

Chapter 6

Date: **Between 593 BC and 592 BC,** (probably closer to 593 BC)
Ezekiel's first vision is recorded in chapter one. It is estimated to have occurred on July 31st, 593 BC. The next dated vision given to Ezekiel occurred in chapter eight. It is estimated that the revelation that is recorded in this chapter occurred between chapter one and chapter eight. Chapter eight is estimated to have occurred on **September 17th, 592 BC.**

Historical Setting: The prophet Ezekiel is living among his fellow Jewish captives in the exile community of Tel-abib just outside the capital city of Babylonia, Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar reigns during the entire time period of this chapter. King Zedekiah rules Jerusalem as a “Puppet” King under King Nebuchadnezzar's control. Jerusalem is forced to pay tribute to the Babylonians, which by 588 BC, Zedekiah stopped paying. The events of this chapter occur just prior to, or during, the time period in which Zedekiah made this bold decision. This caused great anger on the part of the Babylonians, especially to King Nebuchadnezzar. King Zedekiah and most of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were stiff-necked, prideful, and even outright wicked. During this time period, Nebuchadnezzar was involved in the expansion and beautification of Babylonia.

Preview: This chapter might, or might not, be a continuation of the revelation that Ezekiel received in chapter five. Whether or not it is an actual continuation of chapter five, it is for sure that it is a continuation of ongoing revelations that Ezekiel received on behalf of the Israelites. Chapter six is a further voice of warning to the Israelites. The Israelites, from all social classes, are to receive this warning. The Lord proclaims that the sins of idolatry committed by His children will be rebuked. Israel will be wiped out for her sins.



Verse 1-2: “And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them.”

The opening phrase of these verses suggests that this chapter is a new revelation sent to Ezekiel and not a continuation of chapter five. It is not clear as to exactly when this chapter took place; however, it is clear that it took place just prior to the great siege of Jerusalem in 588 BC. Even though the verbiage in the beginning of the verse might indicate that the chapter is not a continuation of chapter five, there is no other evidence that support this theory, making it inconclusive.

The Lord conveys a message to His prophet in Babylon. Ezekiel is addressed as he typically is by the Lord, “*Son of man*”; again making reference to the fact that he is a mortal man.

After addressing the prophet, the Lord tells him to set his face toward the mountains of Israel and prophesy against them. The face symbolizes one’s countenance and one’s self. It usually represents all that one stands for. Ezekiel was to focus his sense of being on the mountains of Israel.

Mountains are symbols of strength and majesty. They are often used to represent the center of the world. The tops of mountains represent paradise and the abode of God. In the absence of temples, mountains are often used in their place. Other symbolic uses for mountains include constancy, eternity, firmness, stillness and leadership. Often, in Biblical symbolism, mountains represent leaders, kings, head priests and the governing class of society.



In this passage Ezekiel was to specifically prophesy against the leaders of Israel. Prophesying against indicates that the content of the prophecy will condemn the actions of the people to whom it is given. It is evident from previous chapters in the Book of Ezekiel, and revelation contained hereafter that the aforementioned is indeed the case.

Verse 3: “And say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys; Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places.”

Here the Lord begins to give Ezekiel the message that he was to carry to the leaders of Israel. He also extends his counsel from the mountains, which represent the leaders of Israel to the hills, rivers and valleys.

Hills are but small mountains. Symbolically they carry similar meaning as mountains but on a lower scale. They might represent people of stature and influence in Israel.

Rivers often symbolize virile men. They can also be used as symbols for the world, strength, power, and authority. Due to its association with water it has also been used to symbolize purification and washing. This symbol is probably used by the Lord to represent the men of Israel.

The term Valley is used in symbolism to represent life and fertility. It typically represents all life from the low to the high. This final symbol encompasses all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The symbol of the valley was probably used to include even the lowly and the poor of Israel.

