



ORTHODOX  
UNION

# Nach Yommi

COMPANION

by Rabbi Jack Abramowitz

*Volume II:*  
Neviim Achronim - Later Prophets

*Section C:*  
Yechezkel - Ezekiel

# Chapter 1

## You're Not Supposed To Get It!

G-d appeared to Yechezkel (Ezekiel), a Kohein (priest) who was among the exiles to Babylonia. The Heavens opened and Ezekiel saw a vision of G-d. A wind was coming from the north, and a cloud with fire flashing in it, as well as chashmal (the modern word for electricity, although Rashi suggests that it may be a type of angel). From the middle of this came four chayos (a type of angel), resembling human beings. Each chaya had four faces, each with four wings. Their legs were each a single, straight leg (which is what we emulate when we put our legs together while saying Kedusha) and the feet were rounded, like calves' hooves, and the legs of the chayos shone like bronze.

The chayos had hands under their wings, and the wings were connected to one another. The chayos didn't need to turn as they moved, since they had a face in each direction. Furthermore, each face was composed of four faces: a human face in front, a lion on the right, an ox on the left and an eagle on the back. (This gave each chaya a total of sixteen faces, four in each direction, and 64 wings, four per face.) For each face, two wings covered the face and two covered the body. The eyes of the chayos shone like torches and lightning came out of the fire. They traveled back and forth like bazak (a flash of light, possibly related to the word barak, lightning).

Ezekiel saw the chayos and there was an ofan near each one. (An ofan is another type of angel.) The ofanim resembled tarshish, which Rashi says is a type of crystal. "Ofan" means a wheel and the ofanim are described as a wheel within a wheel - Rashi says perpendicularly (imagine a gyroscope) - which enabled them to travel in any direction. The ofanim were tall and impressive; their wheels having the ability to see in every direction. The ofanim moved when and where the chayos moved, because the two groups of angels were inter-related.

Above the heads of the chayos, there was an expanse like ice. Under this, the chayos covered their faces and bodies with their wings. When they moved, the wings made a sound like rushing waters, like the voice of the Al-mighty, like the noise of a multitude of people. When they stopped, they lowered their wings, which were then silent.

Above them was the Heavenly Throne, which had the appearance of sapphire and a form resembling a person on it. (Don't be mistaken: this was NOT G-d, but a representation of His glory. Even the traditional commentaries tread extremely carefully on this verse, v. 26). From the waist up there was the appearance of chashmal (see above) and from the waist down, the appearance of fire. The effect of all this brilliance was refracted like a rainbow. At this point, Ezekiel tells us that this was the way he was able to perceive G-d's glory (NOT G-d Himself) and he threw himself on his face. Then a voice spoke to him. (We'll find out what it said in the next chapter.)

This chapter is called Ma'aseh Merkava, the incident or the workings of G-d's "chariot." Don't worry if you don't "get" it. I don't get it. Almost nobody gets it. We're not supposed to get it. The Talmud (Chagiga 14b) tells us that we cannot teach this subject in depth; the Rambam cites this as the law (Yesodei HaTorah 2:11-12). According to the Mishna on Chagiga 11b and the Gemara there on 13a, Maaseh Merkava may even be more esoteric than Maaseh Bereishis, the Creation account. So rather than attempt any real interpretation of this material, we've pretty much gone with straight text and a few scattered explanations from Rashi.

## Chapter 2

### **“On Your Feet!”**

G-d spoke to Ezekiel, using the special name “Ben Adam,” “Son of Man,” possibly because of Ezekiel’s encounter with the Merkava (in the previous chapter). “On your feet,” He said. Ezekiel felt the spirit of prophecy rest upon him and he arose.

G-d told Ezekiel that He was sending him to Israel, who had proven themselves a stubborn and rebellious people. Ezekiel was to tell them that he speaks in the Name of G-d. Whether or not they choose to heed, at least they will know that G-d sent them a prophet. Ezekiel was told to have no fear, for the people would not harm him, though the people could be compared to thorns and to scorpions. Speak to them even if they don’t listen, since they are the epitome of rebellion!

Ezekiel was told that he was not to be rebellious himself, by resisting his mission, as many prophets tried to do. He was to open his mouth and eat what G-d gives him. Then a hand came forth and gave Ezekiel a scroll, written on both sides with tales of mourning and woe. (Does Ezekiel actually eat the scroll? We’ll find out in the next chapter.)

## Chapter 3

### **Tel Aviv**

G-d told Ezekiel to eat the scroll, which he did, finding it as sweet as honey. (He either literally ate the scroll, or perhaps he did so metaphorically, the way we “devour” a book.) G-d then charged Ezekiel with his mission, to go to the people of Israel and to speak to them. Ezekiel was intimately familiar with his mission, which he had “consumed,” and the people would understand his language, so if they do not respond, the problem would not be one of communication. They simply do not want to listen, because they are stubborn and rebellious.

G-d says He will set Ezekiel against Israel, “head to head.” But Ezekiel’s head will be like the shamir, the worm that, according to legend, cut the stones used in building the Temple. Ezekiel was not to fear, but to take G-d’s words to heart and speak to the exiles, whether or not they listen.

A wind then lifted Ezekiel and he heard a great sound: the angels calling out, “Baruch k’vod Hashem mim’komo” - Blessed be the glory of G-d from His place.” (If this sounds familiar, it’s because we say it in U’va L’Tziyon during Shacharis, as well as in V’Atah Kadosh following Shabbos.) He also heard the sounds of the wings of the chayos, the sounds of the ofanim, and other great noises. The wind carried Ezekiel, who was in bitter spirits over having to chastise his people. The “hand” of G-d came upon Ezekiel and he found himself among the exiles in Tel Aviv. (This is not the same as the modern city of Tel Aviv. The modern-day Tel Aviv got its name from the Hebrew title of Theodor Herzl’s book *Altneuland*; the translator got it from here.) Ezekiel sat silently among the exiles for a full week, awaiting instructions.

After seven days, G-d spoke to Ezekiel and told him that He had appointed him to speak to the Jewish people on His behalf. When G-d says that the evil ones will die, it is Ezekiel's job to warn them. If he doesn't, then he will be held responsible for the deaths of the wicked (see Leviticus 19:16, the commandment not to stand idly by when someone's life is in danger). If Ezekiel warns the evil people but they refuse to listen, it will not be considered his fault.

When a righteous person sins, G-d will arrange his death. If Ezekiel does not warn such a person, he will be held responsible. If Ezekiel warns the righteous man and prevents the sin, he will have saved that man's life - and his own soul from being responsible for an avoidable death.

G-d told Ezekiel to get up and leave the valley where he was. He did, and he saw another vision of G-d's glory. Once again, he threw himself on his face. A spirit stood Ezekiel up and G-d spoke to him. G-d told Ezekiel to lock himself in his house and to put on ropes. G-d would make Ezekiel unable to speak, so that he would not at this time chastise the people. Later, G-d would unseal Ezekiel's mouth and he would tell the people that some will listen and some will refrain, because they are a disobedient people.

## Chapter 4

### Behind the Iron Curtain

G-d told Ezekiel to take a brick and to inscribe "Jerusalem" upon it. He was then to besiege the brick, symbolic of the actual siege of Jerusalem. He was to take an iron pan and place it as an "iron wall" between himself and the representation of the city. Ezekiel was to focus upon it, to be a sign to the people. (From here, the Talmud in Brachos 32b says that since the day Jerusalem was destroyed, it's as if there was an iron wall between Israel and G-d.)

Ezekiel was then commanded to lie on his left side (facing north) one day for each year that Israel provoked G-d since entering the land - 390! The suffering he endured would effect partial atonement for the people. Upon completing the 390 days on his left, Ezekiel was to lie on his right side (facing south) for an additional 40 days, corresponding to the years after the Ten Tribes were exiled until the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was to uncover his arm, like a warrior, and G-d would place ropes upon him, to keep him in place. (Metaphorically, the fate Ezekiel prophesied was unmovable.)

