. 16b). The moral of the allegory is then applied: first to the kings (v. 17) and

What considerations point to the king of Tyre (Ithobal II) as a preferable interpretation for the passage?

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(Compare your answer with the text)

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then to the city (v. 18). God's judgement will fall on rulers and city (v. 19).

### The punishment of Tyre (26:7-14; 29:17-20)

Ezekiel, in 585 BC, prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer and destroy the city (26:7-14). In 570 BC, after years of hard labour, he had no "wages for his army." Therefore, Egypt was given to him as spoil (29:18,19). The army's labour was perhaps the attempt to build a causeway between the mountains and island city. Josephus relates a siege of thirteen years and does not indicate the capture of the city; however, cuneiform texts indicate that Nebuchadnezzar established a Babylonian administration in Tyre.<sup>13</sup> Ezekiel does not say that the city was not captured: he says no significant booty was received as compensation for the troops (v. 18). Since Tyre was a seaport, evidently the city had largely been evacuated prior to the final conquest. Regardless of the details, Ezekiel's prophecy in 26:7-14 was not literally fulfilled: the city was not totally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar,<sup>14</sup> nor did Babylon capture her riches, although spoil was taken from Egypt instead. If prophecy is interpreted only as literal, i.e., physical, fulfillment, Ezekiel was mistaken on this occasion and can be classified as a false prophet (cf. Deut. 18:17-22); however, if prophecy is interpreted as a spiritual principle, the prophecy was fulfilled. A city as sinful as Tyre could not live. Although the literal (physical) fulfillment was delayed, it ultimately came to pass (cf. Hab. 2:2,3). God's timetable is not necessarily that of man. God's time is purposeful and redemptive; man's time is chronological.<sup>15</sup>

### Prophecies against Egypt (29:1—32:32)

Seven oracles are pronounced against Egypt, Israel's oldest enemy. Two major historical evils are inferred: the Exodus oppression (e.g., 29:12) and repeated exploitation through deceptive alliances (e.g., 30:20-26).<sup>16</sup> With the exception of 29:17-21 (571 BC) the oracles were delivered immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem (587-585 BC).

### The sins of Egypt (29:2-7; 30:18; 31:10; 32:2,12)

As in the case of Tyre, the Pharaoh is the personification of the nation.

*Self-deification* (29:3). Pharaoh claimed that the Nile was his and that he made it. Pharaoh Hophra had recovered most of the land lost by Pharaoh Necho in 605 BC. He boasted of his power and kingdom: not even God could deprive him of his position. To worship another god is bad enough; however, to make one's self the object of that worship is worse. Pharaoh's desire for wisdom and knowledge (cf. Gen. 3:5,6) combined with his power and position

Egypt is accused of \_\_\_\_\_ and repeated  
\_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_

(oppression, exploitation, deceptive alliances)

As in the case of Tyre, the Pharaoh is the  
\_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ .

(personification, nation)

led to the fatal step of self-deification—and punishment.

*Lack of dependability in time of need (29:6,7).* Ezekiel quotes Isaiah 36:6 as he calls Egypt a broken reed. She always seemed to promise help but would never deliver; the problem is generally the result of one who thinks excessively of self as seen above. Egypt's assistance had been ineffective in the time of Hezekiah's rebellion (cf. 2 Kings 18:21; Isa. 36:6) and in that of Zedekiah (Jer. 37:1-10). On both occasions Egypt had instigated the revolts.

*Personal pride (30:18; 31:10; 32:12).* Pride is an integral part of self-deification; however, Ezekiel repeats the accusation over and over again.

*Evil character (32:2).* Pharaoh proudly considered himself to be like a lion among the nations.<sup>17</sup> However, Yahweh considered him to be like a sea monster or dragon (Heb. *tannim*). The contrast is striking: the lion frequently symbolized royalty; the *tannim* (cf. dragon, or crocodile as some interpret from near-eastern mythology) was a symbol of chaos (cf. Job 41:10). As usual, the Pharaohs "muddied the waters . . . and fouled their rivers." There was an uncontrolled, violently destructive power in their hands. Their evil disposition was like that of an uncontrolled and unpredictable sea monster.

### The fate of Egypt (29:3-5; 30:2-5; 31:1-18)

*The great sea monster would be destroyed (29:3-5; 32:1-10).* The *tannim* (monster) is pictured as a crocodile. There were two ways to catch a crocodile: one with hooks in the jaws (29:4), and the other with nets (32:3).

*The day of judgement, the day of the Lord was near (30:2-5).* It would be a day of darkness ("clouds") and "doom" upon Egypt and upon the nations (vv. 3,4; cf. Joel 1:15; 1:1,2; Zeph. 1:14-18). The sword, anguish, death, the loss of wealth and destruction was at hand (v. 4).

*The example of Assyria is given (31:1-18).* Assyria's downfall was likened to that of a great cedar and should have been a warning to Egypt. Pharaoh, as Assyria, was likened to a world tree: the birds, animals and people benefited from it (v. 6). Symbolically, the literary reference to ancient Eden reappears (vv. 8,9). However, if Assyria could not escape, neither shall Egypt. They will be together in Sheol (vv. 12-18).

