Lamentations; Ezekiel; Daniel

In the last lesson we looked at Jeremiah, which is the only eyewitness account that we have of the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel, whom we will talk about in this lesson, is carried in visions from Babylon over to the temple. He is carried up on visions and deposited in Jerusalem, and then he is brought back to Babylon.

What we have in Jeremiah is striking, devastating, and vivid accounts of the final fall and siege of Jerusalem. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, beginning in chapter 11, we have these laments or complaints. Jeremiah laments about the difficulty of his ministry and role. The Lord comforts him in one sense by reminding him of what He told him in His call, that He would preserve Jeremiah, but his role was to be like a wall. In many ways that was a symbolic role that reflected Israel’s heart. Her heart was like an iron tool. The role of a prophet is to see visions that God gives and to convey those things to the people of God in a way that represents and prosecutes the covenant against the people of God. They see and speak, but in the life of the prophet there is symbolic action. Jeremiah was a bronze wall and was in the stocks. We will see this many times in the life of Ezekiel. We see how this takes a toll on Jeremiah, as it would anyone. Again the Scriptures are very honest about that. In Jeremiah 11 through 20, again and again we see these firsthand laments from Jeremiah to the Lord.

This language of lament is what I want to draw our attention to in the book of Lamentations. I want us to notice some correlations between Jeremiah and Lamentations. Let me draw our attention to Lamentations 3:19,

I remember my affliction and my wandering,  
the bitterness and the gall.  
I well remember them,  
and my soul is downcast within me.  
Yet this I call to mind  
and therefore I have hope:

Because of Yahweh’s great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.  
I say to myself, “[Yahweh] is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him.”

Verses 40-51 say,

Let us examine our ways and test them,  
and let us return to the LORD.  
Let us lift up our hearts and our hands  
to God in heaven and say:  
“We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.”  
“You have covered yourself with anger and pursued us;
you have slain without pity.  
You have covered yourself with a cloud  
so that no prayer can get through.  
You have made us scum and refuse  
among the nations.

All our enemies have opened their mouths  
wide against us.  
We have suffered terror and pitfalls,  
ruin and destruction.”

Streams of tears flow from my eyes  
because my people are destroyed.

My eyes will flow unceasingly,  
without relief,  
until the LORD looks down  
from heaven and sees.  
What I see brings grief to my soul  
because of all the women of my city.

We see this unceasing flow of tears and a voice in the first person. We see very specific elements of the judgment experience, including appeals to the Davidic covenant that are echoed back and forth as false appeals and false hopes, false prophecies and false visions. And then we see the terrifying vision of parents eating their own children. It is a city under siege, and there is devastation of complete and utter shattered brokenness, like a pot that has been shattered by the potter. These images and emotions poured out are reflected in the book of Lamentations, echoing Jeremiah’s own prophecy. For that reason we see that traditionally Lamentations has been attributed to the prophet Jeremiah.

Lamentations is made of five poems to express the response of God’s people to His severe punishment. How does a faithful people and remnant respond to such utter shattering judgment? We see these images that are also common to Jeremiah of a forsaken widow. We see the destruction of Zion in keeping with God’s Word. We see the call to repentance and the failure of Israel’s leadership. We also see these elements of hope that this judgment is not the final word about God’s people. There is some correlation between Jeremiah and Lamentations in these things.

Let us look together at Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah who was carried off into exile and deported with King Jehoiachin. There are some important dates to keep in mind. The Assyrian-Egyptian coalition was defeated at Carcamish by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC, and that solidified the supremacy of Babylonian power in the ancient Near East. We see that Nebuchadnezzar punished Jehoiachin for his dependence on Egypt. He deported Jehoiachin, and he had Daniel as well. Daniel and other leaders were deported in the first deportation, and Jehoiachin and Ezekiel were taken in the second. Jehoiakim died, and his son Jehoiachin took over right around that same time. Jehoiachin was taken off and deported with Ezekiel in 597 BC. Zedekiah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, was appointed, but he too made the mistake of failing to pay tribute to Babylon. That would bring about the final destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel was a priest, but he was called to be a prophet before the time that priests would begin their ministry. They would begin their ministry about age 30, but Ezekiel was deported before that time. He never served in the temple, but he ministered in Babylon. In the beginning of Ezekiel we have this reference to an irrigation canal by the Kebar River. Ezekiel 1:1 says, “In the thirtieth year, in the fourth
month of the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.” That is probably a reference to his age, the thirtieth year, in terms of when priests would begin their service. Notice we have a different year reference in Ezekiel 1:2, “…it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin—the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River […] There the hand of the LORD was upon them.”