What would Ezekiel eat for the 430 days he was lying on his sides? G-d told him to take a mixture of wheat, barley, beans, lentils and a few other ingredients and to mix them in one utensil. He had a strict daily ration of this mixture, as well as of water. And he was to bake it using human excrement, in the sight of the people. This was symbolic of how the Jewish people would eat their food in a state of uncleanness after their exile.

Until this point, Ezekiel said nothing about his unpleasant mission, but when G-d got to the part about human excrement, the prophet balked. "My whole life, I've been careful not to eat neveilah, treifa or piggull!"

(Respectively, those are animals that died without being properly slaughtered, those that were slaughtered but found to be unfit, and a sacrifice that was rendered unfit by the owner's improper intentions.) In deference to Ezekiel's strict adherence to the laws of kashrus, G-d substituted cattle dung for human excrement. (Still unpleasant, perhaps, but nowhere near as unseemly.)

G-d then told Ezekiel that He will "break the staff of bread in Jerusalem" - there would still be food to eat, but in small amounts, so that it would be measured out. The people will lack food and water and will waste away in their sins.

## Chapter 5

### **A Hairy Situation**

G-d told Ezekiel to take a razor and shave his hair and beard. (Because this violates a Biblical prohibition against shaving with a razor, many commentators surmise that it occurred in a vision.) Ezekiel was told to take a scale and divide the hair into three even amounts. One third was to be burnt in the brick representing Jerusalem after the 430 days of siege against it were completed. (See the previous chapter.) A third was to be struck with a sword outside of the Jerusalem-brick. The final third was to be thrown to the wind and scattered, though G-d would unleash a sword against them. But it's not finished! Ezekiel was told to take some of the hair from the remnants tie them up in his garment. He was then to take from them and throw them in the fire. This represents the fate of Jerusalem.

The people of Jerusalem ignored G-d's commands worse than the other nations, therefore He is going to judge them in front of the rest of the world. He will punish them like has never been done before. For example, the horrors of the siege against Jerusalem will drive the people to the desperation of cannibalism. The survivors of these horrors will be scattered. Because of the abominations they did, G-d will reduce the people; He will not have pity. One third will die by famine and plague; another third will be struck down in war; the final third will be scattered in every direction, still pursued by the sword.

After G-d has exercised His wrath, He will allow them to rest and be consoled; they will recognize that all this was from Him. The nations of the world will be amazed at what G-d allowed to happen to His people. G-d will send an increasing famine, until the "staff of bread" ultimately breaks. The famine and wild animals will ravage the populace; G-d will bring plague, blood and the sword against the people.

## Chapter 6

### **Ain't No Mountain High Enough (To Keep Me From Getting to You!)**

G-d instructed Ezekiel to prophesy regarding the mountains of Israel. G-d will bring a sword to the mountains and the valleys, destroying the altars of idolatry that had been erected there. The altars and idols will be bro-



ken. The corpses of their worshippers will be cast before the idols and their bones will be scattered in front of the altars. All the cities will be ruined, their altars and idols destroyed, and the deeds of the inhabitants forgotten. When G-d destroys the idolators, it will be obvious that it came from Him.

G-d will allow a remnant to survive, so that Jews will be scattered among the nations. They will remember G-d in the nations where they are exiled, and how He was "pained" by the way the Jews strayed from Him. They will understand that G-d did not allow this to happen for no reason.

Ezekiel was then instructed to pound his hands and stamp his feet as a sign of mourning for the evil that would happen to Israel. Those who are far will fall by plague; those who are near, to the sword. Those who remain will die by famine. They will understand that G-d did this when corpses fall before the idols that litter the land. G-d will lay waste throughout the land so that they will know it came from Him.

## Chapter 7

### **The End is Near!**

G-d spoke to Ezekiel, saying that the end was coming to Israel and to the "four corners" of the world. G-d is sending His anger to punish the people for their evil deeds. He will not spare them or have mercy; when the abominations come upon them, they will know that it comes from G-d.

G-d says, "See the evil that comes! The end is coming; it has roused against you. Morning has broken upon you, the day of chaos is close at hand. I will pour my anger out on you and judge you according to your deeds. I will bring your abominations upon you. I will not spare you or have mercy. You will know that I, G-d, have acted."

Look! The day is coming! The rod with which the people will be punished has blossomed - it will soon bear fruit. Their acts of injustice have borne a rod of evil to destroy them. None will be spared, since not one of them seeks G-d.

The day has come. Normally, when one is forced to sell his field, the buyer rejoices and the seller laments. Neither party should bother becoming that emotionally invested right now, since the exile is imminent and the ownership of the field will soon be moot. Though it means their very lives, the people cling to their sins and refuse to control their impulses.

They blow the trumpets signaling the troops to battle, but everyone is too terrified to fight. G-d's anger is upon them: the sword outside the city, famine and plague within. Those in the field will be struck down by the enemy, those barricaded behind the city walls will fall to illness and starvation. Fugitives will flee to the mountains, wailing because of their sins. The people will be unable to stand against the onslaught; their legs will melt beneath them. They will show the signs of mourning.

The people will toss their gold and silver away - it's worthless; they can't eat it in a famine. Pursuing wealth was what led them to this sorry state. As for the Temple, the pride of the nation, they have placed idols in it, so G-d will allow it to be discarded, as well. He will let it be prey for the invaders, who will further defile it. G-d will turn away from His holy place and let the invaders despoil it.

Forge the chain of Israel's captivity. The land is full of blood and the city is full of injustice. G-d will bring the most evil of the nations and allow them to take over. He will put an end to the Temple, which the people mistreated.

The time to cut off has arrived. The people will look for peace, but there will be none to be found. There will be one catastrophe after another. The people will seek guidance from the prophets, but they won't get it. They will turn to the Kohanim (priests), who are supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the people, only to find that they have forgotten their Torah knowledge. The King and the prince (possibly referring to Gedaliah, who was appointed governor of the remnant who stayed behind after the exile) will mourn and the people will be in chaos. G-d will treat the people as they have earned through their actions and they will know that it came from Him.

## Chapter 8

### Insult to Injury

Ezekiel was sitting in his house with the elders of the people, when G-d appeared to him in a vision. As with the vision of the "chariot" in chapter 1, this vision includes descriptions of Heavenly phenomena that we cannot go into any deeper than the descriptions given in the text.

Ezekiel saw a vision of a man, resembling fire from the waist down and "chashmal" from the waist up. (See chapter 1 for a discussion of "chashmal.") He took Ezekiel by a lock of his hair and a wind carried him to Jerusalem, to the gate of Temple courtyard, where an idol had previously been. Ezekiel saw a vision of the glory of G-d, as he had before.

G-d told Ezekiel to look to the north; Ezekiel did and he saw the idol. G-d said, "Do you see what they do? You see the abominations that drive Me away? But look elsewhere and you'll see even worse!" He brought Ezekiel to the door and showed him a hole in the wall. G-d had him dig out the wall and it revealed the door to a hidden room. Ezekiel entered the room and saw it was full of idols, being served by the elders of the people. "You see what the leaders do in secret," G-d said. "They say that G-d doesn't care and has forsaken the land. But turn again and see more abominations."

He carried Ezekiel to the Temple courtyard, where he saw a group of women serving an idol called Tammuz, which had been rigged to appear that it could cry. Then He took Ezekiel to the door of the Temple, where 25 men had their backs to the Temple and bowed to the sun. (On verse 16, Rashi quotes the Talmud that they were evacuating their bowels in the manner of the service of the idol Peor; he explains the next verse to say that they were passing wind at G-d.) "You see how they throw their shame in My face," G-d said. (The text euphemistically changes it to "in their faces.") "Because of this," G-d says, "I will react with anger and I will not have mercy. They will call out to Me, but I will not answer."

## Chapter 9

### Gabriel's Pen

G-d called loudly that those appointed over the destruction of Jerusalem should come near, bringing their weapons. (Presumably, this refers to angels of destruction, although it may also refer to the Babylonian generals. For our purposes, we will go with the explanation that it refers to angels.) Six armed men (angels) came from the northeast gate of the Temple, plus a seventh man (angel) in white linen. (Tradition tells us that this was Gabriel, who matches this description in the Book of Daniel.) The man in linen had a scribe's tablet across his hip. The group stood by the altar.

