

Bible Study # 55
August 14, 1990
Mr. John Ogwyn

Major Prophets Series—Ezekiel 1—16

We are getting into the book of Ezekiel this evening, and I think it's appropriate to start out with an illustration. The term "watchman" is a term that we don't frequently use anymore. Years ago there was what was termed a "night watchman." Everybody else was in bed sleeping; this one person was supposed to see if anything happened—fire breaks out or some vandalism occurs.

Going back further than that, at the time Ezekiel was written, generally towns were almost like a little fort. There was a wall around these towns. The fields that the people farmed were outside the wall. When there was danger, people came into the town inside the wall. The gates were closed and they were in a fortified situation where they were protected.

There was an important responsibility in these areas, and this was the job of the watchman. Normally, on any city wall, there was a high tower at a strategic point along the wall and in that tower was an individual whose job was to watch. In the type of terrain that you have in many areas in the Middle East, you could look out quite a distance and you could observe something out of the ordinary.

Particularly, you would see a dust cloud. A lone horseman or one individual walking wouldn't make much dust (a horse would make a little more than an individual walking), but a whole gang of horses and chariots would really kick up a lot of dust. You could see that quite a way on the horizon. It took them time to get there. The very fastest traveling was on horseback or in a chariot pulled by a horse, so you had a little time.

The watchman would observe and if it appeared that danger was approaching, his responsibility was to sound a blast of alarm. They sounded a blast. Generally, the Shofar (a ram's horn) was customarily used because it made a high shrill sound that could be heard for a long distance. It wasn't long ago that bells were often used to signal the time—a dinner bell, etc. This ram's horn carried a sound more like what we would think of as a brass trumpet today. It was a very important job because the survival of the community could depend on the watchman doing

his job. In many cases, there would be marauding bands of robbers out to get what they could.

As we go through the book of Ezekiel, we find that he was told that he was to be a watchman for the house of Israel. He was the one responsible for standing on the pinnacle observing, taking note of what was happening and sounding the blast of alarm warning the nation of impending danger. But there was one problem with that.

As we go through it, we find that the book of Ezekiel was written about 596 B.C. There were three Babylonian invasions and all three were led by King Nebuchadnezzar. The first one took place in 604 B.C. Right after he became king, he launched the first Babylonian invasion there in the Middle East. He came all the way down through Judea and down toward Egypt. At that time he did not destroy those nations or deport the population. He took a few back, but what he basically did was ensure that a king friendly to him was on the throne and that they would start paying him tribute. He was satisfied with that.

Things "rocked along" for about eight years. Because things weren't working the way he had anticipated, he came back in 596 B.C. and changed kings (II Chronicles 36). Nebuchadnezzar took the king (Jehoiachin or Coniah) as a prisoner of war and hauled him back to Babylon. He also took a number of leading citizens and he increased the taxes.

Another nine years later, about 587 B.C., the Jews again rebelled against him; this time he came in ready to do serious damage. He burned the temple, burned Jerusalem, destroyed the area and deported the population.

There were three invasions that took place over a period of time. Ezekiel is writing in the context of the second invasion, about 596 B.C. The point that I would like to make, and as we are going to notice in going through the book of Ezekiel, is that Ezekiel addresses the house of Israel. He says that he was given a message as a watchman to the house of Israel. Do you see what the problem is with that? The house of Israel went into captivity—not to the Babylonians but to the Assyrians about 721 B.C.—over 125 years before Ezekiel wrote. The northern ten tribes, the house of Israel, had long since been in captivity.

One hundred twenty-five years is a long time. One hundred twenty-five years ago takes us back to 1865 A.D., the year that saw the end of the War Between the States. That's been a long time ago. Anybody remember that? No, there is nobody alive that remembers that. One hundred

twenty-five years is a long time. When you start talking about the War Between the States, it's so long ago that it seems like ancient history to many people, particularly to young people.

That's how long had transpired between the time Ezekiel was writing his message and the time earlier when the house of Israel had gone into captivity. So there was a problem. Ezekiel was writing a warning about impending captivity, but the people he's warning have been in captivity for 125 years. If that's who he was really warning, then you have to say he was a little bit late. And, in this case, I don't know if "better late than never" would have applied. If you are already in captivity, it's a little bit late for somebody to warn you that if you don't "straighten out," boy, are you going to be in trouble. One problem was the time element.

We will see that there is a distinction between the house of Israel and the house of Judah. That distinction is made plain in the book of Ezekiel. Solomon died 200 years before Northern Israel went into captivity. When King Solomon died, what happened? His son came to the throne. But that didn't last until the "water got hot" because the first thing the son was going to do was keep taxes high. Things haven't changed; "read my lips, no new taxes."

They were fighting about it centuries ago in ancient Israel. Solomon had taxes high. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, came along promising a new deal. Elect him king and he would lower taxes. So he swept into office. The northern ten tribes said, 'You are going to be our king. That's what we like; we don't like high taxes.' Rehoboam kept the southern tribe, the area around Jerusalem.

At that point, you had what was called the kingdom of Israel or the house of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judah or the house of Judah in the south (I Kings 12). Two hundred years came down since that time. The Assyrians invade and take the house of Israel into captivity and settle them in an area between the Black and the Caspian Sea, in the area of the River Gozan and the city of the Medes (II Kings 17:5-6). Israel is in that particular vicinity, an area that was quite a bit to the north of Babylon.

