

Chapter 8

Date: **The 5th of Elul, 3,169** (based on the Hebrew Calendar), six years after the installation of King Zedekiah as King of Israel. It is estimated to be between August and September 592 BC on our modern calendar. According to some Biblical Scholars the date for the vision contained in Chapter 8 is September 17, 592 BC. However, using Lunar tables and formulas to convert ancient Jewish dates to our modern calendar, the date is placed at **Sunday, August 13, 592 BC.**

Historical Setting: The prophet Ezekiel is living among his fellow Jewish captive's 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, most especially 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: The prophet Ezekiel was sitting in the comfort of his own home amongst the elders of Israel. As they visited, the Lord opens a vision before Ezekiel's eyes. In the vision, the prophet saw the temple of Solomon, and the Hebrews defiling it. He saw the acts of sin that the Hebrews were committing against their God. He saw idol worship and secret acts of abomination. The Lord promises to unleash his wrath on Israel for their sins.



Verse 1: “And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me.”

This verse represents the second time thus far in the Book of Ezekiel where the prophet gives us the date of his revelation. Chapter one recorded the date of that revelation as *"the fifth day of the month... in the fourth month...which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity"*. The Jewish Calendar uses a dating system that changes months according to the moon. It is often referred to as a lunar system, as the month changes at every full moon. It is often difficult to calculate ancient dates due to the fact that the calendar was adjusted periodically to assure that the lunar system matched the seasons for the purpose of planting and harvesting. These adjustments were not always consistent. Given this, there is always the likelihood that conversions to our modern dates might be off. Even so, the modern date for chapter one is converted from the Hebrew date of the 5th of Tammuz, 3,168 to Saturday the 25th of June 593 BC.

The basic layout of the Jewish calendar is as follows.

Order	1	2	3
Name of Month	Nisan	Iyar	Sivan
Otherwise known as	Abib	Zif	-----
Length of Month	30 Days	29 Days	30 Days
Present Day	Mar.-Apr.	Apr.-May	May-June
Order	4	5	6
Name of Month	Tammuz	Ab	Elul
Otherwise known as	-----	-----	-----
Length of Month	29 Days	30 Days	29 Days
Present Day	June-July	July-Aug.	Aug.-Sept.
Order	7	8	9
Name of Month	Tishri	Heshvah	Kislev
Otherwise known as	Ethanim	Bul	-----
Length of Month	30 Days	29 ^{or} 30 Days	29 ^{or} 30 Days
Present Day	Sept.-Oct.	Oct.-Nov.	Nov.-Dec.
Order	10	11	12
Name of Month	Tebet	Shebat	Adar
Otherwise known as	-----	-----	Adar I
Length of Month	29 days	30 Days	30 days
Present Day	Dec.-Jan.	Jan.-Feb.	Feb.-Mar.

Like chapter one, this passage in chapter eight gives a fixed date to the revelation contained hereafter. It is assumed that chapters two through seven fall between the two dates. The revelation in chapter eight, we are told by the prophet, occurred on "*the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month*". The year, we assume, is the sixth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. History records that Babylonia besieged Jerusalem on the 7th or 8th of December, 598 BC. After a short skirmish, the Babylonians took the city and killed its king, Jehoiakim. This left his son, Jehoiachin with the right to the throne. For a brief period, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon allowed Jehoiachin to reign as king under his control; however, the fear of future rebellion due to the fact that he had killed his father caused him to remove Jehoiachin from the throne by late December 598 BC. This is the reference to year used in chapter one. In early January of 597 BC, Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, was placed on the Judean throne by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. The year change can cause some confusion when establishing a year for dates given in the Book of Ezekiel. However, it should be remembered that the Jewish New Year occurred several months later. Based on this, the year for chapter eight is best placed at 592 BC. The modern date for chapter eight is converted from the Hebrew date of the 5th of Elul, 3,169 to Sunday, the 13th of August 592 BC. Though this date is the most likely converted date for the chapter, Parker and Dubbersteins wrote in their work "*Babylonian Chronology*" that the date for chapter eight of the Book of Ezekiel is actually the 17th of September 592 BC.

Assuming that the dates for chapter one and chapter eight are accurate, the time period (according to the modern calendar) between the two revelations is approximately 1 year, 1 month and 18 days or a total of 414 days. Reviewing the first seven chapters, and considering the short time period between the two dates, it is quite overwhelming to consider the extent of revelation given to the prophet from the Lord during this time. It also poses a question. In chapter four, Ezekiel was told to lie on his side for a total of 430 days. We assume that Ezekiel fulfilled the word of the Lord. If such were the case, how could Ezekiel be sitting in his house when the term of his days on his side were not fulfilled? Some have speculated that Ezekiel was only required to lie on his side for a portion of each day rather than round the clock. If Ezekiel were in the midst of fulfilling the Lord's word when the revelation contained in chapter eight was given, it might explain why the elders of Israel were in his home. Quite possibly, the elders were in the presence of the prophet awaiting further light and knowledge from the Lord since much of the information given to the exiles was symbolic and its full meaning was probably obscure to them. Yet another possibility is that the September date spoken of previously is the correct date for chapter eight. If so, the time difference between the

two revelations is extended to 448 day, giving time for the 430 days in which he was commanded to act out a heavenly play to occur.

Another interesting note should be made at this time. The prophet had previously been commanded by the Lord that he should be made dumb until the great destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 3:26). Ezekiel would only speak when the Lord caused him to. Considering this, the elders must have expected word from the Lord. Possibly the conclusion of the act that Ezekiel carried out in their presence brought them to the prophet for further instruction.

The first verse in chapter eight places the Prophet Ezekiel in his own house. This raises yet another interesting issue, could the captives own property and act as other Babylonian citizens? The captives taken exile into Babylonia usually found themselves as slaves in one form or the other. There were basically three different types of slaves in Babylonia; family slaves, serfs, and debt slaves. The different classes of slaves are defined as follows.