G-d told the man with the tablet to go through the city and mark a sign - apparently the letter "tav" - on the forehead of all those who agonize over the abominations that have been done. The others were to follow him and strike down all those not so marked. They were to start with the idolators at the Temple, so they began with the elders of the secret room (from the previous chapter). G-d told the angels not to be concerned with the general prohibition of a corpse in the Temple, as the people had already defiled the place pretty thoroughly with their idols. So the angels started smiting.

While they were out striking people down, Ezekiel was left alone and he started crying, "G-d, will You destroy the entire people in Your wrath?" G-d replied that the sin of the people was very great - the land was full of blood and the city was full of injustice. The people reasoned that G-d didn't care what they did. Because of this, He would not have mercy on them. Then, the figure in linen returned and reported that he had finished marking the people.

## Chapter 10

### Cherubim Revealed

The following section contains further descriptions of Heavenly phenomena. We will continue to relate them without additional embellishment. The next paragraph describes the withdrawal of the shechina, G-d's presence, from the Temple.

Ezekiel looked and saw a sapphire-like canopy over the heads of the angels (specifically cherubim - see below), with something resembling a throne over it. G-d told the man in white linen to go between the wheels beneath the cherubim and fill his hands with coals, to throw upon the city. The cherubim stood to the south side of the Temple as the man in linen passed. The glory of G-d rose from the cherubim to the entrance to the Temple, filling the courtyard. The sound made by the wings of the cherubim was heard to the Temple Mount, like the voice of G-d. The man in linen went and stood near an ofan (a type of angel) and a cherub handed him the fire.

Under their wings, the cherubim had human hands. Ezekiel saw four ofanim by the cherubim, one each, and the ofanim looked like crystal. The ofanim all looked alike, like a single ofan. Among the four of them, they could travel in any direction without turning, and they could see in any direction. Collectively, the ofanim were called "The Galgal," "The Wheel." (Or, since ofan and galgal both mean "wheel," perhaps it means that Ezekiel heard the ofanim being addressed.) Each cherub had four faces: one like a cherub, one like a person, one like a lion and one like an eagle. The ofanim moved when the cherubim moved and they did not depart when the cherubim raised their wings.

The glory of G-d went from the entrance to the Temple and hovered above the cherubim. They raised their wings and ascended, accompanied by the ofanim. The cherubim each had four faces with four wings, with human hands beneath the wings. This was the same angelic vision Ezekiel had before (in chapter 1), but now he knew that they were cherubim.

The English word "cherubim" comes directly from the Hebrew "k'ruvim." In secular society, a cherub is almost universally depicted as a winged, naked baby. As you can see from Ezekiel's description, the real thing is somewhat more awe-inspiring. The cherubim are the bearers of G-d's glory. The cherubim here had four faces, one being the face of a cherub, rather than the face of an ox as in chapter 1. What is the face of a cherub? The Talmud (Chagiga 13b) says that the cherub face was human, but a child rather than an adult. (This may contribute towards the popular depiction.)

## Chapter 11

### **Going... going... gone.**

A wind carried Ezekiel to the eastern gate of the Temple, where 25 men stood. These were the 25 idolators from chapter 8, but now he could identify them as princes of the people. G-d told Ezekiel that these men plan evil and give self-serving advice in the city. They told the people that the warnings of the prophets would not come to pass and they would safely live out their days in the city.

The spirit of G-d rested on Ezekiel and told him to prophesy that G-d knows not only the actions of the people, but their thoughts as well. Their actions will lead to the city being strewn with corpses. The dead will remain in the city; the survivors would be exiled. G-d will hand them over to their enemies and punish them so that they know it came from Him.

Ezekiel did as he was told and, while he was speaking, one of the men died. Ezekiel threw himself down and cried out to G-d, "Will You eradicate the remnant of Israel?" (According to Radak, Ezekiel knew that the people were "marked for death," but he thought there would be time to try and encourage repentance. Now he saw that the smiting had begun.) G-d replied that the people of Jerusalem thought that they, unlike the people of Israel and the rest of Judah, were impervious to exile. Because they thought their hold on the city was immovable, they did not hesitate to turn away from G-d. Therefore, G-d says, they are being removed from Jerusalem and scattered among the nations. However, He will permit them to have synagogues in exile, to stand in for

the loss of the Temple. Eventually, He will gather the exiles back and return them to the land of Israel. When that happens, they will not persist in their evil ways. They will have a new outlook and will be receptive to the word of G-d. As for those who refuse to accept G-d's word and do persist in their evil, G-d will give them exile and the sword.

The cherubim raised their wings, with the ofanim adjacent to them, and G-d's glory was over them. G-d's presence, the shechina, withdrew from the Temple altogether. (It had done so in stages.) In a vision, the wind carried Ezekiel to the Chaldean exile, where he spoke to the refugees and told them what G-d had said.

## Chapter 12

### Role-Playing and Asking Questions

G-d spoke to Ezekiel and said that the prophet lives among a rebellious people. They have eyes and ears, but they refuse to see and hear. Ezekiel was to send the people a message by making himself the tools one would take into exile (Rashi says a cup and a small mixing bowl; the Midrash says a canteen, a bowl and a mat.) Ezekiel was to be told "go into exile" in the people's sight. The idea was that they should see and "get the message," because they're too stubborn to just accept the prophet's straightforward rebuke. Ezekiel was told to take his "tools of exile" by day and exit like an exile by night. He was to dig a hole through the wall of his house and use it to "escape." He should carry his belongings on his shoulder and cover his face. (Much of this was symbolic of the way King Tzidkiyahu of Judah was forced to flee the city.) Ezekiel did as he had been instructed.

G-d spoke to Ezekiel in the morning and He asked if the people hadn't inquired as to the meaning of the prophet's actions. Ezekiel was to reply when asked that this prophecy is about the ruler (Tzidkiyahu) and his people - Ezekiel himself is the sign! What he did himself would be done to them. The ruler and the people would be exiled. Tzidkiyahu would flee by night, through a hole in the wall, with his face covered. He will be caught and brought to Babylonia where he would die, but he won't see it. (Tzidkiyahu was blinded en route, as part of his torture - you can review his capture in Jeremiah 52.) His court and officers will scatter before the sword and the people will be dispersed among the nations. A few, however, will survive the war and famine and plague, to tell everyone what had happened and the nations will know about G-d (i.e., that He punishes evil).

G-d told Ezekiel to eat his bread and drink his water with fear and trembling, telling the people that this is how they would ultimately eat and drink, since the land will become barren, thanks to the sins of its inhabitants. Next, G-d asked Ezekiel the meaning of the popular saying of the time that the days would be drawn out and prophecy would disappear (i.e., the exile would not come). G-d told Ezekiel to tell the people just the opposite - the time is near and the prophecies are about to be fulfilled! The words of the flattering false prophets, who tell the people only what they wish to hear - those are the words that will cease! That which G-d says, however, will be done without delay. The people say that Ezekiel sees events in the distant future. Not so! That which G-d has described is imminent!

In this chapter, we see G-d “asking” Ezekiel questions. The concept of G-d “asking” is always difficult, as He knows all. Often, He asks something as an opportunity for the person being addressed to answer properly or improperly (as with “Where is your brother?” to Cain or “Who are these men?” to Balaam). Here, G-d’s questions are rhetorical. No reply is necessary and Ezekiel doesn’t offer one. When G-d asks “Didn’t the people inquire about your actions?” He means “They asked, but you did not answer,” which is why He continues with, “Here’s what you should tell them...”