We have a lot of chronological references in Ezekiel, and almost all of them reference the time in which the king was deported. That is the measuring stick they use to mark time. Several things distinguish Ezekiel. The use of the first person is very prominent. It is very much autobiographical. It is not written in the third person but the first person, for the most part. That leads us to believe that Ezekiel is the primary author. Notice how many times the chronology and reference to the king and the deportation of 597 BC is mentioned. Like Jeremiah, much of Ezekiel’s preaching is focused on the Lord’s punishment of Jerusalem. The focus is primarily on Jerusalem, but like we have seen with Isaiah and Jeremiah, there are also oracles against the nations. The prophet of God’s people makes it clear yet again that these nations are not powerful in and of themselves. The Lord uses them as an instrument of judgment, and He will punish their own arrogance as well. We have already seen this in Isaiah's vision against Assyria, Tyre, and Babylon. There are oracles that will come against the nation in the midsection of Ezekiel.

There are three main sections to Ezekiel. The enactment of God’s judgment against Jerusalem is in Ezekiel 1 through 24. Ezekiel’s oracles of judgment against the nations are in chapters 25 through 32. Then we mark a turning point in Ezekiel 33 when he receives word of the fall of Jerusalem. Once he receives word of the fall of Jerusalem, a new tone begins to be struck. There is an element of hope and visions for hope for return in the future and for Jerusalem’s restoration in Ezekiel 38 through 48. The purpose of Ezekiel’s visions and oracles is to urge the exiles in Babylon to repent of their rebellion so the Lord might fulfill visions. These visions include the restoration of His glory amidst His people by the return to the land, the renewal of the covenant, and especially the restoration of the temple. The restoration of the temple is a very prominent issue in the book of Ezekiel.

I mentioned before that more than any other prophet, the prophet Ezekiel brings about symbolic enactments and actions. In Ezekiel 4 and 5 we see several examples of this. Remember that the first section has to do with enacting the Lord’s judgment against Jerusalem. Ezekiel is in Babylon during this time, but he is caught up in incredible visions of wheels and the Spirit churning. The Lord is a warrior, though unfortunately a warrior against His own people. Ezekiel is carried in this glorious vision over to Jerusalem, and he prophesies these things to the elders in exile. We see this pattern again and again in Ezekiel. It is a transportation to Jerusalem and back to the Kebar River in Babylon where Ezekiel pronounces these things. He speaks primarily to the elders of those in exile. This transportation is also correlated with the presence of the Lord. In the same way in which Ezekiel is lifted up and transported to Jerusalem and back, we see the glory of the Lord lifted up, departing from the temple and going away. Then in the vision of restoration in the last section of Ezekiel we see that same sort of transportation of the glory of the Lord coming back. That movement in the visions and the glory is a very important back-and-forth motion that we see in the visions of the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel has these symbolic actions. He is to create a clay tablet and draw pictures of the siege on the clay tablet. He is to lay on one side of his body for 390 days and 40 days on the other and bear the sins of Israel and Judah. In this most vivid imagery we see that he is to cook rations in a very strong violation of the purity code. He is trained to be a priest in the temple, but the Lord calls him to do something as a symbolic action of complete and utter judgment that will come. The people who are under siege will cook rations over human excrement. That is disgusting. Think about the sensibilities and the scruples of one trained to be a priest in the temple of God. Ezekiel objects to the Lord, and the Lord says he can use
animal excrement. The picture still comes through, though. This is what it will be like in the days of the siege. You cannot go out and gather wood or anything else for fire. You will have to use these things to cook your rations. That is terrible judgment that will come. We also see the vision of hair that is divided into thirds and burned, cut, and blown away. We have a sense of the burning of a city, the putting of the city to the sword, and the distribution of the people to the four corners of the earth.