Family slaves were slaves that were owned by the family or man of the house. Typically the slave was the son or daughter of a slave who was also in the family. The man of the house or master of the slave usually treated the slave as a member of the family, though the slaves life was somewhat controlled. Family slaves rarely ran away, though there were laws against slaves running away, it is commonly felt that family slaves didn't run away because their life wasn't all that bad. The master of a family slave would often educate or train the slave in a field to increase the slave usefulness to the family. Though they literally worked as slaves, the family slaves were cared for by the master. They were given food and shelter along side the family, and in some cases an allowance of personal funds.

Serfs or **Slaves of the State** were slaves used in the service of the Royal Palace, Temples, or the government in general. They were typically individuals who were foreigners and obtained as a spoil of war. Serfs were generally never released from their service as slaves to the state, though if they were obedient and hard working there was opportunity for advancement within the ranks. They too were cared for by their master, and generally enjoyed a life of reasonable comfort, relative to common definitions of slavery.

Debt Slaves are an interesting concept under the topic of social welfare. If a Babylonian were to become indebted and unable to fulfil his obligation to the person or business under which debt was acquired, the debtor would become slave to that entity for a set period of time until it was deemed that the debt was repaid.

We have no clear proof as to Ezekiel's classification in Babylon; however, we can make educated guesses. Ezekiel could have been a family slave if he were sold or given away by the Babylonian government once brought back from Jerusalem. If this were the case, the house he might have been referring to could very well be the home of his master or a home provided by his master. If Ezekiel were a serf, or slave of the state, he might have been given a living allowance that also might have afforded him a home. Another option is that Ezekiel and some of the other captives from Jerusalem might have been brought back as relatively free men. Often the Babylonians would take captives and transplant them into a new area creating new communities or inhabiting conquered areas with people other than natives to the area.

One might ask what kind of living conditions Ezekiel lived under. A brief explanation of Babylonian homes and its culture can be found in "**Appendix D - The Religion and Culture of Babylon**".

The verse (The Book of Ezekiel chapter eight, verse one) goes on to say that Ezekiel sat in his home with the "*elders*". The term "*elder*" or as it is directly translated from Hebrew, "*old man*" is an official title used among the Jewish community, especially in ancient Israel. We know that there were seventy elders in the Jewish governing council. Though there might have been elders outside of that realm, elders were usually considered the leaders and wisemen. The actual functions of the elders are somewhat vague. We know that elders took part in discussions involving public affairs (Deuteronomy 21:19, 22:15). They were witnesses in business transactions (Ruth 4:9,11). They tried criminal cases (Deuteronomy 19:12, 21:1-9) as well as a litany of other responsibilities. Even though elders were involved in the government leadership, they retained their status even during occupation and exile. It is evident that the elders that were taken captive into Babylonia retained their leadership status during the Babylonian Exile.

Interestingly, the elders of Israel were intact to some extent during the Babylonian exile. Even more interesting, is the fact that the elders were gathered at Ezekiel's home. Was Ezekiel an elder and member of the Jewish leadership? Or was Ezekiel accepted as a prophet of God by the elders who were merely gathered to learn from the Lord's spokesperson? The answers to these questions are unclear, but it is probably safe to say that the elders were at least on talking

terms with the prophet. There doesn't appear to be animosity or friction between the two.

It was in the comfort of Ezekiel's own home and in the presence of the elders of Israel that the Lord opened up another revelation to the prophet. The prophet records that the "*hand of the Lord God fell upon*" me. As discussed in previous chapters, the hand represents the power to act, bless, move, and make change. The fact that the Lord's hand fell upon Ezekiel represents the fact that the Lord was going to act upon Ezekiel.

Verse 2: **“Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire: and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber.”**

A vision was beginning to unfold before Ezekiel's eyes. He says simply, "*I beheld*". From this statement we might conclude that the elders were not privileged to see the vision contained hereafter. This might seem odd that the prophet could receive a powerful and extensive vision in the presence of others and they not be able to see the vision. This, however, is not a new concept in the history of the Lord's people. The Lord often offers spiritual experiences to certain individuals while, for his own purposes, he denies others the experience even if they are present during its occurrence. A prime example of this is found in the Old Testament. We read in the Book of Numbers that a man named "*Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab*". Balaam had been commanded of the Lord not to make the journey. The scriptures go on to record the following.

"And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again. And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and

*Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay. Then **the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD** standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face (Numbers 22:21-31)."*

The Lord obviously has the ability of concealing the spiritual from the eyes and minds of man according to His will. Balaam couldn't see the angel in his path, yet his ass could. Only when the Lord chose to open the eyes of Balaam could he see. The Lord might very well have allowed Ezekiel a grand spiritual experience in the presence of the elders of Israel, without them taking part.

The first image that Ezekiel beholds in his vision was that of a man or at least the form thereof. He describes the man's appearance as fire. Fire has many symbolic interpretations. It can mean transformation, purification, life-giving renewal of life, power, strength, energy change from one state to another, spiritual power, creative forces, divine revelation, the voice of God, and even the destruction of the wicked. Fire is often used as a symbol for God. God is said to dwell in eternal burnings. His son, Jesus Christ, is also associated with such symbolism.

In further clarification, Ezekiel says that the man had the appearance of fire from the loins downwards. From the loins upward he appeared as the brightness of the color amber. Amber is usually the color associated with the golden transparency of the sun. It is associated with congealed light. The American Heritage Dictionary defines the word amber as a hard, translucent, yellow, orange, or brownish-yellow fossil resin. The word amber is also defined as a color, similar to that of the resin. The term brightness alone is a powerful symbol. Brightness makes reference to intense light. Light represents goodness, purity, righteousness, and that which is of and comes from God.

The image in Ezekiel's vision was more than just a heavenly visitor. We are not clearly told who the image represents; however, the symbolism associated with it suggests that it is in fact the great Jehovah, Jesus Christ.

Verse 3: “And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy.”

The heavenly visitor put forth His hand to Ezekiel. The extending of the hand is a symbol of offering. The prophet was going to be given something from the Lord. It is significant that the prophet wrote that the image in his vision extended a form of a hand. This might indicate that the man he saw was a spirit and not a resurrected being or a being of flesh and bone. This supports the theory that the visitor was Jesus Christ since at that time Jesus Christ had not been sent to the earth for the mortal experience and would consequently be a spirit at that time.