### The punishment and restoration of Egypt (29:17-20; 30:20-26; 29:10-16)

*The instrument of destruction (29:17-20).* Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would be given the land as "wages" for the long siege of Tyre. Babylon invaded Egypt in 568 BC and claimed a victory over Pharaoh Amasis (cf. Jer. 43:8-13; 44:30; 46:1-25); however, Egypt, as such, was not integrated into the Babylonian empire.

*The broken arms (30:20-26).* An historical reference is made to the defeat of Pharaoh Hophra in 588 BC as he attempted to lift the siege of Jerusalem (v. 21; cf. Jer. 37:1-10). The other arm would be broken in a subsequent battle with Babylon (vv. 22-25).

Pharaoh considered himself to be like a \_\_\_\_\_ ;

Yahweh considered him to be like a \_\_\_\_\_ .

\_\_\_\_\_ .  
(lion, crocodile)

MATCH the following symbolisms:

lion	chaos
crocodile	royalty

(Compare your answers to the text)

\_\_\_\_\_ .  
The day of God's \_\_\_\_\_ of Egypt was near; the great \_\_\_\_\_ would be

\_\_\_\_\_ .  
(judgement, sea monster, destroyed)

\_\_\_\_\_ .  
UNDERLINE the correct answer.

Persia, Pharaoh Hophra, Nebuchadnezzar would be the instrument of Egypt's destruction.

\_\_\_\_\_ .  
(Nebuchadnezzar)

*Desolation and restoration (29:10-16).* Egypt would be desolate from the North (Migdol) to the South (Syene; v. 10). After forty years (time for completion of Yahweh's purpose), Egypt would be restored as a second-class power (vv. 11-16). Historically, little is known of the Babylonian victory; Persia later conquered and ruled Egypt. Following the death of Alexander the Great, General Ptolemy took control and established a strongly hellenistic dynasty. Rome ultimately brought Egypt under her domination. Although Egypt has continued her existence in one form or another until today, never has she reasserted a dominant position in international affairs since the days of Ezekiel.

### The ultimate destination of Egypt (31:15-18; 32:17-32)

The pride of Egypt in itself was sufficient reason for her downfall. Along with the most wicked nations, Egypt's ultimate destination was Sheol where she would lie with the uncircumcised (31:18). Sheol was the name used for the underworld. The word is of uncertain meaning; however, it is a place of shades (*rephaim*) or shadowy existence. It is a place of "uncertainty" or "iniquity." There all of the dead, lords and servants, would be found (cf. Job 3:17-19). The Egyptians practised circumcision and lavish burial rites for the dead. Ironically they would lie with the uncircumcised (wicked) in the lowest parts of the underworld. In 32:21-23 there also seems to be a reference to a difference of position in "Sheol" or the "pit"; however, there is no suggestion here of rewards. Assyria is found in the deepest part (the most wicked?). The armies of the past great nations are there as well as those of present powers. Isaiah 14:9 speaks of Sheol being excited about receiving Babylon: this includes the kings of the nations sitting on their thrones. Ezekiel 32:27 seemingly indicates that warriors with proper burial have a special place of honour. Egypt, for her wickedness would "be made to lie down among the uncircumcised" (v. 32). In that case, where are the righteous, or the truly circumcised? The wicked have a place in Sheol. And the others? The embryo of a division in Sheol (of Paradise and Hades) has been projected. Theologically, the Inter-Testamental Period would grapple with the concept, and the New Testament would finally formulate the doctrine. Once again, Ezekiel was on the cutting edge of a theological development.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Amos 5:25 and Jeremiah 2:2ff. for a time of early fidelity. Hosea implies the same.

<sup>2</sup>The realistically frank description is shocking to the western mind; however, there is no immodesty from oriental standards, but rather is a normal literary pattern (cf. S. of Sol.).

<sup>3</sup>The element of individual responsibility is always found in tension with the collective personality or group purpose. Yahweh is merciful. His redemption is universal, and He uses human instruments to achieve His divine purposes.

<sup>4</sup>The section is strongly reminiscent of the Deuteronomic historian's theology and terminology. The phrase "with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm" (v. 33) occurs frequently in Deuteronomy (cf. 4:34; 5:15; 26:8).

<sup>5</sup>Cf. the Introduction for the historical background.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. the discussion related to Ezekiel's call experience (Ezek. 3:16-27).

<sup>7</sup>An inadequate understanding of the Deuteronomic theology, i.e., obedience results in "material" blessings while disobedience in curses, also contributed to the mistaken popular dogma.

Following her desolation, Egypt would be \_\_\_\_\_

(restored)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the name used for the underworld; it is a place of \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

(Sheol, shadowy existence, uncertainty)

Sheol, or the pit, for Ezekiel was a place for the \_\_\_\_\_.