## Chapter 13

### **Liar, Liar**

G-d addressed Ezekiel and told him to speak out against the false prophets who speak words of their own invention. Woe to the “prophets” who say whatever they want without having had a real revelation! They’re like foxes, running through the breaches in a ruin (i.e., cowardly). They haven’t actually stood up and “gone to bat” for Israel, preparing them for the hard times ahead. They lie, saying that G-d sent them when He didn’t, so how can they expect their words to come true? Because they lied in His Name, G-d is against them and He will not count them among His people - even in the World to Come (i.e., the “afterlife”). They will also not be among those who return after the exile ends because they misled the people with false promises of peace. It’s like they’re building a structure of an inferior material that cannot endure. G-d will bring the storm that destroys the structure erected by the false prophets. It will collapse and they will be crushed inside of it. In truth, G-d says of the false prophets, there is no wall and there are no builders.

Next, G-d told Ezekiel to speak about the women who engage in sorcery and superstition. They were mediums and fortune-tellers, giving positive and negative forecasts as it pleased them to do. They trapped people by encouraging the wicked and disheartening the righteous. They profaned G-d by pretending to carry Divine messages and for what? Meager wages. With their lies, they condemned the innocent and caused the guilty to endure. Therefore, G-d will destroy their implements of fortune-telling and set right the injustices they have made. No longer will they spout nonsense as if it were prophecy; G-d will save the people from their schemes.

## Chapter 14

### **Noah, Daniel and Job**

Some of the elders of Israel came to see Ezekiel. G-d spoke to Ezekiel and told him that these visitors were idolators (unlike the righteous elders of Judah who visited Ezekiel in chapter 8). Therefore, G-d said that He would answer their inquiries accordingly.



G-d told Ezekiel to tell the men that whoever serves idols and still goes to G-d's prophet for direction, G-d will still answer him. Why will G-d answer them? In order to draw back those who have strayed from Him after idols. Ezekiel was told to encourage the people to give up their idols and to return to G-d. When idolators inquire of G-d, He will answer them, but He will still be angry about the idolatry; He will punish that person accordingly if the person does not listen to the prophet and give up his idols.

If a prophet says something that is not true, G-d will destroy him. That prophet's sin will be comparable to that of the idolator. No one is permitted to cause G-d's people to stray from Him; they are His people and He is their G-d.

G-d also said that if a nation seriously sins against Him, He will punish them with famine. Even if righteous people along the lines of Noah, Daniel and Job were to live in those places, their merits would only be enough to save themselves, not the others. If G-d sent wild beasts, warfare or plague to punish a nation, even such righteous people as these could not save the sons and daughters. Well, G-d is sending all four of these against Jerusalem - famine, war, plague and wild animals - so don't expect the righteous few to save the city. A remnant will survive and they will be a consolation when we see their righteous deeds.

## Chapter 15

### Right to the Point

G-d asked Ezekiel (rhetorically) what happens to the vines that grow in the forest. They can't be used as wood for any constructive purpose. The vines have already been used for fuel, so they're no good for work. They were pretty useless before, even more so once they've already been burned! Well, that's Jerusalem. They should have been a fruit-bearing vine of the vineyard, but instead they're like the vines of the forest - only good for fuel! And the fire is coming.

## Chapter 16

### Ezekiel Doesn't Mince Words

G-d now gives Ezekiel a very long and surprisingly graphic parable about Israel. This parable is so harsh that the Talmud (Shabbos 129b) calls it "the chapter of rebuke" and, according to one opinion, it should not be read publicly (Megilla 25a). In it, Israel is an abandoned baby girl and G-d is her Benefactor. G-d starts the parable by saying that the parents of Israel are the Canaanite nations. (These nations inhabited the land while Israel was in Egypt and they defiled it.) Then, Israel was "born."

The baby representing Israel was abandoned - nobody washed it or cut the umbilical cord. It was left there to die, lying in a pool of its own blood and filth. Then G-d "passed by" and took pity where no one else would,

saying "In your blood, you shall live." (This verse may be familiar to you from the Passover Haggadah. In its simplest meaning, the verse says that Israel will live despite her wretched state. Another explanation is that Israel endures because of the blood of circumcision, the sign of our covenant with G-d.) Israel grew like the plants of the field; she matured and became beautiful, but she was still naked, so G-d washed her, covered her and adorned her with ornaments (Torah and mitzvos). Israel adorned herself with silver and gold, silks and fine embroidery, and ate the finest foods, like a queen. Then she went out among the nations and committed adultery (referring to idolatry).

Israel committed acts of adultery with everyone who passed by. She used her fine clothes as a futon on which to have relations with strangers. She took the gold and silver she got from her "Husband" (G-d) and made phallic shapes out of them (see Radak on verse 17). Then she took the children of her marriage and slaughtered them (referring to the idolatry of Molech). Committing all of these horrible acts, Israel did not remember her younger days, when G-d rescued her from her miserable state and her doomed fate. Instead, she set herself up a roadside stand where she used her beauty to perform horrible acts. She would spread her legs (G-d's words) for everyone who passed by. (Radak says this means that they were receptive to any idol that came their way.)

Israel "committed adultery" with Egypt, whose land was especially full of idols. Because Israel provoked G-d, He reduced her food allowance (i.e., sent a famine) and delivered them into the hands of the Philistines (in the time of Samson), but even the Philistines were embarrassed by Israel's behavior. They continued to commit unspeakable acts. Egypt couldn't satisfy them, so they "cheated" with Assyria. That still didn't satisfy them, so they cheated with Chaldea and the Canaanite nations.

Israel isn't even a prostitute; she's just a harlot. Prostitutes get paid, but Israel gave gifts to her many lovers to encourage them. There never was a harlot so big! Because Israel revealed herself to anyone and everyone, as well as the idols and bloodshed, G-d will punish her. He will gather all of her lovers around her and expose her to them, in order to embarrass her. Then, G-d will judge Israel as the murderer and adulterer she is. Her former lovers will tear down her structures, strip her and take her ornaments. They will pelt her with rocks and poke her with swords, then burn her house down (clearly alluding to the destruction of the Temple). Other women (meaning nations) will see what happened and they will think twice before being unfaithful! Furthermore, Israel will be so degraded that no lover would have her. After all of this happens, G-d's anger will pass. He did all this because she did not remember the kindnesses He did for her in her youth.

There's a saying, "Like mother, like daughter." As we said, Israel's "mother" was the idolatrous Canaanite nation that used to live there. She is her mother's daughter! She also has two sisters: her little sister is Sodom and her big sister is Samaria (the capital of the Northern Kingdom of the Ten Tribes). It would have been bad enough if she had matched the actions of her sisters, but she surpassed them! (Judah had the advantage of seeing what happened to Sodom and to the Northern Kingdom, but they still persisted in their evil ways.) "Compared with you," G-d says, "your sisters are virtuous!" But the remnants of Sodom and Samaria will eventually return, along with the exiles of Judah. (We see from here that there were survivors of Sodom other than Lot and his daughters.)

The adulterous woman of our parable will be exiled in order to be disgraced, as she has earned. When she slipped into this deplorable state, she gave an excuse to the rest of the world for their behavior. Sodom used to be the model for the ones not to emulate, but now everyone knows how degenerate Israel is. She will pay the price for her actions. Israel broke the covenant forged at Sinai, but G-d will remember and renew it, never again to be broken. When they repent, they will be embarrassed about the way they treated G-d. When G-d forgives them, there will be no more excuses for acting that way ever again.

## Chapter 17

### The Riddler

Next, G-d spoke to Ezekiel and told him to pose the following riddle to the people of Israel. (The difference between a “riddle” and a “parable” is that in a parable, we are told that A = B. In a riddle, the metaphor is not really spelled out). G-d says that a great eagle with a large wingspan, with feathers of many colors, came to Lebanon and took the top off of the cedar. (In this parable, “Lebanon” refers to Israel rather than the country we call Lebanon.) The eagle brought the top of the cedar to a country of merchants and placed it in a busy city. He took the seed and placed it in a field; the seed took root next to the water and grew into a vine. (Note that the seed grew into a vine, which is lowly, rather than a towering cedar, counter to expectations.) The vine spread out and grew under the great eagle, which represents Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia. Along came a second eagle, also impressive but not nearly as impressive as the first. This eagle represents Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The vine sent its roots towards the second eagle, representing the messengers that were sent by Tzidkiyahu, king of Judah, to Egypt for help in his rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar. Now, G-d says, can the vine prosper relying upon the second, lesser eagle? Won't the first, greater eagle uproot the vine, which will then wither and die? When the larger eagle uproots the vine the smaller eagle will not try to defend it.