The extended hand took Ezekiel by a lock of his hair. This phrase is most likely symbolic. Though Ezekiel's hair might have grown back, it should be remembered that the Lord commanded the prophet to shave his head in chapter five, verse one. Used symbolically, the hair is a figurative expression for strength and wisdom. It shares in the symbolism associated with the head, that being the center of thought and ration. Symbolically the prophet is saying that the Lord took control of his intellect.

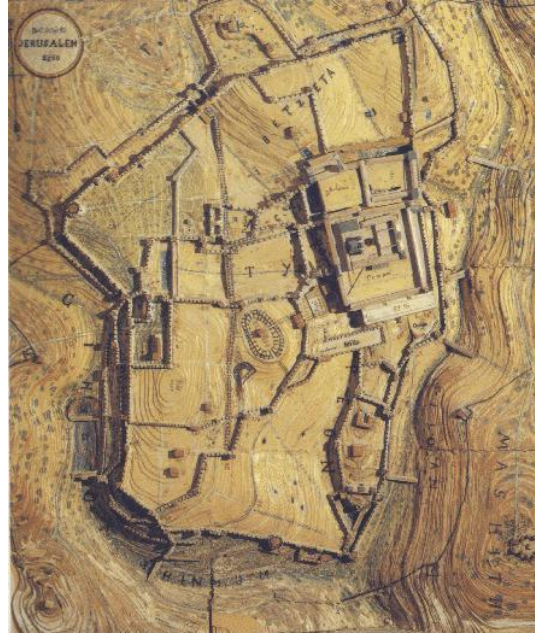
The prophet says that his spirit was taken up from between the heaven and the earth. The exact meaning of this phrase is somewhat unclear. It is often the terminology used when angels appear to men without touching the earth. When the angel Moroni appeared to the prophet Joseph Smith, he stood between the heaven and the earth. Likewise, Israel's King David "...saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem..." (1st Chronicles 21:16). The terminology is also used when referring to death. In an almost comical accounting, the Old Testament records, "And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away" (2nd Samuel 18:9). Generally speaking, it most likely represents the spirit or body leaving or being above the earth. In Ezekiel's case, one might ask if his spirit momentarily left his body, figuratively being lifted up "between the heaven and the earth".

After being lifted up between the heaven and the earth, the prophet then found himself back in his previous home, Jerusalem. This must have been odd for him, since the exiles longed for the opportunity to return to their homes in Jerusalem. There, in the spirit, he experienced the city in a reality that was almost as good as being there

in the flesh. It is in the great city of Jerusalem that much of the vision hereafter would unfold. Unfortunately, the vision Ezekiel saw was not a warm homecoming; it was a vision of Jerusalem's sins. The vision starts at the inner gate of the city.

There is some debate over where the "inner gate" that Ezekiel is referring to really is. Most believe that Ezekiel was making reference to a gate located in the wall of the inner court. The inner court makes

reference to the court of the temple. The American Heritage Dictionary defines a court as an extent of open ground partially or completely enclosed by walls or buildings. Of the temple's inner court, the scholar W. Cleon Skousen wrote,



Jerusalem

"This inner courtyard was called the courtyard of the priests because it was in this place that they did most of their work. Here was the great altar of sacrifice, the great brazen sea, and all the activities took place here involving the slaughter, washing, and sanctifying of vast quantities of sacrificial animals. This courtyard was completely surrounded on all four sides by a high stone wall in three courses topped by cedar coping" (The Fourth Thousand Years, W. Cleon Skousen, page 219).

Another theory about the location of the inner gate is that of the main walls of the city. It is speculated that Ezekiel was brought to the main gate of the city. This gate was the north gate, and not only saw a lot of traffic, but it was the usual approach of invading armies. The gate was also comprised of a double gate, an inner and an outer gate. It is supposed that Ezekiel was brought to the inner gate of the northern gateway of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel was brought by the Lord in spirit or in vision to either the gate of the inner court of the temple or the inner gate of the city walls. In either case, it is interesting that the prophet mentions the direction "north". The north typically represents coldness, darkness, barbarians, and the wrath of God. The north is not typically associated with good. This is fitting given the contents of the rest of Ezekiel's vision. In almost direct contrast to this the terms gate and door have positive symbolic meanings. A gate, if used figuratively, could represent entrance, protection, and entry into a new existence. A door similarly symbolizes hope, opportunity, entrance to a new life, and liberation.

As the prophet looked from his location, he saw a sight that would have made any God loving man or woman quiver. There he saw *"the seat of the image of jealousy"*. A seat is not referring to a chair or stool but rather the center, hub, capital, or base of something. Like Washington D.C. is considered the seat of the United States government, Jerusalem was being considered the seat of the image of jealousy.

What exactly is an *"image of jealousy"*? The answer to this question can be found in Israel's base laws, the Ten Commandments. The Lord told Moses, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee **any graven image**, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for **I the Lord thy God am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me"* (Exodus 20:3-5). The prophet saw what could be considered the capital of Idolatry. He saw the city of Jerusalem full of idols and idol worship. Idol worship causes the Lord jealousy. The emotion jealousy is usually associated with envy and coveting; however, we know that that is not a characteristic of our God. Here the word jealousy takes on another definition. It carries the meaning of intolerance of disloyalty or infidelity. This definition is fitting to our Heavenly Father, for isn't it written that God cannot look upon sin with the least amount of tolerance.

Verse 4: **"And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain."**

The glory of the Lord was there in Ezekiel's vision. It should be noted that the glory of God no longer resided in Jerusalem. The sins of the Hebrews had long since driven His spirit from them. The glory that Ezekiel is speaking of is the power and manifestation similar to that described in chapter one, *"the vision"* he *"saw in the plain"*. The

prophet doesn't go into detail, but one might imagine that there were angels and splendor associated with the vision, even though Ezekiel spends most of his time describing the Hebrews in Jerusalem.