At a little later time, the Assyrians began to pass from the scene; after they did, the Babylonians came onto the scene. They rise to prominence, invade Judah and take the Jews into captivity. Where do they settle them? They settle them down around Babylon. Here is the northern house of Israel living up in an area that is not

even part of the Babylonian Empire. They are in an area that is independently ruled by the Medes, up in the area between the Black and the Caspian Sea.

And here is Ezekiel coming along as a watchman for the house of Israel and warning the house of Israel. First, he is late because they were taken into captivity 125 years ago; second, how is he going to get there? He is a slave in Babylon. He was taken prisoner of war to Babylon.

Was he going to come up to the soldiers and say, 'I think I need to leave; I have this important message and it's for these people who live a long way away. So, I'll see you later. God told me to leave.' Would they say, 'We'll open up the gates of Babylon and let you right out'? That "wouldn't fly" now and "wouldn't fly" then. Ezekiel was stuck there. He didn't have any way of getting out. How is he going to do it?

The point of the fact is that Ezekiel's message was not for his day. It is warning of captivity for Northern Israel, after Northern Israel was already captive. So it can only apply to a time yet future when Northern Israel would again be established as a nation. It is a prophecy as to what was going to happen.

Ezekiel differentiates between the house of Israel and Judah. The split had occurred 325 years prior to the time of Ezekiel's writings. Northern Israel had its capital at Samaria. They had already gone into captivity and were settled in the city of the Medes, the northern-most part of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, the area slightly south and between the Black and Caspian Sea. The House of Judah was taken captive between 604 B.C. and 587 B.C. by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. They were transported to the area of Babylon and settled in the southern Tigris-Euphrates Valley. The area where Israel had been settled over 120 years earlier was not ruled by Babylon. Ezekiel could not possibly have delivered his message to the people intended in his day. His message was warning of future captivity and destruction. This would have been meaningless to a people already in captivity.

The real impact of the message of the watchman for Israel is our time today. Mr. Herbert Armstrong began to understand that back during World War II and he began recognizing the responsibility of proclaiming Ezekiel's message. If it had meaning and impact for our peoples at that time—during World War II and the time right after—how much more does it have meaning for our people in the years immediately

ahead. We live at a very crucial and critical time in the history of mankind, and I think we all realize that. Somebody would have to be blind, indeed, to look at the world around and say they don't see anything that relates to Bible prophesy going on—those things must be for 100 years from now. Dream on! You can turn on the evening news, pick up a news magazine or newspaper and read things that a few years ago, the only place you ever saw it was in the Church magazines and telecast. Those of you who have been around for a few years know that. You remember that.

The first 16 chapters of the book of Ezekiel, which we **are going to focus on this evening, focus on the commission of the watchman.** There are specific warnings of calamity to Israel. There is a cataloging of Israel's sins. There are even a couple of inset chapters that give us a little insight into God's throne.

We will pick up the story in Ezekiel 1. God gets Ezekiel's attention. Ezekiel was here "minding his own business," so to speak.

Verse 1, he was among the captives by the River Chebar and, all of a sudden, he saw a vision of God. Ezekiel sees a vision that opens up. It was an incredible thing. Have you ever thought about how God goes places? Sometimes people have the idea that God just sits there.

When we were in Washington with the youth group, one of the places we went was the Lincoln Memorial. It's a very impressive place. There's this giant carved white marble chair, much larger than life. In this large throne-like white marble chair sits Abraham Lincoln, also carved out of white marble. This is sitting up on a high platform at the back of the memorial. It really dominates the inside. It is very impressive. I couldn't help but think as I saw that immovable, impassive white marble visage much larger than life, sitting there on that great throne-like chair, that's the way a lot of people conceive God.

Some people conceive God as just sitting there not changing expression, not moving and never getting up out of His throne. They think He just sits on His throne. It's like He is glued to His chair. God has a throne in heaven and He sits on that throne. But God doesn't just sit there immovable 24 hours a day, seven days a week, throughout all eternity, never getting up out of His throne. The fact that the scripture says He sits on the throne doesn't mean that He never does anything else.

I think it's kind of interesting in Ezekiel 1 because here's a picture of God—the One who

actually dealt with Israel, the One who we know as Jesus Christ—actually traveling through the universe in this conveyance, a rather impressive, striking sort of thing. When Ezekiel saw it, it appeared to be like this great circle of crystal. There was fire and flames shooting out. There were great brilliant lightening flashes. There were these unusual creatures under it. It describes wheels within a wheel—which is something like a gyroscope—and it can travel in any given direction. This wheel within a wheel enables it to turn in any way.

These creatures that were under it would strike us as very strange looking; yet, they were there. They had four faces; therefore, whichever direction they went was straightforward. Think of the advantages if you had four faces. Any direction you went was straightforward. That's the way these creatures were. When Ezekiel looked up, he thought there was a whirlwind. It looked like a tornado or something. As it came closer, he saw it was like fire unfolding itself. As it came closer, he saw this great brilliant device that had come there, very, very quickly. He describes it moving like lightening.

Ezekiel 1:14, "And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning." They had slowed down to the speed of light, which was slow by comparison to the speed they usually moved because if you just moved at the speed of light, you would spend a long time going across the universe.

Our closest star, Alpha Centauri, is somewhere around a couple of light years away. That means if you are traveling at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second), it would still take you two years to get there. That's a long way. There's nothing man knows that can travel at the speed of light—except light.

Here it describes these creatures that are attached to the transportation of the throne. When they ran and returned, it was like a flash of lightening. It was just instantly there. And that was in slow-motion. Because when they really wanted to go fast, they went beyond that to where they could transverse the universe virtually at the speed of thought. Some of the science fiction talks about another dimension. Well, there is another dimension; it is the spirit dimension. That is the dimension of eternity. That is the dimension that God inhabits. There are some incredible things. We are just given a little bit of it.