(wicked)

UNDERLINE the correct answer.

The nation found in the deepest part of Sheol would be Israel, Assyria, Egypt.

(Assyria)

<sup>8</sup>Various authors do not interpret this as a refining process but as judgement on a nation that is all dross. Cf. John T. Bunn, "Ezekiel," *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, ed. by Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), p. 298; Herbert G. May, "Ezekiel," *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. VI, ed. by Nolan B. Harmon *et al.* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 185.

<sup>9</sup>The specific date was to be written down (v. 2) in face of the disbelief of his fellow exiles. The knowledge illustrates clearly Ezekiel's supernatural insights. The people could later verify his statement.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Arnold J. Tracik, "Ezekiel," *The Jerome Bible Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer and Ronald Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 357; Bunn, "Ezekiel," p. 307.

<sup>11</sup>Bunn, "Ezekiel," p. 307.

<sup>12</sup>The section (28:11-19) evidently was adapted from a recognized popular story. No extant traces remain; however, it seemingly referred to a primal being who, richly blessed, lived in the Garden of God. Subsequently, he was expelled because of his pride. The king of Tyre will likewise fall from his position and privilege. The literary implication resembles a pagan adaptation (myth) of Genesis 3. The material well suited Ezekiel's purpose and was understood by his audience.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. May, "Ezekiel," p. 227.

<sup>14</sup>Alexander the Great destroyed the city in 332 BC. The city was rebuilt and destroyed by the crusaders in about 1290 AD.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. the New Testament difference between the Greek *kairos* and *kronos*.

<sup>16</sup>For other biblical accounts of Egyptian relations and intrigue cf. 1 Kings 11:1-13; 12:2,3; 14:25-28; 2 Kings 18:19-25; 2 Chronicles 12:1-8; Hosea 7:11; Isaiah 30:3,7; 31:1-3.

<sup>17</sup>The royal sphinx had the body of a lion.

## Home Study Exercise

**Basic activity** (*Levels 1, 2, and 3*). Read the study guide and answer the following questions:

1. Interpret the phrase, "Your mother was a Hittite."

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2. Explain the lesson of the "former lovers" turning against Judah (Ezek. 15:39-43).

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3. What is the promise contained in Ezekiel 15:53?

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4. The theme of a new exile and a new exodus are themes also found in the writings of what two men?

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5. Interpret the riddle of the two eagles.

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6. Name the ones Ezekiel accused of corruption.

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7. Whose ineffective leadership did Ezekiel lament in Ezekiel 19:1-14?

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8. Indicate the purpose of the Exile.

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9. Name three ways in which the Exile would be a call to repentance (Ezek. 16:53-62).

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10. When was the allegory of the cauldron delivered?

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11. What was the fate of Ezekiel's wife? How was he commanded to react? Why?

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12. List Bunn's three suggestions for omitting Babylon in the condemnation of the nations.

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13. Why was Tyre jealous of Jerusalem?

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14. List the arguments for interpreting Ezekiel 28:1-19 as Satan's history.

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15. What objections are raised for the above interpretations?

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16. Interpret the allegory in Ezekiel 28:1-19 as a treatment of the historical relationship between Israel and Tyre.

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**Supplementary activity** (*Levels 2 and 3*).

1. Compare Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's teachings on individual responsibility (see especially Ezek. 18 and Jer. 18;31).
2. How does Ezekiel's treatment of individual responsibility relate to the general Old Testament concept of the collective personality?
3. According to Ezekiel, how do heredity, environment and associations influence individual responsibility? What was the popular explanation for personal and national guilt?
4. Discuss the responsibility inherent in Old Testament covenants. (Cf. Gen. 9:1-7; 12:1-3; Ex. 24:1-8; Ezek. 16:58-63; 2 Sam. 7:11-16 and 2 Chron. 7.)

**Advanced activity** (*Level 3*). Read articles on "Death," "Sheol," "Soul" (*nephesh*), and "Blood" in a Bible encyclopedia or dictionary and answer the following:

1. Define the nature and location of Sheol.
2. What is the Old Testament concept of death?
3. What social distinctions seemingly exist in Sheol (cf. Ezek. 32 and Isa. 14)?
4. How does the New Testament clarify the concept of Sheol?
5. Discuss the Old Testament concept of "man as a living being."
6. Discuss the relationship of "blood" with "soul." (Cf. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 14:17; 17:14; Deut. 12:23.)

**Optional Supplementary Reading**

- H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, pages 11-26, 68-144.  
H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel*, pages 42-65.

**Seminar Discussion**

1. Discuss the conditional nature of prophecy. How is the prophetic word conditioned by historical circumstances and the nature and purpose of God? Does the condition always have to be explicit? (Cf. 2 Chron. 7:13,14 and Jonah 3:4.)
2. Was Jonah's prophecy concerning Nineveh fulfilled (Jonah 3:4)? Was he a false prophet (cf. Deut. 18:17-22)? If not, how do you explain Jonah 3?
3. Discuss the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy against Tyre.