After clarifying whom His message should go to, the Lord begins his warning. He starts by saying that He will bring the sword upon them. As previously discussed the sword represents death, vengeance, and tribulation. Truly, the Lord did bring all of this unto Jerusalem because of their sins.



The Lord then adds that he will destroy all of their high places. The Revell Bible Dictionary defines high places as follows.

"High Place (1) In rural areas, usually an elevated or hilltop site set aside for cult worship; (2) In cities, a platform or altar. Old Testament high places were sanctuary sites, set aside by the Canaanites as places to conduct religious rites. These places often featured symbolic stones (Heb., massebot), altars for sacrifice or burning incense, a wooden Asherah pole, along with graven or molten images, various vessels, and sometimes a raised platform. The rites conducted at high places often involved immorality and even child sacrifice." (The Revell Concise Bible Dictionary, Fleming H. Revell, pages 273-274)

The Israelites had taken part in very grievous sins, some of which consisted of Idol worship in its worse form. The Lord was going to remove all physical evidences of Idol worship in Israel by destroying their high places.

Verse 4: **"And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols."**

An altar is typically an elevated place or structure upon, or even before, which religious ceremonies, sacrifices, and prayers are offered and performed. High places typically consisted of an altar or many altars. In destroying the high places of Israel, the Lord also promises to make their altars desolate. They too would be destroyed.

In addition, the idols or images themselves would be broken. The Revell Bible Dictionary defines an image as follows.

"Image - (1) Old Testament: an Idol - wood or metal shaped to represent an object or being; (2) in the Old Testament, used with 'likeness' to make a statement concerning human nature." (The Revell Concise Bible Dictionary, Fleming H. Revell, page 290)



**Computer generated depiction of
an Ancient Mayan Altar**

Images and idols are essentially statues and carvings of false and nonexistent gods that people chose to worship in place of the true and living God. Despite the beliefs of those that worshipped them, they were never more than the materials that they were made of. They offered no protection or support, other than a false sense of emotional security created in the minds of those that practiced idol worship. The Israelites had obviously built altars containing idols to worship. This could not be tolerated by the Lord. The idols would be destroyed and with them many Israelites would die before their altars.

Verse 5: “**And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars.**”

In this verse, the Lord makes reference to ~~dead carcasses~~ and ~~bones~~. Both are rather obvious symbols for death. It is further explained that the dead will be laid around their altars and idols. Such verbiage symbolizes that the cause of their death would be the fact that they worshipped idols and performed ceremonies to false gods on altars. Another observation that can be made in this verse is the fact that the Lord will bring this to pass. The "I" spoken of is indeed the Lord God.

In a strikingly similar event, the Book of Kings records of the destruction of idols in Israel many years prior. The story unfolds much like Ezekiel's prophecy is said to occur. The event is recorded as follows.

*"And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathanmelech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron. And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile. And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men. Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and **took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar,***

and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words.” (2nd Kings 23:11-16)

Obviously, the Lord brings about His purposes according to His own desires, but one might ask why would an enemy choose to lay the bones of the conquered dead around the broken altars of their idols? One answer is quite logical. The idols or gods of a country or people represented their strength. People relied on them for protection. By destroying the altars and idols, you effectively destroyed the foundation of their strength. It was the ultimate show of power over an enemy to lay the carcasses of the opponents dead before their fallen idols.

As for the fate of Israel, the psalmist summarized it best when he wrote, “*Our bones are scattered at the grave’s mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth*” (Psalms 141:7).

Verse 6-7: “**In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.**”

In addition to the death of many Israelites, brought about by their disobedience and disrespect for the Lord, the Lord promises to destroy their dwelling places. He also promises to destroy their idols and altars built to them. This passage leaves little to the imagination. The Lord is quite direct and clear as to His intents.

Verse 8: “**Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries.**”

Even though the Lord's wrath was to bring about such great destruction, He promises that there will remain a remnant. This does not mean that there will be those that escape the Lord's anger, but rather that there will be those that are subjected to the pestilence and destruction and yet live. The Revell Bible Dictionary defines a remnant as follows.