I think it is important for our young people to realize that God's Kingdom is not going to be dull. Sometimes the concept of being in God's

Kingdom is, 'Life sure is going to be dull because what does God do? He just sits on this throne.' Well, God does a lot of things, and I'll tell you one thing that God doesn't do. God doesn't look down on human beings and say, 'I wish I were a person; they have all the fun. They get to do all this exciting stuff and all I get to do is sit up here on My throne.' God never looked down envious of us and wished He could come down and have fun.

It's important to realize that we don't give up anything to be part of God's Family. It's like you better have all your excitement and fun now because the end is coming. You'd better pack it all in because once the kingdom gets here, that's the end of anything exciting. Well, if you like to ride fast, hold on to your hat because you have never ridden anything like this. You think it is a thrill? Well, it is!

I remember riding on horseback rapidly or coming down a hill on a bicycle. I remember the thrill of the first time you experience that sense of speed. Well, you have never moved with speed like God can move with speed. When we are a part of His Family, we will have access to all kinds of things.

God gave Ezekiel a little bit of a vision of the greatness and the power and splendor of God; he recorded it for us. I think it is important for us to realize that because sometimes we can have this kind of concept that comes out of religious art, which comes out of certain ideas that have been built up, which really doesn't come out of the Bible. There's no Being in the Universe who lives a more exciting, more scintillating and more enjoyable, wonderful existence than God does. And He offers to share it with us.

It's not a matter of having to give up excitement, fun and thrills. Who designed you to where you could enjoy things? Who made it possible for you to even experience emotions? Anything you can experience right now is only enough to whet your appetite, and it is only a tiny shadow of what God can experience on the spirit realm. I think that's important for us to realize and for our young people to realize.

Ezekiel sees this vision, this throne.

In Ezekiel 2, Ezekiel is given a commission. What is he told?

Ezekiel 2:1-5, "And He said to me, 'Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.' Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. And He said to me: 'Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a

rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they are a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them."

Based on verse 5, I would conclude that there remains yet a very powerful conclusion to this work to be accomplished. When all these things come crashing down, they are going to know that there has been a prophet among them. I don't think that would entirely be the case were everything to end up now.

There are, in certain sections in the United States, many who know some things about the Church and a little bit of what we've taught. But in terms of having really shaken this nation—particularly Britain, as well as Australia, New Zealand, Canada (the portions of modern-day Joseph), as well as the other areas of the house of Israel in northwestern Europe—I don't think we have really shaken them in the way that God has yet for us to do. So there remains a work to be done. At the right time, God will open the doors and will enable us to go through those doors if we are close to Him, walking with Him and if we're not "asleep at the switch." That may be in some cases.

Ezekiel's commission is described.

Ezekiel 3:4, "And He said to me: 'Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.'"

Verse 17, "'Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me.'" He was told to go and do this.

Verses 18-19, "'When I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you warn the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.'"

Basically, you give the warning. You do your part, but you don't control the response. But if you don't warn them, their blood will be required at your hands.

Verse 20, "'Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die;

because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.”

The job of the watchman carries with it a great responsibility. God’s servants will be held accountable for the consequences if they don’t convey God’s message. Satan would like nothing better than to have us get caught up in our own problems, to get caught up in petty squabbling and various things that divert our attention and our resources from the work that God has set before us to do. Satan would like to divert our attention and to subvert our efforts. I think we have to keep that in mind. It’s a matter of keeping priorities in mind.

Notice how clearly Ezekiel distinguishes Judah and Israel as two separate people. He told him he was to portray a siege.

Ezekiel 4:1-5, ““You also, son of man, take a clay tablet and lay it before you, and portray on it a city, Jerusalem. Lay siege against it, build siege wall against it, and heap up a mound against it; set camp against it also, and place battering rams against it all around. Moreover take for yourself an iron plate, and set it as an iron wall between you and the city. Set your face against it, and it shall be besiege, and you shall lay siege against it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel. Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. For I have laid on you the number of years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.” This had to do with portraying the punishment that was going to come upon the house of Israel.

Verse 6, ““And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year.”” He was to bear the iniquity of Israel 390 days, and for the house of Judah he was to bear it 40 days. This shows a very clear-cut distinction between the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

By the way, the 390 years, if we figure from the fall of the house of Israel (the Assyrians captivity and invasion) in 721 B.C. and come down 390 years (v. 6, a day for a year), it would bring us to 331 B.C. Now, 331 B.C. was a significant date because that is the year when Alexander the Great conquered the Media-Persian Empire.

Remember, the house of Israel had been settled by the Assyrians up in the city of the Medes. We are told that in II Kings 17:6. The empire of the Medes had been a subject people to the Assyrians. In 612 B.C., they gained their independence from Assyria. They conquered Nineveh. Nineveh was actually overthrown by a confederation of peoples and collapsed. The Medes gained their independence.

The Babylonians rose as a great empire. The Medes remained a little independent entity up in the north. Things “kicked along” for almost 100 years until the Medes and the Persians united, overthrew the Babylonians, and ruled as an empire. The Northern Israelites had remained captives. They had remained in a servant status for 390 years—from the time the Assyrians brought them up and settled them in the city of the Medes, all through the time of the Median Empire until Alexander the Great conquered the Medes in 331 B.C. When Alexander the Great overthrew the Medes, then the servants of the Medes (the Israelites) were freed and were free to migrate. That marks the beginning of the great Celtic invasion of Europe—coming across the Black Sea and up into Europe. This is a rather remarkable thing and the dates exactly correlate. It dates back to this time. This was the 390 years. As we come down, notice we are given some information about what is going to happen. Ezekiel was told to take some hair and divide it in three portions.