Eighteen times in Ezekiel we see the recognition formula. This starts in Ezekiel 6 where we see something that hints at what will come later in a vision of restoration. All of this is a vision of death. Ezekiel 6:4 and 5 say, “Your altars will be demolished and your incense altars smashed, and I will slay your people in front of your idols. I will lay the dead bodies of the Israelites in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones around the altars. Wherever you live the towns will be laid waste and the high places demolished so that your altars will be laid waste and devastated, your idols smashed and ruined.” This judgment comes right in the very act of idolatry. That is the very picture of the severity of the covenant defection. It is similar to the severity that we saw in Jeremiah of the breaking of the covenant and the utter corruption in terms of cultic purity and social justice issues. Right in the very act of worshiping false gods we see this vivid imagery of putting the city to the sword. In verse 7 we see the recognition formula, “Your people will fall slain among you, and you will know that I am the LORD.” Verse 10 says, “They will know that I am the LORD.” Verse 13 also says, “They will know that I am the LORD.” In the midsection in the oracles against the nations and when God brings judgment they will know that He is the Lord. We see this phrase 18 times.

Turn to Ezekiel 33, which ends the whole oracle of judgment and begins a view toward restoration. We see this recognition formula in Ezekiel 33:29. First we have a report in verse 21, “The city has fallen. A man who has escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, ‘The city has fallen.’ Now the evening before the man arrived the hand of the LORD was upon me, and he opened my mouth.” In Ezekiel 33:28 and 29 we get a summary of all the oracles of judgment, “I will make the land a desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end. The mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them. Then they will know that I am the LORD when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things that they have done.”

In Ezekiel 36:11 we see a hint of hope. It is not just about the Lord’s judgment that brings the sense of recognition of His sovereignty and holiness and the seriousness of His promises and His covenant. He says, “I will increase the number of men. I will bring you back. I will settle a people as in the past. I will make you prosper more than before, and then you will know that I am the LORD.” We see over and over again that the actions of nations and of international interactions in the ancient Near East and the known world are associated with the sovereign actions of Israel’s God. These things happen not just at the will of Assyria and Babylon. The actions are taken because He is the Lord.

Let me back up to Ezekiel 8, which gives us a vision that we have seen already with Jeremiah about how utterly corrupt things are in Jerusalem. We see this vision of idolatry in the temple, and Ezekiel 8:3 and following says,

…The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven in visions of God. He took me to Jerusalem to the entrance of the north gate in the inner court, where the idol that provokes to jealousy stood. And there before me was the glory of the God of Israel, as in the vision I had seen in the plain. Then he said to me, “Son of man, look toward the north.” So I looked, and in the entrance north of the gate of the altar I saw this idol of jealousy […] And he said to me, “Go in and see the wicked and detestable things they are doing here.” So I went in, I looked, and I saw portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and detestable animals and all the idols of the house of
Israel. In front of them stood seventy elders of the house of Israel, and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan was standing among them. Each had a censer in his hand, and a fragrant cloud of incense was rising. He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each at the shrine of his own idol?…”

This idol of jealousy was probably an Asherah or Baal’s consort. We see women sitting there mourning for Tammuz. Tammuz is a Mesopotamian agricultural god, the husband of Ishtar. It was believed that Tammuz would die every winter, and then with the return of spring you would see the return of Tammuz from the netherworld to the earth. It was a cycle of death and planting and harvest. These are the things that happened in the temple of the Lord.