“Remnant - Survivors; that portion of a nation that escapes an event which destroys the majority. The remnant may then serve as the nucleus through whom

the group is renewed.” (The Revell Concise Bible Dictionary, Fleming H. Revell, page 468)

In support of this prophesy the prophet Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem, *“Yet a small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, and all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, mine, or theirs” (Jeremiah 44:28)*. Jeremiah is quite clear that many Hebrews would escape the death brought about by the Babylonians by fleeing to Egypt. It is also clear that at a point after the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, they would be allowed to return home. Despite this allowance by the Lord, it must keep in mind that no one escaped the Lord's wrath.

Why would the Lord choose to allow some people to escape the fullness of His wrath, that being death? The apostle Paul touched on the answer when he wrote, *“What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory” (Romans 9:22-23)*. Furthermore, Paul wrote, *“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5)*. The Lord apparently leaves a remnant, among other reasons, for a testimony to man of His power and mercy. He also does so for the rebuilding of His kingdom here on earth.

Verse eight ends by speaking of a remnant being scattered among nations. Those that fled to Egypt were but a fraction of the Hebrews that were scattered fulfilling this prophecy. Lehi and his family left Jerusalem just prior to the Babylonian siege and populated much of the Western Hemisphere of the earth. The Babylonians also spared the lives of thousands of Hebrews to serve as slaves. Eventually these slaves were either bought, sold, escaped or freed. Through this processes they were slowly scattered among nations all throughout Europe, the Middle East, and even into Asia. The Lord truly scattered His people.

Verse 9-10: **“And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations And they shall know that I am the LORD, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them.”**

The Lord makes it clear that those that escaped death during the Babylonian siege shall remember him. In other words, they will be sufficiently humbled.

The Lord also makes it clear that He is tired of their whorish heart. A whore in modern speech, or according to modern definition, is one who sells sexual acts for monetary gain. In biblical writing, a whore can also represent one who participates in idolatry, whether physical or spiritual. Like a literal whore, the symbolism is the same, they give that which is precious and pure in exchange for things that are worldly and base. The best example of this symbol is found in the Book of the Revelation of Saint John. He wrote,

*"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of **the great whore** that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." (Revelation 17:1-6)*

In addition to the use of a whore as a symbol, this passage combines it with the symbol of the heart. Revell Bible Dictionary defines the heart as follows.

***"Heart** [Hebrew - leb; Greek - kardia] (1) The true inner self; (2) rarely, the physical organ. In Hebrew thought, the heart was the center of each person's being and intellect. It is with the heart that a man feels, perceives, and makes moral choices." (The Revell Concise Bible Dictionary, Fleming H. Revell, page 267)*

The heart symbolizes all that one truly stands for. It symbolizes ones intent, feelings, and thought. It is ones true self. The children of Israel had apparently given their hearts to idol worship. In similar symbolism, the Lord goes on to say that they had departed from Him with their eyes. The eye symbolizes desire and intent. It is evident the Lord is angry at the Israelites' actions, but is more concerned over the fact that their intents and desires have changed to the things of the world. In the New Testament we read, *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart**"* (Hebrews 4:12).

The whole concept of God knowing ones desires and intents was not new to the Israelites. Moses, speaking for the Lord, said, *"And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God"* (Numbers 15:39-40). The Israelites were specifically commanded to keep their heart and eyes focused on the Lord.

For this gross act of rebelliousness, the Lord states that the children of Israel will loathe themselves for their actions and desires. The American Heritage Dictionary defines the term loathe as follows.

Loathe tr.v. to dislike (someone or something) greatly;
abhor

The children of God transgressed the laws because their hearts were changed. They lost the desire to do that, which was right, and consequently they erred in their ways. The prophet Hosea said it best when he wrote, *"My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God"* (Hosea 4:12).