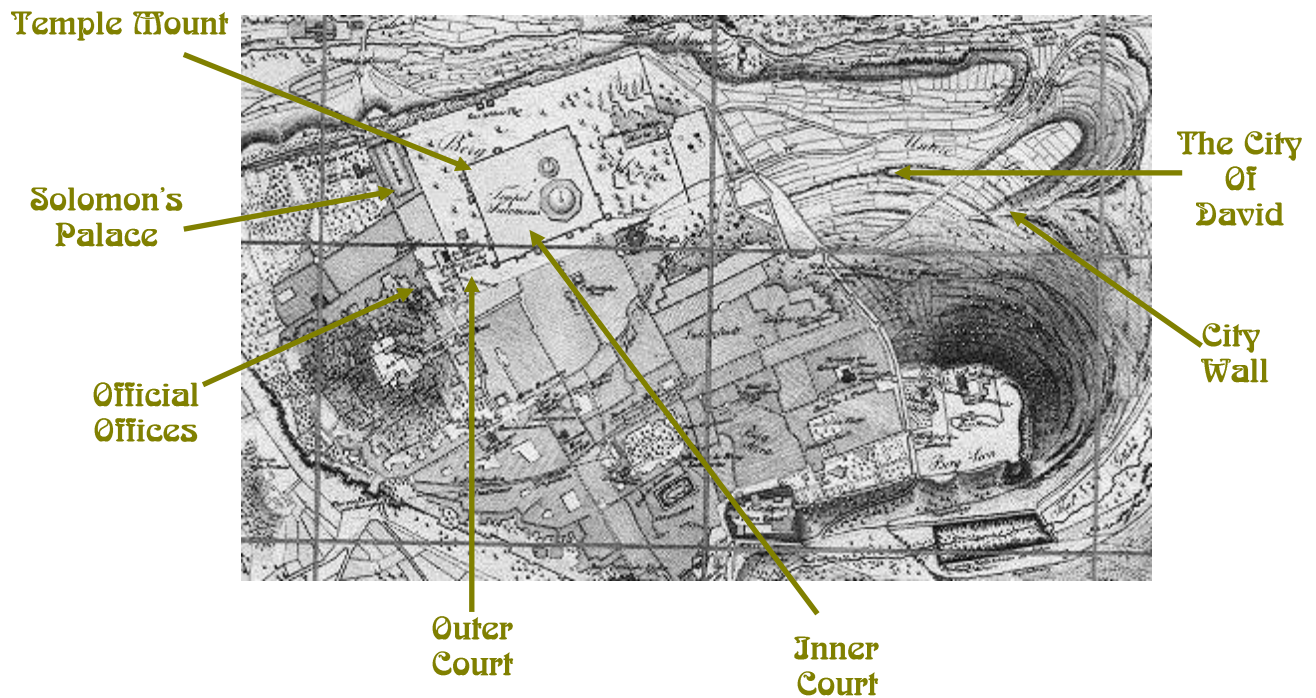
Verse 5: “Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry.”

Here again, the Lord, calling Ezekiel "*Son of man*", shows him a new location in the city where yet another act of sin is occurring. Like verse three, there is some debate over where exactly this location is. Ezekiel, we suppose, is standing at the inner gate to the northern entrance through the city walls of Jerusalem. From here he is asked to look northward. As he looked northward, he saw the gate of the altar. It is assumed that the gate spoken of is the gate next to the Palace Complex which was most commonly used by the priests to access the altar in the inner court.

Modern Jerusalem

with references to

Ancient Locations



From Ezekiel's vantage point, he saw an "image of jealousy" standing before the gate. In other words, the Hebrews had erected an idol before the entrance to the Lord's house.

Verse 6: **“He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.”**

The Lord takes a moment to ask Ezekiel several questions. Basically, He asks, do you see what the children of Israel are doing? And, do you understand why my spirit no longer dwells in the Temple? These questions were not answered here by the Lord; however, the entire chapter serves as sufficient answer to the Lord's query. The Lord leaves the questions for Ezekiel to ponder and directs him to yet another site in Jerusalem where the prophet could observe the Hebrews' sins.

Verse 7: **“And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall.”**

The gate that Ezekiel is suspected to have looked upon from the north gate of the city wall now becomes his next destination. The Lord brought Ezekiel to the gate of the outer court of the temple. It was adjacent to the Palace Complex. W. Cleon Skousen wrote, *"The outer courtyard enclosed the entire temple ground and more or less formed a huge quadrangle. It had several gates, and was referred to as a place of general assembly...like the inner enclosure, this court had walls of stone topped by cedar. The eastern side boasted a beautiful colonnade which was a favorite meeting place for the learned teachers"* (*The Fourth Thousand Years, W. Cleon Skousen, page 221*). The outer court was considered part of the temple grounds, though it was not as sacred as the inner court, it was considered a holy place. *"There was planted beautiful trees and shrubs in the outer courtyard"* (*The Fourth Thousand Years, W. Cleon Skousen, page 221*). People would gather to worship and pray there.

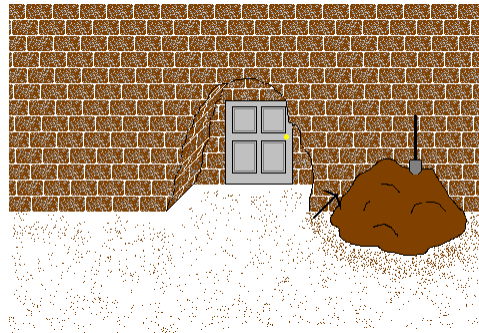
As Ezekiel stood in front of the gate, no doubt beside the blasphemous idol, he saw an odd sight. He saw a hole in the wall. This observation, though probably appearing quite real in his vision, was undoubtedly a vision created by the Lord as a symbolic teaching tool. To better understand the meaning behind this part of the vision, the symbols involved should be understood. A wall could symbolize a barrier, protection, over-whelming obstacles, limitations, and boundaries between the God and man. A hole, on the other hand,

symbolizes void, emptiness, and the gateway to the spiritual. A hole in the roof of the temple represents an opening into the celestial world. Passing through a hole can represent passing from the physical to the spiritual.

It can be suggested that the Lord had placed certain regulations and limitations on the children of Israel. To obtain the Lord's blessings, certain paths and gates must be followed. The hole symbolizes deviation from the Lord's course. It symbolizes the sins of the Israelites.