Ezekiel 8 through 11 is a vision that Ezekiel has, and notice what happens in Ezekiel 10:4. “The glory of the LORD rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple; the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD. The sound of the wings of cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court.” Verse 18 says, “The glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim, and while I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground. And as they went the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance to the east gate, and the glory of the LORD of Israel was above them.” Ezekiel 11:23 and 24 is the end of the vision that began in Ezekiel 8:3. “The glory of the LORD went up and stopped at the mountain east of the city. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God. The vision I had seen went up from me, and I told the exiles everything the LORD had shown me.” This movement is really important for understanding what happens in the visions and oracles. This departure of the presence of the Lord is an act of judgment that precedes the siege and fall of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 12 through 24 is the judgment against Jerusalem. We see the Lord instructing Ezekiel to take symbolic action. In Ezekiel 12 he packs belongings for the exile. Right there in Babylon he packs belongings like someone who will try to escape through a hole dug in the wall of the city of Jerusalem. He is supposed to symbolize this action in front of the elders of the people. Ezekiel 12:16 says, “Then they will know that I am the LORD.” We also see various visions, including the vision of two eagles swooping down. The eagle of Babylon is the prominent one in Ezekiel 16. Ezekiel 22 gives the same metaphors that we read about in Jeremiah with the two harlot sisters, Israel and Judah. Finally we see the notion of the rusty pot. A rusty pot is not good for anything. We see the same with a vine. You cannot get enough wood from a vine to start a fire, and wood is for cooking. In these various metaphors of the vine and the rusty pot we see that Israel has failed in her vocation. She is not good for anything. She has failed in what the Lord commissioned her to do. The Lord commissioned her in Ezekiel 5:5-9,

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations with countries all around her, yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees. Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: You have been more unruly than the nations around you. You have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you. Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations because of all of your detestable idols.

We see that what was supposed to be a light to the nations had become a city that was indistinguishable from the nations. They were not only indistinguishable from the nations but worse. These are the words of judgment through the prophet Ezekiel to the people of God.
Even before Ezekiel 33 we get a sense of hope. We see glimmers of hope in Ezekiel 16:59 and 60, “This is what the LORD says: I will deal with you as you deserve because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant, yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed.” Here we have a sense of covenant renewal that the Lord will bring about. We get a little bit more in Ezekiel 20:39-42 in a section on judgment and restoration. We read in verse 39, “As for you, O house of Israel, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Go and serve your idols, but afterward you will surely listen to me and no longer profane my holy name with your gifts and idols. For on my holy mountain, the high mountain of Israel,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘there in the land the entire house of Israel will serve me, and I will accept them. There I will require your offerings and your choice gifts along with your holy sacrifice, and I will accept you as fragrant incense when I bring you out from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered. I will show myself holy among you in the sight of the nations.’” There we see again the vocation of Israel to show forth what it looks like when a holy God lives in the midst of His people. God will show and vindicate His holiness. The theme that we see in the restoration is that the Lord will display His holiness once again through His people. Ezekiel 20:42 says, “Then you will know that I am the LORD.”

In this midsection Ezekiel speaks words of judgment against the nations. This happens so that Babylon and the other nations do not misunderstand their role and think and believe that their gods are in the ascendancy in some sort of multinational contest of gods. Ezekiel 25 focuses on Edom. Obadiah is the one chapter in the Minor Prophets, or the book of the twelve, that is focused on Edom. Obadiah prophesies against Edom because, as Jerusalem fell and people tried to escape, the Edomites killed them. The Lord brings judgment against Edom for this. Tyre in her wealth, even though her wealth preserved her for a time, could not save her from Babylon. We see in Ezekiel 26 through 28 this prophecy against the king of Tyre. Sidon and Tyre are Phoenician cities, and they are wealthy because of their ability to travel by sea through the Mediterranean. Yet we see the pride of their wealth. The Lord uses Ezekiel to prophesy against them. The Lord says, “I am going to bring foreigners against you and ruthless nations who will draw their swords against the beauty and wisdom of your splendor.” Sure enough, Babylon destroyed Tyre in 571 BC.