Ezekiel 5:1-3, ““And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber’s razor, and pass it over your head and your beard; then take balances to weigh and divide the hair. You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after them. You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment.””

Then he was told that this is what is going to happen to the house of Israel.

Verse 12, “““One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.””” That is what Ezekiel warned was going to happen to the house of Israel when they were taken captive.

That’s a warning that applies to our time yet future. We understand the great invasion, the

things that are going to take place, the fact that there is literally going to be famine and disease epidemics that are going to sweep this nation. The gods that our modern nations trust in to deliver them from such things are going to fail. They are going to find that the gods in which they have placed their trust as a nation are going to fail in their time of crisis. The American people trust in a multitude of gods. They trust in the gods of war, military might, economic power, the gods of technology, and of medical science—of all the various modern-day gods at whose altars people virtually worship in our modern nation. They stand in awe and think that surely, whatever problem, they have some humanly-devised solution that can solve it or there is some humanly-devised protection that can shield them. Well, we are going to find that is not the case. The only ones who are going to be spared—a handful—are the remnant that is bound up in the skirt. They're in a place of protection. This shows the calamity and events that are going to occur and the magnitude on which it will occur. As we come down, we see what is going to happen to our cities.

Ezekiel 6:6, “In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste....” There is going to be bombing and destruction. There are going to be tremendous cataclysmic events that are going to occur. It is something just beyond the mind of most modern Americans to even imagine or conceive of. We think those are the things that happen to other people in other nations. We see the stories of what happened to other people in other countries, and it's difficult for the average American to conceive that such things could happen here because they never have. But why haven't they? —Because as the book of Lamentations brings out, God has set a hedge about our people (Lamentations 2:6; KJV, margin). But He's going to remove the hedge. Is it going to be an all-out battle? Are we really going to be able to mobilize and put on a great show?

Ezekiel 7:14, there's an interesting verse, ““They have blown the trumpet and made everyone ready, but no one goes to battle; for My wrath is on all their multitude.”” He says they have blown the trumpet to make ready, but nobody goes out to battle. The indication is we're not even going to be in shape to retaliate. Why? I don't know. It doesn't say exactly. Maybe the people we have manning the nuclear arsenal are all “stoned” out of their minds when the word comes. That's not too farfetched. It doesn't say

exactly. The indication is a very demoralized circumstance will have occurred and tremendous internal strife and tumult.

Amos 3:9 talks about the tumults in the midst of her, referring to our people. In other words, there will be civil strife and unrest.

When you let serious economic crisis come, then the consequence of that is that people in the cities get hit the hardest of all because they are the least able to independently survive. Generally, the people who are at the bottom of the economic rung are going to be the hardest hit. That's always the way it is. You're going to have a lot of really severe problems. There's going to be civil strife and great unrest because when people start getting laid off. When there begins to be a great deal of economic calamity in a nation that has known plenty, it's hard for us to conceive there not being plenty.

There are some few of you here who remember the depression. As hard as it was on people then (people were better equipped to survive it than they are now), it's going to have a lot more calamitous results when it happens again. People are accustomed to having it so easy.

Some think the solution is to stock up on gold, guns, food and to defend themselves. They will have their own place of protection. There are various survivalist groups that have some of these concepts. They, at least, have a little bit of insight into some of the problems that are going to occur and they think that's the solution.

Notice what God says about those who take that way out, those who decide that what they are going to do is stock up on gold, guns, hoard their food, maybe get a cave somewhere and defend what they have.

Verse 15, ““...whoever is in the field will die by the sword; and whoever is in the city, famine and pestilence will devour him.”” So kind of take your choice here.

Verses 16-18, ““Those who survive will escape and be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each for his iniquity. Every hand will be feeble, and every knee will be as weak as water. They will also be girded with sackcloth; horror will cover them; shame will be on every face, baldness on all their heads.”” It talks about being weak. The indication would be of a nuclear destruction. It talks about their hair falling out. These are symptoms of nuclear fallout.

Verse 19, ““They shall throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be like refuse; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver

them in the day of the wrath of the Lord....”””

One thing about gold—it becomes very highly radioactive when exposed to radiation. One of the first things you would want to get rid of is your gold. It’s kind of an interesting thing. In the book of James, it talks about how the gold will burn them. It’s very descriptive if you read a little bit about nuclear fallout and radiation. It’s very descriptive of what happens with nuclear fallout and radiation.

James 5:3, “Your gold and your silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasures in the last days.” It talks about the effects of becoming radioactive, and it will just eat your flesh like it was fire. It is so very, very descriptive.

Some of the things that are described here, you know, people must have read that for centuries and scratched their heads and wondered how in the world could something like that happen? What could that mean?

Revelation 18:10, you read about Babylon the Great, “...“Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.””” People must have read that for centuries and scratched their heads. People must have figured that must be just kind of a poetic expression because you can’t destroy an entire city in an hour. It’s impossible! It was up until 1945. Then a great city was destroyed in an hour. All of a sudden, we realize that Revelation 18 is not just a poetic exaggeration, not just poetic license; it was a very literal description of what happens when a nuclear bomb is dropped. You see the smoke of the torment—that famous mushroom-shaped cloud—ascending up miles out to sea.

Verses 9-10, everybody keeps his distance for fear of her torment; the torment of radiation sickness, a slow death. It is very, very descriptive.