Verse 8: “Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door.”

After viewing the hole in the wall of the temple court, the Lord instructs Ezekiel to dig in the wall; we assume expanding the hole. The term dig carries the figurative meaning of uncovering, revealing, and showing that which was hidden. Ezekiel was symbolically uncovering the sins of Israel. After exposing the entire hole, Ezekiel saw a door. A door typically symbolizes hope, opportunity, entrance to a new life, and liberation. However, in this passage it carries a symbolic meaning similar to that of the word “dig”. The closed door represents the covering of sins. It symbolizes the hidden. The Israelites somehow believed that that which they did in secret was not seen by the Lord. How wrong they were.

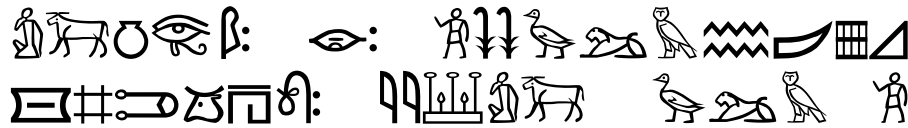


Verse 9-10: “And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about.”

The Lord invites the prophet to enter the door, and is told to look at the sins that the Israelites perform in secret. Before going further, it is noteworthy to mention Ezekiel's approximate location. Previously, it was mentioned that the prophet was next to the Palace Complex when he saw the hole. The wall that he saw the hole in could very well have been adjacent to the meeting place of the Jewish

Council, or the governing body of Jewish Elders. This adds a significant dimension to the vision.

Ezekiel followed the Lord's direction and entered the door that he unearthed in the wall. Upon doing so he saw "every form of creeping thing", "abominable beasts", and all the "idols" that were being worshipped in Israel. The idols are probably somewhat easy to envision and understand their use, but what are the creepy things and beasts spoken of? One bible scholar wrote, "It is very likely that these images portrayed on the wall were the objects of Egyptian adoration: the ox, the ape, the dog, the crocodile, the ibis, the scarabocus or beetle, and various other things. It appears that these were privately worshipped by the Sanhedrin or great Jewish council consisting of seventy or seventy-two persons, six chosen out of every tribe, as representatives of the people. The images were portrayed upon the wall, as we find those ancient idols are on the walls of the tombs of the kings and nobles of Egypt" (Commentary, Clark, 4:443). The Jews had obviously adopted idol worship in many forms, from many cultures. They apparently even covered the walls of the grand council room with idolatrous Hieroglyphs.



Verse 11: "And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up."

Ezekiel, we assume was standing in the Grand Council room of the governing body of Israel. This body was later given the name 'Sanhedrin', meaning 'council'. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish senate and the highest native court in both civil and ecclesiastical matters were addressed. The presiding High Priest ruled over the Sanhedrin. The number of members of the Sanhedrin was seventy, though the number was found to be seventy-one and seventy-two at various times during its existence. Many suspect that the Sanhedrin is the cloudy remains of Moses' seventy elders who were selected to lead and guide the children of Israel. The Book of Numbers records,

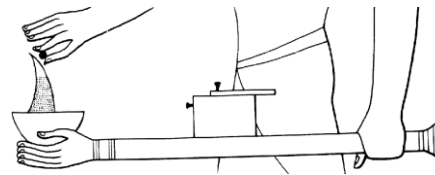
"And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them;

and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee” (Numbers 11:16).

Though the council of seventy was formed at the time of Moses, in all actuality, the date in which the title Sanhedrin was given is unknown.

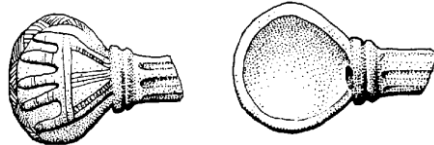
As Ezekiel stood in this great room, he saw the seventy men called the "ancients" or elders of Israel. He then makes specific mention of one by name, Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Jaazaniah is mentioned in no other place in scriptures, however, his claim to fame is through his father. Shaphan was the right hand man of King Josiah of Israel (2nd Kings 22:3-14). He was the equivalent of our Secretary of State. Josiah attempted to reform Israel from the idolatry and wickedness of year's past. Though he was very successful in cleaning up Israel, so to speak, it appears that Israel reverted back to their old ways. The mention of Shaphan's son as a member of the Grand Council was significant. It is a perfect example of the decay of the Jewish society. Jaazaniah came from a righteous family, but had turned to idolatry and was part of the council that was leading the citizens astray.

As Ezekiel looked around the room he noticed that every man held a censor in his hand. A censor was a vessel used to burn incense. Incense symbolizes homage to deity, purification of the soul, communication between man and God, and prayers rising to heaven.



Man holding a Censer

shaped as a cupped hand holding a bowl.
He is adding Incense to the fire.



shaped as cupped hands symbolizing offering and sacrifice.

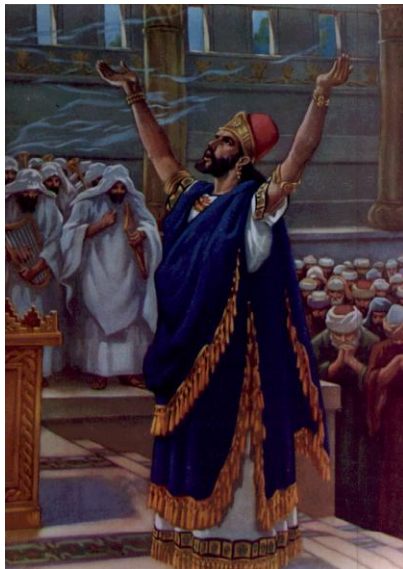
The elders were obviously burning incense since Ezekiel says that he saw a thick cloud of smoke rise from the room. The cloud represents the hidden. It is used to symbolize the veil, hidden mysteries, and secrets. When a cloud of smoke rises, it represents the prayers of saints rising to God.