The king of Tyre laments in Ezekiel 28:11-12, and this is a passage that is often referred to regarding Satan. “You were a model of perfection full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone adorned you. Your settings and mountings were made of gold […] You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you on the holy mount of God. You were blameless in your ways from the day that you were created until wickedness was found in you; and I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty and corrupted your wisdom. I threw you to the earth and made you a spectacle before the kings.” This is metaphoric language of God’s blessing on the king of Tyre. The pride and arrogance of Tyre is the wickedness that is found in him. Ethbaal, the king of Tyre, is described in terms of God’s favor like a primeval being or a figure like Adam, crowned with beauty. He remains there until this arrogance and pride is found in him, and he is thrown to the ground.

These prophecies against the nations also include Egypt. We see that Egypt was a source of last-minute hopes for those trapped in Jerusalem. We see that Zedekiah tried to send out and get help. From the shards of pottery found in Jerusalem we have a sense that people were sent out while they were under siege from Babylon to try to get help from Egypt. Yet Egypt is depicted like a reed that one would lean on and put your weight against. They were like an ally. But the reed splintered, and you get splinters in
your hand. We see that image in Ezekiel 29:6, “You have been a staff of reed for the house of Israel. When they grasped you with their hands you splintered, and you tore open their shoulders. When they leaned on you, you broke and their backs were wrenched. All who live in Egypt will know that I am the LORD.” These oracles against the nations in Ezekiel 25 through 32 form the midsection of Ezekiel’s prophecy.

As we began to talk about earlier, in Ezekiel 33 after he receives word of the fall of Jerusalem, things in his prophecy begin to turn toward hope and restoration. One of the first images we see is one that is really important for those of us whom the Lord would call to pastoral ministry. Ezekiel 34 was the passage that was preached at my ordination service, and it is a prophecy against the shepherds of Israel. We have a woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves. Ezekiel 34:2 says, “Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds and clothe yourselves with the wool and the slaughter of the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock of God. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally, and so they were scattered because there was no shepherd.” This is an indictment of the leaders of Israel, but hope comes because the sovereign Lord says, “I will shepherd my people.” Verse 11 says, “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered [...] I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. [...] I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.” We have a picture of hope here, and we see the same sort of picture in Isaiah 40 where the Lord returns. In Isaiah 40:11 He says He will gather His people in His arms like the lambs of a shepherd. He will care for them. This is exactly the imagery that Jesus picks up on in John 10 when He describes Himself as the good shepherd. He talks about how the shepherd guards the gate, and He says He is the gate. The imagery of Jesus as the shepherd comes from Ezekiel 34.

We also see a picture of a cleansed, resuscitated, and reunited people in Ezekiel 36 and 37. We have the prophecy of the son of man. In Ezekiel the son of man is best understood as a human being. There is some debate about this, but perhaps son of man takes on a different quality in Daniel’s visions. Son of man in Ezekiel is mainly in terms of a human being. We see the idea that the Lord will restore Israel to her vocation and show the holiness of His great name. His name has been profaned among the nations. Ezekiel 36:23 says, “The nations will know that I am the Lord. I will show myself holy through you before their eyes.” This is a restoration from Exodus 19 of the notion of being a holy nation, a holy people, and a royal priesthood. Ezekiel 36:25 says, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all of your impurities and all of your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you, remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep all of my laws.” Whereas the Lord had struck with the sword in the very moment of idolatry and then scattered their bones around the altars, now we see those bones gathered together in Ezekiel 37. Flesh is restored to them, and again we see the prominence of the servant David who will be a king over them, according to verse 24. And this covenant that God makes with them that was hinted at in chapter 20 will be an everlasting covenant.