G-d spoke again to Ezekiel saying, “Ask the people of Judah if they understand this riddle.” The king of Babylonia came to Jerusalem and brought their royalty back to Babylonia. He took the royalty and made a covenant with them. Judah would continue to exist as a country but they would be subservient to Babylonia. But the king of Judah rebelled against Babylonia by sending messengers to Egypt asking for horses and soldiers. Can Judah possibly succeed? Can Tzidkiyahu hope to violate the agreement with Babylonia and get away with it? G-d swears that the king of Judah will die in Babylonia, the territory of the one he rebelled against. Pharaoh will not send the requested army to save Tzidkiyahu when he sees Babylonia bringing their siege engines against Jerusalem. Since he broke his agreement with the king of Babylonia, he will not escape. Furthermore, G-d says, “Since Tzidkiyahu made this oath in My name, he also broke an oath against Me. Therefore, I will catch him in My net and bring him to Babylonia to pay for the crime he committed against Me! His supporters will fall to the sword and the survivors will scatter in every direction and you will know that I, G-d, have brought this about.”

G-d says, “I, Myself, will take a branch from the top of the cedar and plant it on a high mountain. It will bring forth fruit and become a sturdy cedar. Birds of all species will dwell safely under the shade off its branches. All

the trees of the field will recognize that I, G-d, have brought the high lowly and raised the lowly high. I have dried the greenery and I have made the dry bear fruit. I, G-d, have spoken and I will make it happen.” (This last prophecy speaks of Moshiach, the Messiah, who is a “shoot” or “spout” from the seed of David.)

## Chapter 18

### Fathers and Sons

G-d spoke to Ezekiel and told him to explain the meaning of the popular saying of the time that fathers eat sour grapes, but the sons are the ones whose teeth are set on edge. (This means that the children pay the price for the actions of their parents.) G-d says that this saying will no longer be used. All souls belong to Him, both the souls of the fathers and the souls of the sons. The person who commits the sin is the one who will be punished.

Let’s say that there’s a person who is righteous and practices justice. The Navi then gives a list of sins from which that person would refrain including idolatry, adultery and violating the laws of family purity. He neither robs nor withholds from paying his debts. He is charitable, he doesn’t loan with interest and he pursues justice between his fellow men. Such a person will surely reap the benefits of his righteous deeds. Now let’s say that his son is an unrepentant sinner. He commits acts of violence, idolatry, adultery, robbery, and more. Shall such a person live? Should he benefit from the merits of his father? Surely not! He himself will bear the penalty for his actions.

Let us say further that the sinner of our example has a son of his own. This person sees the actions of his father and rejects them. He doesn’t commit idolatry or adultery or robbery, but rather he is generous and charitable and walks in the ways of G-d. Should this person be punished for the ways of his father? Again, surely not! But the people of Ezekiel’s time were saying, “Why do we, the sons, have to pay the price for the sins of our fathers?” If those sons were truly righteous, they would not be paying the price! The one that sinned is the one who will be punished.

Now let’s say that the evil person of our story gives up his sinful lifestyle and regrets all the injustice that he has committed. If so, that person will be forgiven and will live. G-d will “not remember” the sins that that person had previously committed. G-d doesn’t want wicked people to die; He would prefer that they turn from their evil ways and live! (This may sound familiar from the High Holiday services.) Conversely, when a righteous person gives up his proper ways and starts living a lifestyle of abomination, should he continue to reap the benefits of his previous appropriate acts? His righteous deeds will not be remembered; he will die because of his new, sinful lifestyle.

The people complain that the way of G-d is not proper (because they don’t understand it). “Now listen,” G-d says. It is not His ways that are improper; it is their way that is improper! When a righteous person gives up his proper lifestyle, he will die because of his new, evil deeds. When an evil person gives up his sinful lifestyle, he will live because of his new, righteous ways. Every person will be judged properly according to his deeds, G-d

says. Give up your evil ways and encourage others to give up their evil ways so that it will not be a cause of sin to you. Throw away your sins and give yourselves a new heart and a new soul, rather than die. G-d doesn't want anyone to die, He wants them to turn away from their sins, towards Him, and live.

## Chapter 19

### The Lion King

G-d tells Ezekiel to sing a dirge for the royalty of Israel. (The Radak tells us that this refers to Yehoachaz, Yehoyakim and Tzidkiyahu.) Their mother (referring to Israel) was a lioness. She dwelled among the other lions and raised her cubs to be young lions. The first of her cubs (referring to Yehoachaz) started to attack people. This refers to Pharoh, king of Egypt. Nations surrounded him and caught him, bringing him to Egypt. When the mother lion saw this, she became discouraged. She took the next of her cubs (Yehoyakim) and made a young lion out of him. He, too, started to attack people. (The Radak suggests that Yehoyakim antagonized Edom, Moav and Amon because they were among the nations that attacked when he rebelled against Babylonia.) He would abuse their widows and lay waste to their cities. Because of his actions, the land became desolate. So the nations gathered against him as well, capturing him and bringing him to Babylonia.

The mother (Israel) is like a fruitful vine planted by the water. Many strong rods came from this vine, which Rashi tells us refers to the mighty kings of Israel. The vine was very tall and could be seen from far away, but it was uprooted and scattered; the east wind (Nebuchadnezzar) dried up its fruit. (This refers to the sons of Tzidkiyahu, whom he murdered). Fire devoured the vine, which is now in the desert where there is no water to nourish it. Fire actually came out of the branches, referring to the evil that came because of the sins of the rulers. The fruit was consumed and there was no rod left to rule the people. This is the dirge that will be said at the time of the exile.

## Chapter 20

### "I'm Not Talking to You."

Once again, elders of the people came to Ezekiel to seek advice from G-d. This time we are told the date. It was the tenth day of the fifth month, which is Tisha B'Av. (Four years later on that date, the Temple would be destroyed.) G-d said to Ezekiel, "Tell the elders who have come to inquire of Me that I will not be sought by the likes of them." G-d then told Ezekiel to tell the elders about the sins of their ancestors.

When G-d chose Israel (900 years earlier), He made himself known to them in Egypt. He told them to throw away their idols and not continue worshipping false "gods." They refused to listen to Him and to get rid of them. G-d was inclined to destroy them but He refrained from doing so, so that His name would not be desecrated in front of the nations. (Compare this with Moses' prayer following the incident with the spies in Num-

bers chapter 14.) So G-d brought them out of Egypt into the wilderness, where He gave them the Torah and the mitzvos (commandments). He gave them Shabbos to be a sign between Him and them. But the people refused to follow G-d's laws and they violated His Shabbos. So He was once again inclined to destroy them, but He refrained for the sake of His name. However, He did not permit that generation to enter the land of Israel because they did not follow His ways.

G-d said to the next generation, "Do not follow your parents' ways and do not defile yourselves with idols. Keep My Torah and mitzvos and observe My Shabbos so that you will know that I am G-d." But the next generation also rebelled against G-d. They did not keep His laws, which if performed would cause a person to live. Once again, G-d was inclined to destroy them but He refrained from doing so, although He did resolve to scatter them among the nations.

G-d allowed the people to be defiled by the very gifts He gave them. For example, every first born is supposed to be consecrated to G-d. He allowed them instead to fall prey to the temptation of the idol Molech, which involved sacrificing those same children. (In a sense, G-d "gave them enough rope to hang themselves.")

G-d told Ezekiel to speak to the people and tell them that their ancestors committed blasphemy with the way they treated Him. He brought them to the land of Israel and when they saw every hill and tree, they used them for altars to their idols. G-d disparagingly called these altars bamos, meaning "high places." (People also used bamos to sacrifice to G-d, which was prohibited once the Temple was built.)