In closing, the Lord clarifies the reason for His actions. In all His wrath, one message will clearly be conveyed, *"**The Lord is God**"*. The Lord says that He has not commanded any of this judgement in vain. The term vain is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as follows.

Vain n. 1. To no avail 2. In an irreverent or disrespectful manner.

In other words, the Lord has a purpose to His action, to reiterate that He is the God of Israel.

Verse 11-12: **"Thus saith the Lord GOD; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. He that is far off shall die of the pestilence; and he that is near shall fall by the sword; and he that remaineth and is besieged shall die by the famine: thus will I accomplish my fury upon them."**

This passage begins with verbiage that is quite odd in appearance. The Lord, apparently directing Ezekiel, tells him to smite with his hand, and stomp with his foot. The smiting of the hand and the stamping of the foot symbolizes frustrated rage. It would be much like our modern day expression; *"bang your head against a wall"*. Rightfully so, the Lord and his prophets must have been frustrated with the children of Israel. They had been warned and cautioned time and time again and yet they refused to listen.

As a result of the Lord's frustration, he pronounces his wrath. As he does so he uses the expression, *"Alas"*. This term is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as follows.

Alas interj Used to express sorrow, regret, grief, compassion, or apprehension of danger or evil.

The use of the word "Alas" is quite interesting. Despite the Lord's anger, He gives an expression of grief and sorrow. Like any good parent, He does not delight in the punishment of His children; however, He does know how necessary it is.

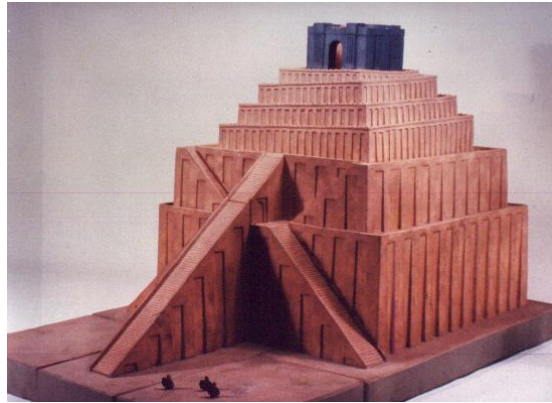
The wrath that is pronounced in these two verses has been discussed in some detail in chapter five of this commentary.

Verse 13: **"Then shall ye know that I am the LORD, when their slain men shall be among their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, the place where they did offer sweet savour to all their idols."**

Once again the Lord reiterates His promise to make it clear in the mind of every Israelite that He is the Lord, God. This shall be accomplished by the destruction of Jerusalem, and the death of many Israelites. In great Irony, the Lord will cause many of the Israelites to die amongst the idols that they built and relied on for strength.

Some of the words and phrases used in this verse seem foreign or out of place. In order to understand their meaning a better

understanding of Israelite Idolatry needs to be obtained. The verse makes mention of high hills and mountain tops. This references the fact that most idol worship of the time was associated with high places. The origin of this practice apparently comes from the Tower of Babel (see **Appendix D - The City of Babylon, the Religion and Culture**). The understanding was that the higher one was, the closer one was to deity.



The verse also mentions green trees and thick oaks. Trees were often worshiped as idols. They were also used to carve figures that represented idol gods. One of the most common idols carved from wood (trees) was the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar. In ancient Israel she was probably referred to as Asherah or Ashtoreth. Idol worship involving her usually centered around what was called an Asherah pole. Speaking of this practice and the ancient Israelites, Revell's Bible Dictionary says, "*Asherah [ASH-sheh-ah], Canaanite goddess of fertility and originally the consort of El, but, in biblical times, of Baal. Known also in scripture as Ashtoreth [ASH-tuh-rahth] and by the plural form Ashtaroth [Ash-tuh-rahth]. Asherah is linked with other fertility goddesses of the ancient Near East such as the Sumerian Inanna, the Mesopotamian Ishtar, the Babylonian Ashratum, Phoenician Ashirat, and the Greek Astarte.*