God will establish them and increase their numbers and put His sanctuary among them forever. That sanctuary dominates the last part of Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel 40 through 48. It is a vision of the rebuilt temple. We have a rebuilt temple and a restored priesthood with all the rooms that are built for the priest in Ezekiel 42. Ezekiel 43 is a climactic moment. “The man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the Lord God coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the
land was radiant with His glory. The vision I saw was a vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and the visions I had seen by the Kebar River. So I fell face down. The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east, and the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court where the glory of the LORD filled the temple. He said, ‘Son of man, this is the place of my throne, the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.’” We have the restoration of the temple, the restoration of the priesthood, and the return of the glory of the Lord envisioned by Israel as He ministers to the exiles after they get word of the fall of the city. We see that the land will be divided again in Ezekiel 45, and it is redistributed. The offerings in the holy days are reestablished, and this Davidic prince in Ezekiel 46 enters to bring offering to the temple. Notice lastly that we have a river flowing from the temple in Ezekiel 47, and it flourishes and makes healing and fruitful land grow through the entire boundary of Israel. The land has been redistributed among the tribes. “I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east. The temple faced east. The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, and it brought me out through the north gate and led me around outside the outer gate facing east. The water was flowing from the south side.” Ezekiel 47:5 says, “…it was a river that I could not cross […] a river that no one could cross. […] ‘This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh.’”

Let us talk about what to make of these visions of the restoration and rebuilding of the temple. What I have tried to draw attention to is the fact that Ezekiel was a priest. He never served in the temple, but he was thoroughly familiar with the preparation rooms, the way priests had worked, and the vestments for priests. We see the depiction of a temple three times the size of what Herod’s temple would be in Jesus’ day. We see this magnanimous language and this magnanimous vision of a river flowing out of the temple that then makes the entire land fruitful and heals and restores the people of God. It is that river that we see in the book of Revelation. Revelation 21 and 22 talk about the river of life and that it flows from the throne of God. We have the throne of God depicted in Ezekiel 43. The river, the presence of God among His people, and this vision of restoration end the book of Ezekiel.

I want to say one thing about Gog and Magog in regard to eschatology. Let me back up and anticipate some of the questions you might have. Gog was the ruler of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Meshech and Tubal are mentioned in Ezekiel 27:13. This is a place in the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea in Asia Minor. It is in the area where Paul first ministered much later. At the time when God’s people are restored to the land, we have this vision of how enemies of God came from the north. Generally all the enemies of Israel would come from the north, particularly the Assyrians and the Babylonians would come from the north that way. We see even in the judgment at the temple that the glory departs to the north. The glory returns in the east, from where the people and the Lord return. In Ezekiel 38 the chief prince will lead a coalition of nations—from the north, Gomer; from the east, Persia; and from the south, Cush—against God’s people. Yet the Lord will protect them, and he will pour down torrents of judgment against this coalition of nations. “Then they will know that I am the LORD,” we read in Ezekiel 38:23. In Revelation 20:8 this Gog and Magog represent the ultimate enemies of God’s people. This is a vision of another coalition that will come against God’s people, and yet God will protect them. They could be cloaked references to Babylon’s leader and nation. It is a word of comfort and hope that once God’s people are restored they will not be carried off into exile again.

Now let us talk about Daniel. What we have in the book of Daniel are unique characteristics of a type of literature that Daniel represents. We have glimpses of it in Ezekiel, like we just talked about. We also have glimpses of it in Isaiah 24 through 27. Portions of Joel and Zechariah are also like this. Daniel contains apocalyptic language. There are certain markers and aspects of the apocalyptic genre, and Daniel displays these aspects most consistently. It is these aspects that we have to take into account.
when we come to Revelation, for example.

Let us talk about apocalyptic language, some of its characteristics, and how it invites us to read it. It does not invite us to read it like a cryptogram. It talks about things that happen on the earth that are controlled by heaven. We see that oftentimes we have an author, sometimes a leader among God’s people, who writes in apocalyptic language. Enoch and Ezra, for example in the intertestamental literature, are examples of apocalyptic-type literature. In those cases they are pseudonymous. Enoch and Ezra lived much earlier than when these books appeared. These types of visions contain future-oriented, symbolic visions of judgment that must be interpreted by a mediator. Usually this mediator is heavenly—for example, an angel. In Daniel we see Gabriel as an important interpreter of these visions to Daniel. Gabriel is an important figure who reappears in Luke, and we should not miss that.