We see some of what is said.

Ezekiel 7:19, “““They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be like refuse; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord; they will not satisfy their souls, nor fill their stomachs, because it became their stumbling block of iniquity.””” Human beings put their trust in these things to deliver them. In the day of the final calamity, they are going to find that it is not going to be of any avail. If that is what we trust in to survive the Day of the Lord, we are going to be disillusioned. We certainly should be wise

stewards of our resources and should use wisdom in terms of riding out the ups and downs of our day-to-day economic fluctuations. Yes, but in terms of counting on something like this for deliverance and as a protector when the calamity comes, forget it!

Verse 23, “““Make a chain, for the land is filled with crimes of blood, and the city is full of violence.””” “Make a chain.” It is link joined to link; one thing is linked to another—cause and effect. This is so descriptive of our cities in this country today.

God says, as a result of it, there are going to be consequences that are going to come.

Verse 24, “““Therefore I will bring the worst of the Gentiles, and they will possess their houses; I will cause the pomp of the strong to cease, and their holy places shall be defiled.”””

Ezekiel 8 gives an interesting description. God says, ‘I am going to show you some of the abominations of the house of Israel.’

Ezekiel 8:6, “Furthermore He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations.’” He said, ‘You see this? It looks bad, but you are going to see greater abominations than this.’

Verses 13-14, “And He said to me, ‘Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing.’ So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the Lord’s house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.”

Verses 15-16, “...‘Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these.’ So He brought me into the inner court of the Lord’s house; and there, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east.”

Now, when is the sun in the east? When it is rising, right? So what he saw was a sunrise service. The only time you would worship the sun toward the east is when it is rising. If you would like to do a little research on “weeping for Tammuz,” you will find that this is the origin of Lent. It was a period of penance in the spring (going back to the ancient Babylonians) that culminated in a sunrise service—and it still is!

If you dig hard enough, you will find somebody who will come up with the idea of Mardi Gras

back there, too—to kind of “kick it off.” If you’re going to do penance for 40 days, you want to make sure you have something to do penance for. No need doing penance for nothing. God looks at these things and He doesn’t like it.

People say today, ‘But we don’t do it for that reason. We are not weeping for Tammuz. We’re not actually worshiping the sun. We’re worshiping God. We just go out there and have this service at sunrise, but we’re not doing it for that reason.’ It’s the same thing people will tell you about putting up a Christmas tree; they’re not worshiping the sun god. They put up a tree because everybody else puts up a tree. It’s pretty and decorated with the lights—anything wrong with lights? Does God hate trees?

People use human reasoning and say, ‘I don’t see what difference it makes. We are not doing it to worship Tammuz or to worship the sun god. It’s just kind of a cute little custom and everybody is doing it. We don’t want to stick out like “sore thumbs” and we don’t want our kids to be deprived.’

Well, I would like mine to be deprived—deprived of the Great Tribulation, deprived of the wrath of the Day of the Lord. There are a lot of things I would like to be deprived of and I hope my family is deprived of. I think there are things you would like to be deprived of. People say they don’t see what difference it makes. That’s the whole point; *they* don’t see what difference it makes! It doesn’t make a difference to other people. Maybe they are doing it for that reason. No, generally the reason they are doing it is because everybody else does. Show me any place in the Bible that says that just because everybody else does it, it is a good reason and that’s what God wants His people to do.

Deuteronomy 12:30-32, I do find where God says, “take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, “How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.” You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”

God says not to look around and see how all these pagans serve their gods and think that’s kind of a cute little custom. We should not do that.

John 4:23, God wants to be worshiped in spirit and in truth. What is truth?

John 17:17, “...Your word is truth.” God wants to be worshiped in accordance as He reveals. He doesn’t want us adding to it or taking away from it and kind of adapting it. He doesn’t want us looking around and adapting all these cute customs.

‘We won’t call it by the old pagan name; we will just change the name.’ So the ancient Romans celebrating the Saturnalia started celebrating Christmas. They did the same thing at the same time, but they just called it by a different name.

That makes it okay? Right?

You can read Deuteronomy 12 and Ezekiel 8 as well as I can. God directs how He wishes to be worshiped. We are responsible as individuals for what we do, and I think we have to understand that. You can do all kinds of things; maybe nobody else is going to know it and maybe nobody in the Church finds out. Big deal! We all ultimately give an account to God for what we do and what we know.

James 4:17, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” We all have to keep that in mind. Ezekiel has these warnings here, and we are admonished to take heed.

Ezekiel 8:17, “Then He said to me, ‘Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations, which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose.’” The more literal translation is “they have put the branch to *My* nose.”

There are several amendments to the text called “emendations of the Sopherim.” The Sopherims, who were the scribes, made several little emendments to the text. They didn’t erase the text; they just made a little note up above it in terms of the way it was to be read. There were several places where they thought the language was kind of strong or offensive or they knew that what was described was almost blasphemous and they didn’t want to say it that way. So they emended it to kind of soften the sound of it. When it said, “they put the branch to My nose,” they thought that was a very harsh statement and changed it around.

When you actually look up that phrase, it is a reference to a very ancient pagan symbolism, an ancient phallus symbol. The Hebrew “*zmowrah*” is the term for “branch.” It refers to the phallus symbol, the obelisk. Actually, it is the origin of

the steeple. That's why you find it on the top. It goes back to the ancient "zmowrah." God views it as offensive. People don't see what difference it makes. It is irrelevant whether it makes a difference to people. The question we all should ask ourselves is, 'Does it make a difference to God?' That's really the issue—does God care one way or the other? That is Who we have to be primarily concerned about pleasing.