G-d asked the people through Ezekiel, "Are you continuing to go astray in the manner of your ancestors?" The people take their first-borns, who should be sanctified to G-d and pass them through fire as a form of idol worship. Therefore, G-d says, "I will not be sought by the likes of these men." They want to be like the other nations serving idols of wood and stone, but G-d will rule over them. G-d will remove them from among the nations where they live and whose idols they have been worshipping. Before returning them to Israel, He will bring them back to the wilderness as they were when they left Egypt and there will be there a reckoning for their actions. G-d will remove those who rebel against him and they will not return to the land of Israel. G-d says the people might as well worship their idols because they are not worshipping Him. They can't have it both ways, serving idols and coming to inquire to G-d through his prophet. Right now, G-d doesn't want their gifts, but when He returns them from exile and the Temple is rebuilt, then He will accept them. When the people are exiled they will think about their actions and come to regret them. They will come to know G-d when He punishes them for their evil ways.

## Chapter 21

### **Yes, There Are Two Paths You Can Go By...**

G-d told Ezekiel to face south (towards Israel from Babylonia) and speak to (or of) the "forest of the field," meaning the Temple. G-d will light a fire that will consume both moist trees and dry trees (i.e., both the righteous and the wicked). This fire will not be doused, burning everything south of Babylonia.

Ezekiel said that he was concerned that the people would dismiss his prophecies as mere fables. Therefore, G-d restated the prophecy in a straightforward manner, rather than as a parable. "Okay," G-d said, "Speak to Jerusalem about the Temple and the land." G-d said He would remove His "sword" and strike down both the righteous and the wicked, from Jerusalem to Babylonia. Once He starts, G-d won't stop until He's finished. Ezekiel will sigh so hard from the calamity that it will physically deplete him. The people will ask the cause of his sigh and he will tell them the horrible news of the oncoming disaster.

Next, G-d told Ezekiel to prophesy about two swords: first, that of Babylonia, to destroy Jerusalem. Then, that of those who would kill Gedalia, who had been appointed governor over the remnant that stayed in Judah. These swords are sharpened and polished, ready to be put to use. There's no reason for joy. G-d rebuked His children, but they laughed it off, so now He has to "up the ante." G-d tells Ezekiel to go ahead and cry for what's about to happen. The rulers and royalty will be put to death by the sword. (This refers to Josiah, Yehoyakim and the sons of Tzidkiyahu.) There will be many trials and tribulations to come, because the nation refused to be corrected by less harsh means.

There's still a third sword, G-d says - the sword of slaughter, which will cause many people to fall. The people will lose heart and stumble. This sword is polished and wrapped, ready for use. Pick a path, left or right, and get going.

G-d tells Ezekiel to make two roads by which the sword of Babylonia could come, both starting from the same source. Clear a place at the head of the road that leads to the city. Make a road to Rabbah, for the people of Amon, and one to Jerusalem - Nebuchadnezzar is going to one or the other! He will stand at the fork in the road and cast lots to determine which route to take. Jerusalem is selected for conquest! Israel cannot believe it, but the result of every form of divination Nebuchadnezzar used was the same. He used 49 forms of fortune-telling and they all told him to go to Jerusalem, to serve as G-d's instrument to punish them for their sins.

The sins of the people are about to be recalled and, because of them, the people will be delivered into the hands of the Babylonians. The wicked are sentenced to death and Tzidkiyahu will forfeit the throne at this time of reckoning. G-d will remove mitznefes (the "turban") from the Kohein Gadol (High Priest) and the crown from the king; neither will retain their position. Gedaliah, who is not of royal blood, will become ruler, while Tzidkiyahu will be deposed. The leadership of the nation will be a "hot potato," tossed from person to person. It was taken from Yehoyachin and given to Tzidkiyahu, then from Tzidkiyahu and given to Gedaliah; Gedaliah won't hold on to it for long, either.

Ezekiel was told to prophesy about the nation of Amon, who rejoiced when Nebuchadnezzar's fortune-telling sent him to Jerusalem, rather than to Rabbah. Not so fast! There's still a sword polished and ready for Amon! Amon's soothsayers may say that the danger has passed, but it's not so! They're just misleading their people to end up like Jerusalem will! When the sword drawn against the Jews is finished with its work, it will be Amon's turn. G-d will punish them for their sins, allowing them to fall prey to Nebuchadnezzar's army. Amon will be wood for the fire and their blood will run. Amon will be wiped out, as G-d has said.

## Chapter 22

### Be a Man

G-d spoke to Ezekiel and said that he should judge Jerusalem, which He called a city that spills blood. Ezekiel was to tell them in the Name of G-d that they have made themselves guilty through bloodshed and defiled themselves with their idols; because of their crimes, their time is almost up. G-d will make them a topic of conversation among all the nations, who will discuss how far Israel fell and how they were punished.

The rulers of the people abused their authority and shed innocent blood. Parents were not respected and the poor, widows and orphans were oppressed. Sacrifices were treated disrespectfully and Shabbos was violated. Gossip and slander led to bloodshed and, of course, there was all the idolatry and promiscuity. Incest was committed and the laws of family purity were ignored. The people committed adultery and charged interest and in all other ways forgot about G-d. G-d metaphorically mourns over the evil actions of his people.

Can the people endure all that is about to happen to them, which G-d is going to bring about because of their actions? He has decreed it and it will happen. They will be scattered among the nations and dispersed among many lands until their impurity has dissipated and they will be brought low in the eyes of the world.

G-d spoke again to Ezekiel and told him that the people in Israel had become like the impurities in metal that need to be refined. They are like copper, tin, iron, and lead, rather than the silver they should be. (The comparison of the Jews to a variety of metals is because not all of them had fallen equally far from G-d.) G-d's anger is the fire and He will purify them as the furnace purifies the silver.

Finally, G-d told Ezekiel to tell the people that Jerusalem is a land that was not purified by rain. (Rashi quotes the Targum to explain that they did not have sufficient merits to protect themselves from punishment.) The false prophets conspire to reassure the people with baseless promises of peace, but they are actually helping to bring about the very destruction that they deny. The Kohanim (priests) were responsible to instruct the people in the ways of Torah, but they neglected to do so. The Kohanim did not distinguish between ritual purity and impurity, as they are supposed to do, and they turned a blind eye to desecrations of Shabbos. The princes of the people are compared to wolves shedding blood for the sake of personal profit. Those false prophets smooth over all of these misdeeds claiming to represent G-d, which they do not. The people of the land rob and oppress, rather than helping the needy among them because there were no leaders to correct their behavior. G-d waited for someone to stand up and "be a man" but no one ever did, so He poured out his anger upon them in payment for their evil deeds. (Compare with Avos 2:5, "in a place where there are no men," i.e., leaders, "strive to be a man.")

## Chapter 23

### Oholah and Oholibah

Once again, G-d spoke to Ezekiel. He told the prophet a parable about two women, sisters. (The women are the two Jewish nations: Judah and the Ten Tribes of Israel.) They behaved promiscuously in Egypt.

(Promiscuity is the common metaphor for idolatry.) The sisters' breasts were fondled by the Egyptians. (See the end of this synopsis for an explanation of this metaphor, as it is too long for a parenthetical note.) We'll call the sisters "Oholah" and "Oholibah" (respectively, "Her Tent" - referring to Samaria, capital of Israel - and "My Tent is in Her" - referring to Jerusalem, capital of Judah). Oholah (Samaria) cheated on G-d with the idols of Assyria and she continued to long for Egypt, who was her "lover" before she "married" G-d at Sinai. So G-d let Assyria have her. They revealed her shame, killed her children and made an example out of her.

The younger sister, Oholibah (Jerusalem) saw this, but did she learn from it? No! She exceeded her sister's promiscuity! She still pursued Assyria, as well as the Chaldeans. The Babylonians came to her "bed" and they became lovers, but she rejected them. (This refers to the rebellion against Babylonian rule.) G-d became sick of Oholibah, as He had with Oholah. And she, too, longed for Egypt, the "lover" of her youth. So, G-d gathered Oholibah's lovers against her, as He did against Oholah: the Babylonians, the Chaldeans and others, as well as the Assyrians. They will attack and judge Oholibah. They will disfigure her face as a punishment for her promiscuity (to make her unattractive to future lovers), enslave her children and scorch the land. They will take her ornaments, referring to the vessels of the Temple. In this way, Oholibah will be prevented from future promiscuous behavior and give up her longing for Egypt.