These visions often refer to a well-known event in the past but also divide the future events into periods of history. Often what we have is a menagerie of beasts, for example. These beasts represent nations, and oftentimes they refer to other international powers related to the people of God. Daniel is unique among biblical apocalyptic language in considering other world empires in the light of God’s ultimate purposes and sovereignty.

There is a real difference between evangelical and non-evangelical readings of Daniel. It is important for us to understand that. In the evangelical perspective, this was written by Daniel, the one who was deported at the time of Nebuchadnezzar. For non-evangelicals they say it is pseudonymous, that Daniel is just a penname of an important figure in Israel’s history. The four kingdoms that are represented by the visions of Daniel 2 and 7 in particular, for non-evangelicals, are Babylonia, the Medes and the Persians, and Greece. The reason for that is because the vision of the kingdom of God has to do with the Jewish states set up by the Maccabees. Non-evangelical critical scholars tend to focus on how this work functioned during a Maccabean period dealing with a predominately Greek challenge in the form of Antiochus Epiphanies in 167 BC. These visions are after the event and refer to the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanies. That is the abomination of desolation talked about in Daniel 7. For support they point to 531 BC and 628 BC in references to Darius the Mede to talk about a Median kingdom separate from the Persian kingdom. They also point to historical problems raised by this notion of Belshazzar as king instead of the son of the king Nabodinus, who was king during that period. These are some problems and challenges raised by critical scholarship against evangelical readings of Daniel.

The evangelical reading sees the four kingdoms as Babylonia, Medo-Persian—together because the Persians conquered the Medes—Greece, and Rome, leading up to the time of the birth of Christ. The kingdom of heaven is that of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of Man. Jesus, in the Gospels, refers to the abomination of desolation that will come in 70 AD, when the Romans burn the temple. These visions are predictive prophecy. The year 528 BC supports the lack of evidence for an independent Median kingdom.

Turn to Daniel 5, and let us look at a few things. In Daniel 5:28 we have a reading of this writing on the wall, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. We see that Belshazzar, the king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over. Notice the kingdom of Belshazzar, in verse 28, is given to the Medes and the Persians. Who is this Darius the Mede who takes over? He supports satraps. Turn to Daniel 6:28, which says, “Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” Many evangelicals read verse 28 as what is called an appositional vav. Vav is the letter in Hebrew that means “and.” An appositional use of it means it is translated “that is.” In other words, Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian are the same person. Cyrus the Persian king has another court name, according to Median traditions, and the Persians conquered the Medes. You see in the vision of Belshazzar that the
Medes and Persians are together. That is the way in which most evangelicals read those passages.

The other thing that we need to mention is Belshazzar. There are several references to King Belshazzar in Daniel 5 through 8. We just read one of them, the son of Nabodinus who traveled to Temah. Nabodinus traveled outside of Babylonia. He was still the king, and he left his son in charge. Belshazzar acted as the king even though Nabodinus was still the king. That is how evangelical scholars have answered that original critique.

The Daniel who is talked about in these stories is the Daniel of the first deportation. The best date for Daniel is in 539 BC instead of the second century BC. That has implications for these visions in terms of the 70 weeks and what they refer to in leading up to the establishment of the kingdom that will have no end. Let me refer you back to this kingdom in Daniel 6. We see that the living God will endure forever, and His kingdom will not be destroyed. His dominion will never end. In Daniel 7 is the vision of the Son of Man where the Ancient of Days takes His seat. We see a river of fire flowing. Verse 10 and following say, “Thousands and thousands attend him, ten thousand times ten thousand […] In that vision before me was one like the son of Man coming on the clouds. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory, sovereign power. All peoples, nations, and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” There is no question that, in the Gospels, when Jesus talked about seeing the Son of Man coming in the clouds, He was making a direct reference to Daniel 7:13. He claimed that this passage had to do with Him.