When Solomon finished the temple that he was commanded of the Lord to build, he offered burnt offerings and burned incense to show his gratitude to the Lord God. The smoke of the offerings rose to the heavens. This was a practice followed amongst the Israelites from the days of Moses. It was a law practiced by all righteous Jews, and therein lies the problem with this verse. The elders of Israel burned incense and made offering to the Lord, yet they were far from righteous. They followed the outward ordinances, but in secret they worshipped idols. They were hypocrites. Professing to love and worship God, but walking after the ways of the world around them.

Two Pictures showing Solomon on The Day of Dedication of the Temple

Note the presence of clouds or smoke rising to heaven



Verse 12: “Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not: the LORD hath forsaken the earth.”

The Lord again pauses to ask the prophet a question. He asks, do you see what the elders (leaders) of Israel do in the dark? Darkness represents evil, the hidden, secret combinations, and deception.

The Lord finishes his question with the phrase "every man in the chamber of his imagery"? It was common practice among societies of the Near East to worship hundreds of idols. The Babylonians had over 2,000 known false gods that they worshipped. The members of society would adopt idols to worship depending on the circumstances of their

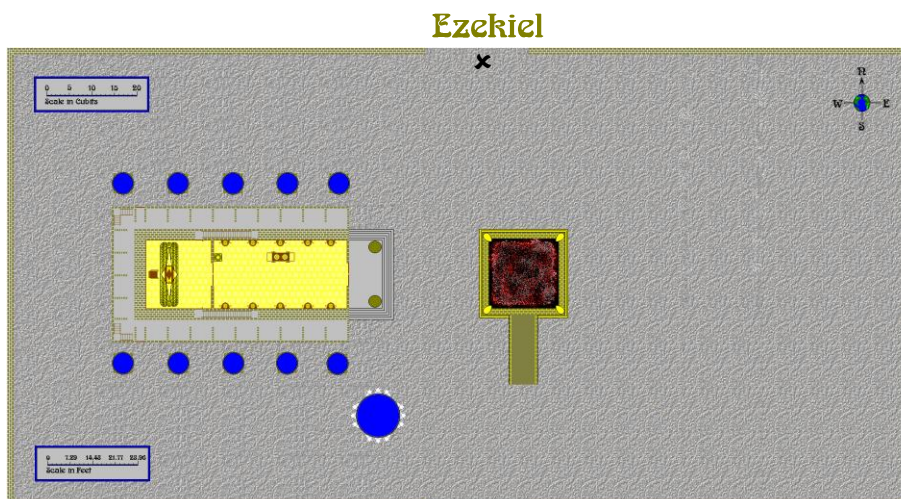
life. Farms would adopt the god of the field, while scribes might adopt the god of wisdom. There was just about a god for every occasion. It was common to build small shrines in homes and throughout the city for the purpose of worship. Apparently, the elders of Israel and the inhabitants of Jerusalem had adopted this concept; every man worshipping at the shrine of his image or the image that he selected to worship.

The Israelites felt that the Lord couldn't see their actions because they kept them secret. Isaiah wrote,

"Alas for those who deeply from Yahweh hide their plans, whose deeds are done in the dark, and who say, Who sees us? Who knows us?" (Isaiah 29:15).

Verse 13-14: "He said also unto me. Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz."

Continuing on his visit, Ezekiel was told to look at yet another act of sin committed by the Israelites. To see this, Ezekiel was lead out of the Grand Council Room, to the gate of the Lord's House. We assume that he was led back out the hole in the wall, and through the gate at the north side of the wall surrounding the outer courtyard. The prophet was then lead through the outer courtyard to the north gate of the wall encompassing the inner courtyard of the temple of Solomon.



The Temple of the Lord, called
Solomon's Temple
(Shown in the inner court above)

Once standing before the gate of the temple itself, Ezekiel saw a puzzling sight. There were women in great mourning. Their sorrows; however, were not for lost loved ones or over pain and anguish but rather part of a Babylonian cult ritual involving a false god. In the fourth month of every year, a ritual mourning for a god named Tammuz was performed. Tammuz was a fertility god that died every fall, only to be risen each spring by the pleas of his worshippers in the ears of the other gods. The ritual was even conducted during a month that was named after him. There are no surviving depictions of the god Tammuz, which is quite odd for a god of his popularity. Many theorize that Tammuz is merely another name for the Babylonian god Marduk who has similar characteristics and legend surrounding him. More information regarding Tammuz and the other gods of Babylon can be found in "**Appendix D - The Religion and Culture of Babylon**".



Marduk

One side note is that this vision is given in the month of Elul, not Tammuz. Many suspect that the vision shows things from the past to Ezekiel as though they are present.

I am sure Ezekiel is starting to truly realize the extent of Israel's sins. The city was full of idols, the leaders worshipped them in private, and the women of Israel worshipped them in the outer court of the temple.

Verse 15-16: "Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east."

Was the amount of disobedience not bad enough? No, there is worse. The Lord leads Ezekiel from the mourning women in the outer court through the gate and into the inner court of the Temple. There, Ezekiel would have seen the great altar of sacrifice, the lavers of washing, the great Brazen Sea, and of course the magnificent house of the Lord.

The Temple of Lord, called Solomon's Temple



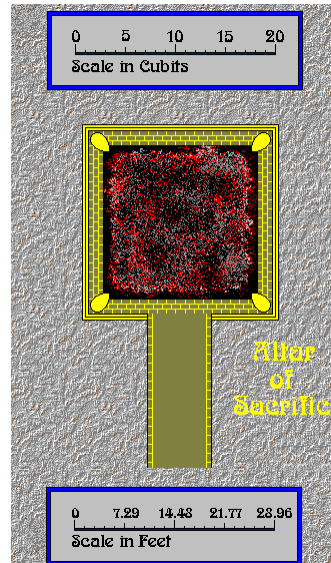
As Ezekiel focused his eyes on the inner court he saw the great doors of the temple itself. Just prior to the doors stood the great porch with the columns named Boaz and Jachin. There were ten steps from the porch to the ground and before that stood twenty-five men. These men are generally assumed to be priests. They were looking east with the great horned altar of sacrifice standing in front of them.