In biblical times, the people of Canaan and Syria worshipped Asherah as a fertility goddess. Her worship involved sexual excesses intended to stimulate rain and quicken the ability of animals and people to reproduce. Asherah figures were apparently made of wood, and the goddess is associated with sacred trees or groves of trees (asherot)...King Manasseh placed a carved Asherah pole in the Jerusalem Temple itself." (The Revell Concise Bible Dictionary, Fleming H. Revell, page 60)

A final reference is made to the offering of sweet savour to the Israelite idols. A savor, according to the dictionary is a pleasant aroma or taste. It is synonymous with the word incense. In ancient idol worship costly incense was burned as a sacrifice to the god being worshiped. Incense consisted of spices and herbs. As it burned the area would smell of the sweet aroma. The smoke and smell represented the prayers and pleas of the person making the offer. Symbolically, the smoke carried their prayers as it raised up into the heavens. The

offering of such prayers to idols was obviously an abomination unto the Lord. His wrath would bring an end to this practice in Jerusalem.

Verse 14: **"So will I stretch out my hand upon them, and make the land desolate, yea, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblath, in all their habitations: and they shall know that I am the LORD."**

The stretched out hand usually carries the symbolic meaning of the offering of help or assistance. It might seem rather odd that in the midst of pronouncing such strong judgments on the Israelites, that the Lord says he is stretching forth his hand. One explanation is that the wrath of God will act as a blessing to His children. Those that survive will be humbled and taught. Consequently, they will have opportunity to again walk uprightly before the Lord. Another explanation is that the out stretched hand simply represents the Lord sending forth his power. The hand symbolizes the power of action. No matter which explanation is appropriate, the fact remains that Jerusalem will be made desolate.

The extent of the desolation that the Lord was going to bring upon Jerusalem is compared to the wilderness near a place called *"Diblath"*. Diblath is only mentioned once in the scriptures. Unfortunately, for purposes of understanding the only place that mentions it is this verse. Many feel that it should be spelled and pronounced Diblah (dib-law) and is but an alternative form for the city Riblah. Diblath or Diblah is translated to mean *"place of the fig cake"* and is thought to be a place near the wilderness in northern Israel.

Riblah was a city of almost constant flux and turmoil. It had been controlled by the Egyptians, Assyrians, Israelites, Canaanites and many others. Pharaoh Necho of Egypt was driven out of Riblah by the Babylonians in 609 BC. It was a desired location militarily for its strategic location. In addition, it was of importance economically because of the trade routes that went through it. It was located at the headwaters of the Orontes River, which flows from Egypt to the Euphrates. Other than these two issues, it represented very little value. Riblah lies approximately 50 miles south of Hamath, and is primarily desolate.

The Lord might have made reference to Riblah in this prophecy to help the Israelites understand just how serious the wrath of the Lord would be. They were all aware of the battles and destruction that had taken place in Riblah. As a point of irony, in 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylonia, established his military headquarters in Riblah. Some years later he would conduct the great siege against Jerusalem from Riblah. It was from Riblah that the Lord brought to pass many of His judgements against Jerusalem. It was also there that King Zedekiah would later be blinded and his sons were executed. Truly, Jerusalem was would be as desolate as Riblah.

Chapter

Summary:

The chapter seems to repeat again and again, the message that the Lord will bring about the destruction of Jerusalem along with its idols and all the items associated with them. The message was to carry forth to all of the Hebrews. It was aimed not only at their leaders, but at every level of society. The Lord explains that the Hebrews would realize the fact that their idols were false gods, and that He is the true God of this world. The Lord goes further to explain that the inhabitants of Jerusalem would eventually hate themselves for their sins. Amidst the death and destruction promised by the Lord, he promises that a remnant would be spared. This remnant would be scattered over the face of the earth for bringing to pass the purposes of the Lord.