G-d will hand Oholibah over to her enemies, who will take all of her handiwork and leave her naked, revealing her shame. All this will happen because she followed in her sister's footsteps, therefore she will share her sister's fate. She will become drunk, miserable and confused. Jerusalem will drink from the cup of Samaria and drain it, becoming so disoriented that she will inflict harm upon herself.

G-d says that since they have forgotten Him, they will have to bear the consequences for their actions. He then asks Ezekiel if he will judge the actions of the sisters, who strayed after idols and whose hands are full of blood. They also violated the Sabbath and defiled the Temple with idols, which they would show off to foreign dignitaries. They were on a fancy bed, with a set table before them, using the incense and oil of G-d for idolatry. Multitudes came from neighboring nations and they "made themselves up" for their visitors. G-d said that He would bring an end to this behavior. Lovers came to Oholah and Oholibah, but righteous people will try them for their crimes. They will be subjected to the horrors of being stoned and stabbed and bereaved of their homes and children. G-d will abolish this promiscuity and no one will ever wish to emulate them.

Now, as to the metaphor of the breasts. Such a metaphor would normally be easy to gloss over in a synopsis that doesn't cover every single word of a chapter. However, in this case, it is a recurring metaphor that appears four or five times, so it is important to understanding the chapter. As in Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs), breasts symbolize the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, or in other words, Torah. While the Torah had not yet been given while the Jews were still in Egypt, there were still Jewish standards of behavior above and beyond those of other nations. This observance was neglected in Egypt because of the influence of the idolators among whom they lived. This is the meaning of the Egyptians groping the breasts of the Jews - their idolatry contaminated the Jews' performance of G-d's will. However, it is important to note that the imagery is one of "foreplay," rather than intercourse. Idolatry is commonly presented as adultery. In Egypt, though the Jews were affected by the idols of their neighbors, they didn't "go all the way" into idol worship, they merely dabbled. (Still not good, but relatively innocent compared to what was to come, and more easily overcome.) Also, this happened before the Torah was given at Sinai, so Israel was still "single," rather than "married." (Again, still not a good thing, but not as serious a sin as marital infidelity.)

## Chapter 24

### Asarah B'Teves

G-d spoke to Ezekiel in the ninth year of King Tzidkiyahu, on the tenth day of the tenth month (the 10th of Teves). He told Ezekiel to make special note of the day, as that's the day Nebuchadnezzar began the siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was told to relate a parable of a cooking pot, full of choice pieces of meat, which has been set to boil. G-d says woe to Jerusalem, symbolized by the pot, whose filth will be boiled out of her in stages. They didn't even try to conceal their guilt; they left the blood exposed and didn't even cover it as one does the blood of a slaughtered animal. (Rashi relates this to the Talmud in Gittin 57b, which describes the seething blood of the murdered prophet Zechariah.) G-d says that He will fan the fire under the pot, piling on firewood, making it so hot that even the bones will be burned. The contents of the pot will be consumed, but the pot will continue to be heated, to remove the absorbed impurities.

The people committed their evil with subterfuge; they will be purified through fire. Since the people refused to be cleansed, G-d is left no choice but to purge them of their impurities, as one does a non-kosher pot. G-d has decided this and He will not change His mind.

G-d spoke again to Ezekiel and told him that his wife was going to die from the plague. However, Ezekiel was not permitted to mourn her. Instead, he was instructed to suffer in silence. He was to continue to wear tefillin and shoes, and not to eat meals sent him by neighbors. Ezekiel's wife died at night and everyone saw that he was still going about his regular business the next morning, as if nothing had happened. They asked him why he wasn't sitting shiva and he replied that what happened to him was a microcosm of what would happen to Jerusalem. G-d would destroy His own Temple, the strength and pride of the nation, and their children would fall to the enemy sword. But they are to do as Ezekiel is doing, not observing the normal mourning procedures. This is because every single one of them would be a mourner - there would be absolutely nobody to console them.

On the day when all this happens, when the Temple is destroyed and the people bereaved of their children, the people will finally believe Ezekiel's prophecies. He will then be able to rebuke them, because they will see that he speaks for G-d.

## Chapter 25

### Amon, Moav, Edom and Philistia

G-d spoke to Ezekiel and said he should prophesize to the people of the nation Amon. He should tell them to listen to the word of G-d because they rejoiced when the Temple was conquered and the Jews were exiled. G-d would deliver them into the hands of the nation of Aram. Aram will settle in the land of Amon, building temples and palaces, and they will eat all the goodness of the land. Eventually, they will abandon the land and Rabba, the capital of Amon, will become a place for herds of camels and flocks (meaning desolate, bereft of

people). G-d decreed this because they applauded and stamped their feet with joy for everything that happened to Israel. G-d is giving Amon over to be plundered by the nations and He will cause them to disappear from the land.

G-d said because Moav and Seir said that Judah is like all the other nations (meaning that G-d has removed His special consideration from them), G-d will expose their weakness and allow their enemies to enter. The invaders who conquer Amon would come by way of Moav. G-d will also allow Moav to fall into the hands of these invaders so that people will know that He pays for the evil that is done. When G-d punished Judah for their sins, Edom did not stand by them (as we will see in the book of Obadaiah). G-d said that He will cut off Edom, from man to beast, and lay waste to the land from the south (Yemen?) and the city Dedan will be conquered by the sword.

G-d also spoke of the Philistines, who constantly harassed the Jewish people unprovoked. G-d will stretch His hand upon them and cut them off. (The pasuk here calls the Philistines "Kreisim," the same root as the word meaning "to cut off." The choice of words suggests that the Philistines were inherently deserving of this fate.) G-d will act upon them with great fury and they will recognize that this punishment came from Him.

## Chapter 26

### Tzuris for Tzor

G-d spoke to Ezekiel regarding the nation of Tzor (Tyre). Even Tzor, which had always been a friend of Jerusalem, rejoiced in the destruction of the Holy City, not out of animosity but out of the promise of material gain; the traders who had formally gone to Jerusalem were now expected to bring their business to Tzor. Therefore, G-d says, He will bring invaders upon them, who will destroy their walls and towers and raze the land until it is like a smooth rock. The place will be so wide open that that's where fishermen will go to spread out their nets. Not only the cities, but also the suburbs will be destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar is coming with his armies. His troops will strike down the girls who are working in the fields and they will attack the cities with siege engine and catapults. The people of Tzor will be covered with the dust kicked up by his horses and the walls of the city will shake from the noise of his chariots. They will slaughter the people and tear down the towers. They will plunder all of the possessions of Tzor and demolish their houses, casting the building materials into the water. No longer will songs and music be heard in Tzor. It will become a place for spreading out nets, never to be built up again; this G-d has decreed.

G-d says, is it not true that many islands will moan when they hear what has happened to Tzor, out of fear that the same thing will happen to them? Princes of the islands will get off their thrones and remove their royal clothes because their fear and trembling will surround them like garments. They will sit on the ground in their great fear of destruction when they hear what has happened to Tzor. They will mourn what has happened to a city that was considered one of the strongest and most praiseworthy in the sea. G-d says that He will make them like Tzor, ruined like a city that was never settled and overrun by invaders like the waters of a flood. They

will be lost like those who have died, like nations that were destroyed long ago. G-d will make them a land of the dead rather than a land of the living. They will be as nothing. They will be sought but never found.