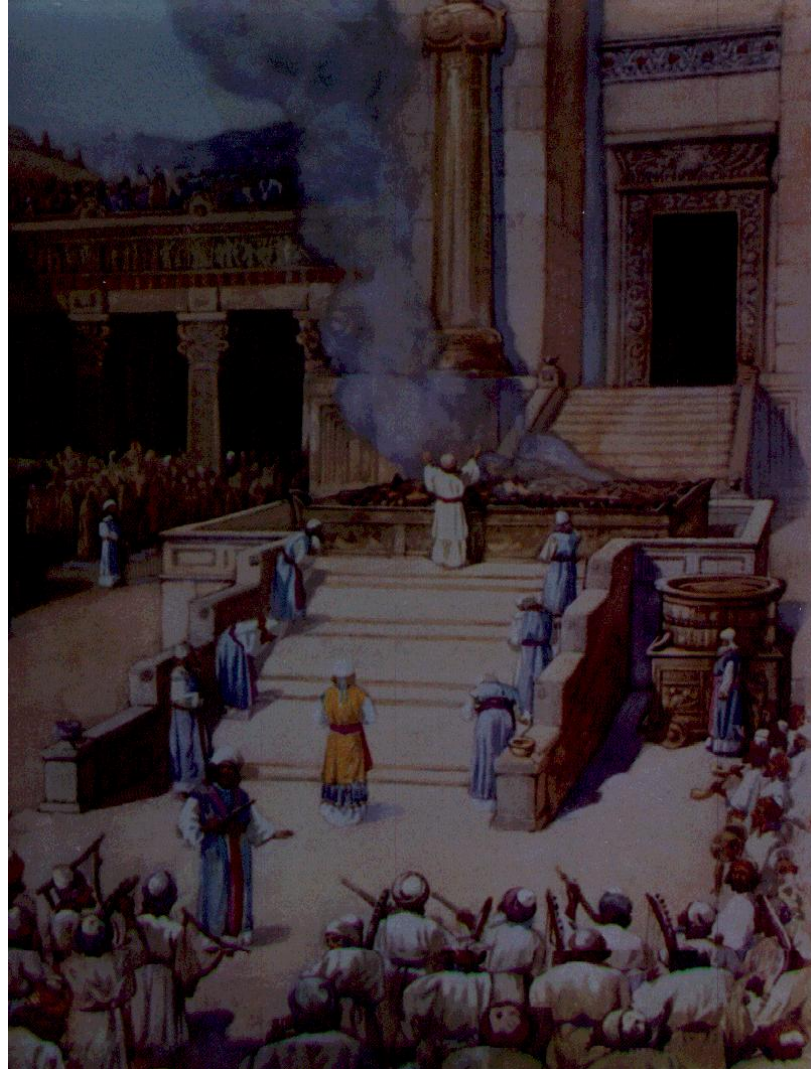
An example of an
ancient
Horned Altar

Hence, the altar also symbolizes the tomb, the resurrection, and the life hereafter. The area between and around the Lord's house and the great altar of sacrifice was considered very sacred. It was often the area where the priest would offer prayer to their God. The prophet Joel recorded one example of this when he wrote, "Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" (Joel 2:17).

The altar symbolizes the divine presence of God. It also symbolizes sacrifice and the reunion of man and God. Another symbolic definition for the altar is the fact that in certain instances it represents the tomb of Jesus Christ.



Picture of the Priest at The Great Altar of Sacrifice



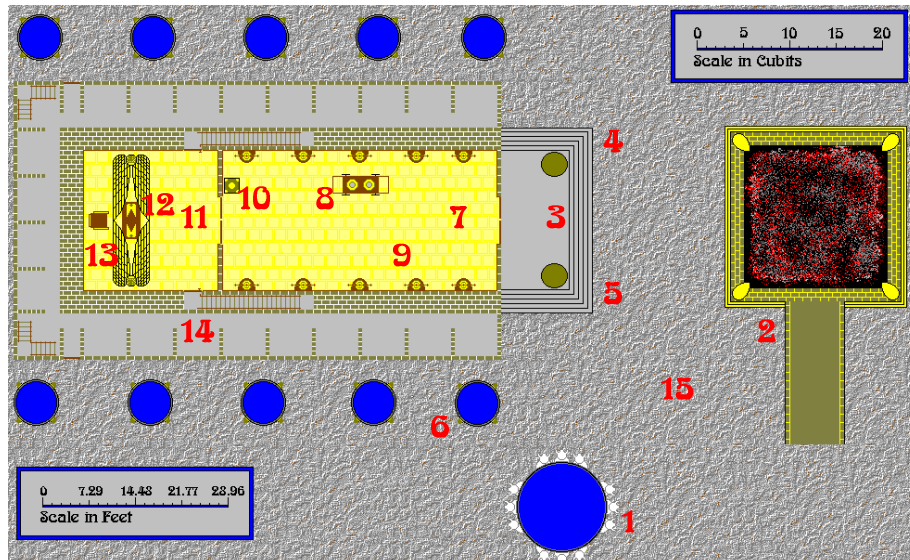
Thus far one might ask, what's wrong with this picture? There doesn't appear to be any idols, or wrong doing. Upon further examination, and explanation of the Lord, there is much wrong. It must first be understood that the temple represents the Lord's house. The Israelites considered it His literal residence. When the priests prayed to God, they prayed toward the temple. Here we find that the priests were facing east, away from the temple. The prophet says that their backs were towards the temple and their faces



looked east. Jeremiah said speaking of the Jews, "And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction" (Jeremiah 32:33).

Symbolically, turning your back on something or someone denotes denunciation, rejection, or refusal. This is literally what the priests of Israel had done. The prophet Ezekiel noted that they were engaged in the worship of the sun. This worship involved looking towards the east where the sun rises, and offering supplication to the celestial mass. The sun god was the Babylonian god "Shamash", though he has many names throughout many cultures.