Let us talk about the purpose and outline of Daniel. The year 539 BC is right before 538 BC, which is when Cyrus’ edict took place. The people began to return, so Daniel ministered to the exiles and the early returnees. The purpose was to assure the exiles and the early returnees to the land of the God Most High. “God Most High” is a phrase that is used very often in Daniel. This phrase is appropriate amidst other nations that claim to have gods. We see that Nebuchadnezzar and Darius say that the God Most High is the God of Israel. Daniel is divided into two sections. Stories of God’s sovereignty are in Daniel 1 through 6, which include the testing of Daniel and his friends. They are wonderful examples of what it means to live faithfully in exile. In other words, they kept the purity laws and did not eat certain kinds of food. They prayed toward the temple, just like Chronicles says. And they did not bow down to other gods. The thing that is most central to the identity of the people of God of having no other gods before God is embodied by Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In Daniel 7 through 12 Daniel’s visions of God’s sovereignty depict a future influenced by four kingdoms but controlled by God’s sovereign rule. A good memory verse is what we just read in Daniel 7.

The visions of Daniel 2, 7, and 8 talk about bizarre menagerie compositional beasts that are common in apocalyptic visions. These beasts represent nations and their challenge to the sovereignty of Israel’s God. Each one of them suffers destruction, as terrifying as they are. In Daniel 2 we see the head of gold. Babylon deported Judah’s king. The Medo-Persian empire defeated Babylon in 539 BC. They Cyrus edict happened in 538 BC. Greece defeated the Persians in 331 BC. Alexander the Great swept through. The legs of iron and the terrifying beast is Rome. Rome assimilated former Greek holdings, and the kingdom of God that will have no end is the rock against the feet of clay. It grows into the mountain that fills everything. These visions in Daniel 2, 7, and 8 all correlate together.

Unlike Ezekiel, Daniel’s use of the term Son of Man takes on the quality of a great Davidic king exalted by God to effect His reign on the earth, as Jesus shows by forgiving sin, healing, and coming in power. The great kingdom of Daniel is none other than the kingdom of Christ, and Jesus Himself referred to Daniel’s record about the abomination of desolation and the Son of Man coming with power.
Let me say one thing as we close about the 70 years. Turn to Daniel 9, which is Daniel’s prayer for the exiles. He reads the prophecy of Jeremiah and that these things would last 70 years. We saw that in Jeremiah 29. Daniel 9:20 talks about the 70 sevens and says,

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision: Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ […] the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. […] He will confirm a covenant for many.”

Then the abomination of desolation passage is next. It is interesting that Gabriel also appears at the same time to Zechariah in the temple. Gabriel also addresses Mary as “highly esteemed.” There are a lot of echoes from Daniel in Luke.

Let us talk about how we understand the 70 years and the 70 sevens. One possible understanding is that it is 70 years from the destruction of the temple in 586 BC to the rededication of the temple in 515 BC. Second Chronicles 36 sights the Cyrus edict as a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy. The year 539 BC is an important date, but it could be dated back to the deportation in 605 BC. There are a couple of ways to measure the 70 years in terms of Jeremiah’s prophecy and what Chronicles says is a fulfillment of that prophecy. Here we have a reinterpretation in terms of 70 times seven. This has to do with a passage in Leviticus 26:14-28. This is about the curses of the covenant and the requirements of it. Verse 18 says, “If after all of this you do not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze […] If you remain hostile to me and refuse to listen to me I will multiply your afflictions seven times over as your sins deserve […] I will scatter you among the nations and draw up my sword.” The context in Leviticus 26 is this idea of the sanctions of the covenant. In Daniel’s prayer of repentance, Gabriel shows him what God has done. The 70 is now multiplied seven times over, making 490 years. If we look at it in terms of the rededication of the temple beginning a new period, the first 70 years is from the Cyrus edict to the dedication of the temple. From 515 BC until approximately 5 BC is approximately 490 years. This period of 70 years is a typical period of judgment that goes beyond a generation. In other words, that generation will experience punishment or judgment. This is the general idea of how this works in leading up to the time of Christ here.