I remember many years ago, back in the early to mid-70s, back around 1973 or 1974, things had gotten to such a point that there was an individual who was even in the ministry at that time (he has long since been out of the ministry and out of the Church) who absolutely shocked me. I was at a district ministerial meeting and I was absolutely shocked by what I heard. Several of us were standing around and he mentioned very casually that he had put up Christmas decorations that year. My mouth must have dropped open. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

His excuse was he was not doing it really to celebrate Christmas. He just didn't want to be offensive to all of his worldly neighbors. They all go in for this and put it up. He just didn't want to stand out as being different. They may have been offended because he didn't have decorations up. My question was, 'Aren't you concerned about being offensive to God? If I were you, I would be a whole lot more concerned about offending God than I would the guy next door.' Well, no, evidently he wasn't. I guess he figured God would understand.

God understands—that's the whole point! God understands when we are not doing what we should do. God offers mercy and grace, but He offers it upon repentance. God offers to save us from our sins, not in our sins. God is very merciful and compassionate when we repent. God doesn't have a casual "anything-goes" and "I-don't-care-what-you-do" attitude. He doesn't say, 'Whosoever will, may come. Just do anything you want to do and it is fine with Me. No big deal.' I go through the Scriptures and I find God made an awfully big deal out of a lot of things.

Ezekiel 9:4, "and the Lord said to him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.'"

Verses 5-6, then He told His angels standing by, "To the others He said in my hearing, 'Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye

spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary....'"

This is not the mark of the beast; rather, this is the sign of God. God sent Ezekiel and He said, 'I want you to go through and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations of Israel. Set a mark on those who are really bothered and grieved and moved by all the trash and the filth that they see around. But do not set a mark on those who are comfortable and complacent with it, who want to be part and parcel of it and dabble their toe in the cesspool. Set a mark on those who are bothered by it, take offense at it, are grieved by it, hate to see it and are yearning, "Thy Kingdome come.'" God says, 'I want you to note all of those because those are the ones I'm going to protect. When I do that, then it's all going to break loose.'

You might read the parallel back in Revelation 7 and Revelation 14 about the sealing of the servants of our God in their foreheads. That is what is pictured here. After the sealing, then the plagues of the Day of the Lord come sweeping across. He says, 'Start at My sanctuary, at My house; start with My people.'

It is important that we be among those who sigh and cry for the abominations of Israel. It's important that the things that we see happening in society bother us—not in the sense that we should just sit around and be horribly depressed all the time. We should not have a casual, careless, indifferent attitude to what we see because God doesn't have a careless, casual attitude to what He sees.

God sees the consequences. Little things lead into big things. It leads to grief, suffering and harm for people—human beings made in God's image who are suffering unbelievably the consequence of sin. It is important that we be bothered by that in the right way.

We are told in Ephesians 1:13-14 that we are sealed. God's Holy Spirit has sealed us until the day of redemption. That is symbolic—there on our foreheads, the sealing of God's servants.

In Ezekiel 10, we again find this portable throne that God utilizes. It's very descriptive. We don't have time to go into all of this, but it must have been quite a remarkable thing. Ezekiel had to describe it in the language of which he was familiar. How would you describe an airplane, an automobile, a train or something of that sort if you had never seen anything like that before? You would use the language that is known to

you. You would try and describe it using terms and comparisons that you are familiar with.

That's like our forefathers when the car first came out. They called it the horseless carriage. Mr. Herbert Armstrong told about when he was a little boy that his father was standing at the window and said, 'Everybody come quick and see a horseless carriage.' This was quite an event. They had heard of them, but none of them had ever seen one. They came running to the window and looked out, and there was a wagon pulled by a couple of mules. His father had a big laugh and said, 'See, that's a horseless carriage.' It was not being pulled by horses but by mules. That was back in maybe 1896. People utilized phrases like "horseless carriages" because how do you describe them? There wasn't a name for it. Eventually, a name was invented.

Ezekiel saw this throne. He saw this conveyance. He couldn't use the language of modern technology to describe it. It would be beyond our ability to describe. To try to describe it, he used the language and the phrases that it looked most like to him.

Ezekiel 11 describes why God will give His Spirit to Israel.

Verse 17, he talks about bringing them back after the nation has been punished and the consequences—gathering the remnant and bringing them back. That is yet future after Christ returns.

Ezekiel 11:19-20, "'Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.'" God says, 'I am going to change them.' He is going to give His spirit for the purpose of conversion, of changing us, of transforming us, and enabling us to walk in His statutes and His ordinances. A transformation by the Spirit of God makes us the people of God.

We see the way that Israel is characterized in Ezekiel 12.

Ezekiel 12:1-2, "Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 'Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear, for they are a rebellious house.'"

Verse 6, He says, "'...for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel.'"

Verse 9, "'Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What

are you doing?'" It goes down and describes the nation as a rebellious nation.

As we continue, there is an interesting description.

Ezekiel 13:2, "'Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, 'Hear the word of the Lord!'"

Let's understand a little bit about this word "prophet." The Hebrew word for prophet, "*nabiy*," is a word that means "those who announce or who proclaim." The prophet of God is one who announces or proclaims God's message. In some cases, it might be a revelation of future events. We think of the word "prophet" as being one who foretells the future. But the word "prophet" has a much broader meaning than that. A prophet is simply one who announces a message, one who conveys, proclaims or announces. A prophet of God is one who proclaims or announces God's message.

A false prophet is anyone who proclaims or announces a false message. In some cases, the message was a foretelling of future events, but that's not the only thing that God can convey. Here we see false prophets describing the false prophets of society.