The Temple of Solomon & its immediate surroundings



#	Legend
1	The Brazen Sea
2	The Altar of Sacrifice
3	The Porch
4	Joachim, the Pillar
5	Boaz, the Pillar
6	The Lavers of Washing
7	The Sanctuary

#	Legend
8	The Table of Shewbread
9	The Golden Candlesticks
10	Altar of Incense
11	Holy of Holies
12	The Ark of the Covenant
13	The Cherubim
14	The Side Chambers
15	The Inner Court

Verse 17: “Then he said unto me, *Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose.*”

After seeing four separate showings of Israel's idolatry, the Lord asks Ezekiel, "*hast thou seen this?*". Without waiting for an answer, the Lord explains that the things which He showed Ezekiel were not light things. In other words, they were serious offenses; serious enough to anger the Lord. Their offenses have caused them to fill the land with violence. Transgression, if not repented of, usually leads to other sins. If a society travels down that road of transgression, one will find a land full of theft, immorality, murder, rape, and acts of violence in general.

This verse is pretty much straight forward, except for a twist at the end. As a final exclamation, the Lord says, "*and, lo, they put the branch to their nose*". Many feel that the branch to the nose was an essential part of the worship of the sun god, "*Shamash*". Supposedly, the worshipper was required to place a small tree branch or twig under his or her nose to protect the sun from being contaminated with his breath.

Verse 18: “Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.”

This verse echoes a number of other verses previously written in Ezekiel's work thus far. The Lord keeps reiterating the fact that Israel has sinned without remorse. They refuse to listen to the prophets, and refuse to repent of their sins. Consequently, the Lord condemns them. He promises to "deal in fury". This is referring to the great destruction that the Lord is going to send to Jerusalem, the Babylonians.

The Israelites continual rejection of the Lord's pleas, warnings, and supplications have caused Him to issue His judgement without reprieve. The time for repentance is not during judgement. This should be a lesson for us. We cannot reject the Lord's word, and then during His wrath think that we can but call His name and find relief. The Lord warns the prophet Ezekiel that the Israelites will cry to him for relief from the Babylonians, but He will not answer them.



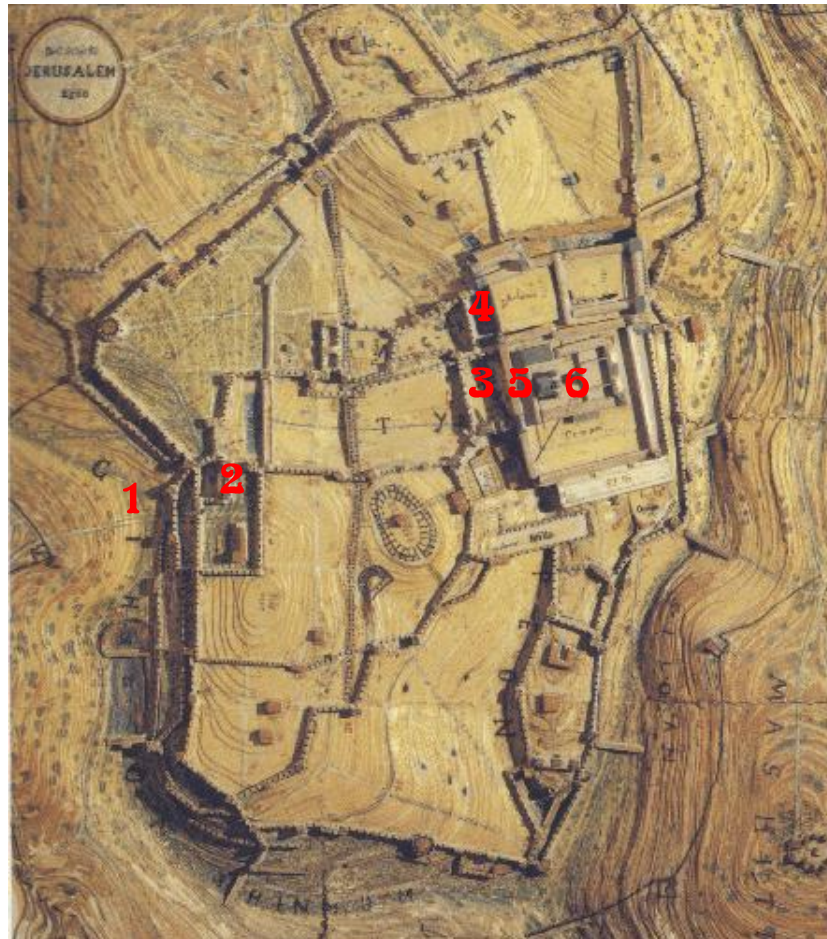
Chapter

Summary:

The prophet Ezekiel, while sitting at home with the exiled elders of Israel, received a vision from the Lord. In the vision, the Lord appeared to Ezekiel and took him to Jerusalem. There the Lord showed the prophet the sins of Israel. The vision can be outlined as follows (reference the numbers on the map of Jerusalem located on the following page).

#	Verse	Location	Content
1	Verse 3	Outside the North City Gate of Jerusalem	The Lord tells Ezekiel that the City of Jerusalem has become the center of Idolatry.
2	Verse 5	Inside the North City Gate of Jerusalem	The prophet passes through the gate of the city and looks to the northern gate of the outer court and sees an idol in the gateway.
3	Verse 7	Outside the North Gate of the Outer Court of the Temple	The prophet proceeds to the outer court of the Temple where he sees a hole in the wall.
4	Verse 10	Inside the Grand Council Room in the Palace Complex	Entering through the hole, the prophet finds himself in the grand council room of the Sanhedrin. The walls are adorned with Egyptian gods which the Sanhedrin worship. They do this, yet still carry out the ritual rite prescribed by the God of Israel.
5	Verse 14	The Outer Court, Just outside the North Gate of the Inner Court	The Prophet passes through the northern gate of outer court. Upon entering the court he sees women mourning. They are mourning for the god Tammuz which is part of an annual fertility ritual.
6	Verse 16	Inside the North Gate of the Inner Court of the Temple	The Prophet passes through the northern gate into the inner court of the Temple. Here he sees the priests of the temple. They have their backs to the temple and branches in their noses. They are partaking in worship rituals to the Sun god.

Jerusalem



After seeing the various acts of Idolatry in Jerusalem, and among the Jews, the Lord tells the prophet that He will visit Israel in anger. They have rejected Him beyond the point of return. His wrath will be issued and Israel will not be able to turn to him for relief.