I think sometimes we have tended to very narrowly view this and to think of some of the preachers on the radio and television of some of the worldly churches. We have identified it with them and said that these are the false prophets. Well, yes they are, but they are not the only false prophets. And, frankly, they are not the false prophets that are primarily listened to in this nation. The various ones on radio and television are not really the ones that most people in this country pay a whole lot of attention to. Only a tiny fraction of the people in this country really give a lot of credence and really pay a lot of attention to what the radio and television "false prophets" say.

The term "prophet" in the Hebrew—those who announce or proclaim a message—would certainly in our modern society refer in a general sense to the whole realm of the media. It is something that really did not exist in that way in ancient Israel, but it exists as a very powerful force in our society today. They (the media) are the opinion molders. They are the ones who announce or proclaim a message that shapes the thinking and the opinions of people. This includes both the secular false prophets as well as the religious false prophets. It includes everything from the major television, radio,

newspaper and news magazines—the whole realm of the opinion molders. It includes those who announce and proclaim, those that people look to for explanation and understanding of what is transpiring in the world around.

Verse 6 (KJV), God says of them, “They have seen vanity and lying divination....” NJKV, “They have envisioned futility and false divination....”

Verse 10, “Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace—and one builds a boundary wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar—” He says, ‘They’ve built up this edifice, and others have come along, whitewashed it and made it look good.’

But, verse 11, the whole thing won’t stand up because it is going to fall when a wind and storm comes. When the events that are going to transpire come, it is going to show what a shaky edifice has been built by those who claim to be “in the know,” those who are the “experts” and those who are the opinion molders and opinion shapers. It’s going to become very apparent when this occurs.

Verse 14, “So I will break down the wall you have plastered with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered; it will fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst of it....” It is going to be apparent on what a faulty foundation the whole society has been built.

Frankly, the biggest things that are the foundation of our modern society are the concepts of science (I Timothy 6:20 KJV, “falsely so called”), evolution and all the things that are the spin-off of that. If there’s anything or any concept that underlies the thinking of modern “educated” people, it is the concept of evolution. The concept of evolution is the idea that there really isn’t a God who intervenes in human affairs. And if there is any kind of God at all, it is some kind of remote vague “first cause.” They claim there really isn’t any God at all and this “first cause” really doesn’t have any relevance to us. It certainly doesn’t tell us how to live our lives and certainly does not intervene in the world or have controlling influence in the affairs of the world around us. The foundation of this society is based on the fact that there isn’t a God who steps into history. They believe everything just continues along, just as it always has been.

Verses 17-18 describe the daughters of My people. Some of the symbolism that’s used here is not entirely clear, but the concept is all of these

various “do-gooder” causes and various movements that are out there.

Jeremiah 6:14, supposedly, all these various “do-gooder” causes go out and as it says it, “heals the hurt of My people slightly.”

Ezekiel 13:19, “And will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, killing people who should not die, and keeping people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies?”

In so many cases, the consequence of some of these “do-gooders” is that all the sympathy is dished out for the criminal and the people who are out causing all the problems—“...keeping people alive that should not live....” And as a consequence, those who are innocent and are going around minding their own business die a needless death. The professional “do-gooders” and sympathizers always seem to have their sympathy with the perpetrators of the problems and very little sympathy left over for the victims. They are out trying to do all these things. There are soup kitchens and all these things, and it’s not the solution to the problem. “...by your lying to My people who listen to lies.”

Verse 20 (KJV) describes all their various good works and the pillars that they sew and the things that they do.

Verse 22, “Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life.” You’ve been there to bail him out, to help him out and keep him from suffering the consequences of his actions. Really, what you’ve done is kept him from coming to repentance because you’ve been there to try to soften the blow. What he needed was not somebody to soften the blow. You’ve wound up making the righteous sad because the result has been a society that is filled with violence and all sorts of things. It’s a sad commentary as we see it.

Ezekiel 14:4, “Therefore speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity....’” He sets up the idols in his heart. That’s ultimately where idolatry is. It is what we set up in our hearts. It’s what we look to, what we stand in awe of, what we’re really deeply impressed with.

What does it mean to “worship”? Sometimes you need to look up synonyms because we think we

know what it means to “worship.” It talks about the world worshipping the beast. What does that mean? It means they are very deeply impressed with and they stand in awe of. That’s what it means: to have that worshipful attitude, to just be most impressed with, to really stand in awe of.

In our society, if you’d ask most people, ‘Do you worship idols?’ They would say, ‘No.’ Take a poll in this country; go up to people on the street and ask, ‘Do you worship idols?’ You’d go through and say, ‘Ezekiel must have been wrong; nobody worships idols. Everybody says they don’t worship idols.’

We’re familiar with the statues and things that we think of with the Catholic Church. If you were to go to them and ask if they worshipped those things, they’d say, ‘No, of course not.’ They don’t worship idols. Nobody claims to worship idols. But God says somebody is worshipping idols. You can’t read it and all the things God has to say about idolatry and not come to the conclusion that somebody, somewhere, is worshipping an idol. In fact, it kind of sounds like a bunch of people are worshipping idols. They set up idols in their heart.

Idols can be set up. They can be some literal figure that you see, bow down to and burn incense to. God very clearly says not to do that. But some people, who wouldn’t dream of setting up this image and bowing down to it, have an idol in their heart. If we’re not careful, that’s the kind of idols we can set up. We’d be so careful not to bow down to some great big fat leering golden Buddha and burn incense to it. I don’t think any of us would ever dream of doing such a thing. But we can set up an idol in our heart if we’re not careful by really standing in awe of and being impressed with something other than God in a way that should be reserved for God.

Verse 13, God says, “...I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it. ...”

Verse 14, even though Noah, Daniel and Job were there, they wouldn’t save anybody but themselves. Things are going to get so bad, and God says that nobody is going to be able to save anybody else. God says He’s not going to make a deal like He did with Abraham (Genesis 18:32)—‘if there are ten righteous men in the city, I will spare the whole city.’ God singles out these three individuals as three of the most righteous men who ever lived: Noah, Daniel and Job. These individuals are certainly singled out as men of outstanding righteousness. God says if they were there, He would save them. But He wouldn’t save the city even for their sake.

Verse 13, “...I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it.”

Verse 15, “If I cause wild beasts [KJV, “noisome beasts”] to pass through the land, and they empty it, and make it so desolate that no man may pass through because of the beasts.” Animal plagues, noisome beasts that pass through the land, rabid animals—whatever it may be. You’ve heard some of these things about killer bees. So far nothing has really come of it. People can sit back and say, ‘Well, you know something like that could never happen.’ Well, God says it will. I don’t know exactly how it’s going to happen, but I believe it’s going to happen.

Some of these things we’ve talked about, and Mr. Herbert Armstrong talked about them many, many years ago. We may have speculated about “time” in certain areas, as anticipating certain of these events happening. We may have “jumped the gun” on some of that in our eagerness. We may have introduced speculation about “time.” God has reserved the times and the seasons to Himself (Acts 1:7). We tried to read God’s mind, as we do sometimes. That’s human nature. The disciples tried to do that, too. None of that diminishes from the accuracy of what is going to happen. We should never kid ourselves. We need to make a distinction between what’s speculative and what’s not.

There’s nothing speculative about the fact that God is going to call noisome beasts to pass through the land to spoil it and make it desolate. That’s what it says. That is not speculation. If I said, ‘Well, He’s going to do it in “x” amount of years,’ now that would be speculation. The fact that He is going to do it is not speculation. That’s a clear statement of fact.

Verse 17, “Or if I bring a sword on that land, and say, “Sword, go through the land,” and I cut off man and beast from it.”

Verse 19, “Or if I send a pestilence into that land. ...”

Verse 22, “Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant [just a handful], who will be brought out. ...” We see that there are going to be a lot of these things that are going to come about.

Ezekiel 16 is an analogy of Israel. Israel is pictured as a castoff infant and reared by God. After her maturity, she marries God. Then in the aftermath of the marriage, Israel is pictured as entering into idolatry. God draws this analogy, which is brought out. He describes Israel in this poetic symbolism and, in a sense, shows the

absolute horror of what Israel did in turning their back on God who rescued and nurtured them, who brought them up and married them, as it were in a symbolic sense.

There are many principles that we can deduce from this. There are many things that we can learn. We see the symbolism that God describes. He describes what Israel did. We understand the primary implications of it. I think that even in cases like this, it is one of the ways of learning how to be governed by the Bible and to let God reveal His will.

We know from the New Testament certain general principles, for instance, of proper modesty and not gaudy attire. Ezekiel 16 gives a picture symbolically of God arraying Israel. It is sometimes helpful to look at it, realizing that it's symbolic, but we realize that if God utilized it, then it is not inappropriate. He describes beautifully crafted shoes, beautiful garments with linen and with silk. He describes jewelry. He describes these things.

Ezekiel 16:9, "...I anointed you with oil [in the sense of perfumed oil]." We can see that Israel is arrayed as a bride or arrayed as a queen. There are appropriate occasions where it's not wrong to wear something that is appropriate for the occasion. Here it shows the utilization of jewelry, the utilization of beautiful clothes or even perfume. The things God utilized, the specific things that He mentions—basically perfumed oil, shoes, clothing and jewelry—show that it is not wrong for a Christian woman to utilize jewelry, for instance. Some religions totally prohibit the use of any jewelry. And yet we read from Ezekiel 16 and understand that it is not wrong.

Obviously, there are principles in the New Testament that show that we should be modest in our apparel. We are not to be gaudy and we are not to go to an extreme; jewelry is used tastefully and obviously for certain occasions, such as a wedding. Here, the sense is not only of a wedding but the coronation of a queen with a crown. Obviously, there would be things that would be appropriate that are not wrong in and of themselves as long as they are used properly, tastefully and not in a wrong manner. Some things God utilizes; other things He doesn't. You can draw contrasts between God arraying Israel as His queen and Israel arraying herself as a harlot later on in other passages. But we can deduce here that it is not wrong that certain things are utilized. They are not intrinsically wrong in and of themselves—as certain ones

have sometime thought—as long as it's done properly, appropriately, in proper taste and at the proper occasion.

It goes through and describes the contrast of Israel being called by God and God providing all of these wonderful things, offering Israel the opportunity as His wife, as His queen. And yet, what did she do? She went and involved herself with all of the nations around. God compares that to harlotry. That's the way God spiritually views unfaithfulness—as a betrayal. He draws the analogy as a husband betrayed by his wife. In that sense, God pictured Himself as the husband. There is a sense of betrayal that is described.

This pretty well takes care of the first 16 chapters in the book of Ezekiel. There's an awful lot packed into the book of Ezekiel and an awful lot packed into the Major Prophets. There is a tremendous amount that is there. There are things that we would do well to take notice of and pay attention to because they're things that very directly impact us and the world in which we're living—events that are transpiring oh so rapidly and quickly.