## Chapter 27

### **Sinking the S.S. Tzor**

G-d told Ezekiel to sing a dirge about Tzor. Tzor, city of the sea and busy port of merchants, considered themselves the city of perfection and beauty. They were surrounded by the ocean and her architects built from the most beautiful materials. Her wood was from juniper, cedar, oaks and cypress adorned with ivory, all from the best lands for these types of lumber. Their linen came from Egypt and they imported blue and purple cloth. This chapter compares Tzor to a ship and her wise men to sailors; they did not have to import "mariners" from other nations. Her elders were like builders who would repair any cracks in the ship that was Tzor and her sailors would take care of all of her needs. Other nations, including Persia, would aid Tzor in wars against her enemies. She was so wealthy that all seafaring nations were her trading partners, bringing any wares they had, from copper to slaves. From Germamia (possibly Germany) they would bring skilled slaves, fit to be horsemen. Nations would bring expensive gifts such as horns, ivory, and peacocks. The nation of Aram would trade Tzor precious stones and expensive clothes, which were popular among her ruling class. The two Jewish nations, Judah and Israel, would trade wheat, balsam, honey and oil. Damascus would bring white wine and wool. Arabia would trade sheep and goats. Sheba would bring spices, gold and precious gems. Tzor became full from all the wealth that was brought to her, so full, in fact, that it was sinking her metaphorical ship.

When the ship that is Tzor finally "sinks," the neighboring lands will tremble from the cry let out by her "sailors." The traders from other lands will disembark from their ships, saying "without Tzor what reason is there to go to sea?" They will let out a bitter cry and tear out their hair in mourning. They will put on ashes and sackcloth and wail bitter dirges saying, "Who is like Tzor in the middle of the sea?" When Tzor came around, the needs of many nations were met. Their abundance of riches made the kings of the Earth rich. All the island nations will be amazed and their kings will be afraid. Merchants of the nations will mourn the loss of their marketplace and Tzor will never reappear.

## Chapter 28

### **Game Over for Tzor**

Until now, Ezekiel prophesied about the land of Tzor (Tyre). Now, G-d told Ezekiel to speak about the king of Tzor. The king was arrogant and considered himself a god on Earth; he even had himself made a throne that represented him ruling over the Heavens and the seas. But he's not a god, he's just a man. Forget about being an omniscient god - he's not even as wise as Daniel, who understands profound secrets. He didn't amass his

fortune through his own brilliance or skill. But he considered himself G-d's equal, which is why G-d will bring an invasion upon Tzor. The king of Tzor will "die many deaths" by drowning and protesting that he's divine will not save him.

G-d told Ezekiel to mourn over the king of Tzor. They were a land of skilled artisans, whose craftsmanship was instrumental in building the Temple. He considered himself like G-d in the Garden of Eden, rejoicing in his creations. The king's clothes were embedded with all sorts of precious gems. G-d allowed the king of Tzor to enjoy these honors, even though He had the foreknowledge that the man would ultimately become arrogant; he also had the capacity for humility, but he did not utilize it.

G-d compares the king of Tzor to a cherub with a large wingspan. (Remember, cherubim were rather impressive creatures, not the winged babies of Renaissance art. See chapter 10 of this Book for a fuller description.) The king metaphorically covered his people with his wings, protecting them. Tzor earned a special place through their work in building the Temple. The king of Tzor ranked right up there with the kings of Israel, until his huge ego proved his undoing.

The merchants of Tzor started acting unjustly in their business dealings, secure in the knowledge that they wouldn't lose customers, as there was no place else to go. G-d will reject them; they will no longer be renowned for their contributions to the Temple. Tzor became arrogant because of their riches and finery, which overpowered their wisdom. Therefore, G-d will bring them down. Kings of other nations will look down on them. Because of their sins, and the king considering himself a god, a fire will consume them, until they are nothing but a mound of ashes on the ground. People will be astonished by this turn of events, then that's it for Tzor, forever.

G-d spoke to Ezekiel and told him to prophesy about the nation of Tzidon. G-d is against Tzidon and He will be honored when He punishes them for their evil deeds. He will send plague and sword, and blood will run in the streets. The people will know they are doomed and consider themselves already slain.

After G-d has dealt with Amon, Moav, and all the other nations as described in the last few chapters, these nations will no longer be around to antagonize Israel. When G-d returns the Jews to the land of Israel, they will dwell securely. G-d will punish those who have oppressed Israel and everyone will see that this came from Him.

## Chapter 29

### **If Rashi Doesn't Know, I Sure Don't!**

G-d spoke to Ezekiel about Egypt. (Chronologically, this prophecy precedes the one concerning Tzor, found in the previous chapters. It is recorded after because it was juxtaposed with other prophecies concerning Egypt, which came later.) G-d told Ezekiel to say that He is against Pharaoh, who is compared to a great crocodile of the Nile, considering himself in complete control of his domain. G-d will put a hook in Pharaoh's mouth, like one catches a big fish. Smaller fish, representing Pharaoh's army and people, will cling to him and be dragged

up out of the water with him. They will be scattered in the desert, which is not an especially good place for fish. They will fall and remain unburied, left for the scavengers to pick at. Egypt is being punished because, over the centuries, they have continually been unreliable, promising aid to Israel, only to renege at the last moment. Relying on them is like leaning on reeds - not only do they not support one's weight, they actually puncture the hand of those who try it. G-d is bringing the sword to Egypt; they will be cut off and the land will be desolate. Pharaoh will recognize that G-d controls the Nile, not he. Egypt will be deserted and empty for forty years. It will be considered a ruin even when compared to other destroyed nations. But at the end of forty years, G-d will gather the Egyptians from the lands of their captivity and return them to their homeland, although never again will they be a world power. Egypt will no longer tempt Israel into the sin of relying on them rather than on G-d.

G-d spoke to Ezekiel about Nebuchadnezzar, who had set his army against Tzor and conquered it. They made no profit from the conquest, as it had been Divinely decreed that Tzor's riches would be lost to the sea. Since Nebuchadnezzar made no money and gained no subjects from the conquest of Tzor, G-d is giving him Egypt as a sort of consolation prize. From there, he will get bodies and riches for Babylonia. This is payback for Egypt's deeds. The downfall of Egypt will be a "blossoming horn" for Israel. (Rashi says it is unclear to him how Israel - who were exiled before Egypt was conquered - reaped any benefit from that conquest. Because of this, he interprets the verse as referring to Egypt's renewal and the concurrent rise of Persia. Radak also says that it refers to the birth of Cyrus, who was instrumental in rebuilding the Temple.) When Ezekiel's words are fulfilled, people will finally believe him and will listen to his instructions, secure in the knowledge that he does, in fact, speak G-d's words.

## Chapter 30

### **G-d Breaks Pharaoh's Arms**

G-d spoke to Ezekiel and said that the prophet should proclaim that the day of destruction is near. When it comes, the day will be cloudy and dark for Egypt because of all their troubles. The sword will come to Egypt and they will tremble in Cush (Ethiopia) when they hear what has happened. Cush and all the other allies of Egypt will fall along with them. Their cities will be the most desolate of all the ruined cities. Everyone will be able to see that it was G-d Who set the fire against Egypt and her allies. He will send legions to shake Cush out of her complacency. G-d says that He is sending Nebuchadnezzar to dismantle Egypt. He will make the rivers dry and deliver them into the hands of their enemies.

G-d says that He will destroy the idols and remove them from the city of Nof; there will no longer be a world leader from Egypt. G-d will execute judgment against all the idolatrous centers in Egypt. Their young men will fall to the sword and be taken into captivity. Darkness will fall early in Egypt when G-d breaks whatever remaining hold she has over other nations. A cloud will cover her and her daughters will go into slavery.

G-d spoke to Ezekiel and told him to say that He has broken the arm of Pharaoh. It was not mended, so that he is no longer able to hold his sword with it. Now G-d is coming against Pharaoh to break both his arms, both the strong one and the one previously broken, and He will cause Pharaoh to drop his sword. The Egyptians will be scattered among the nations and dispersed throughout the lands. G-d will strengthen Nebuchadnezzar and give him the sword when he breaks the arms of Pharaoh. G-d will support the arms of Nebuchadnezzar just as He breaks the arms of Pharaoh. G-d will give Nebuchadnezzar the sword, which he will stretch out over Egypt. The Egyptians will be scattered and everyone will know that this is from G-d.

## Chapter 31

### **“You Think You’re Better Than HIM?”**

G-d spoke to Ezekiel and told him to say regarding Pharaoh and his nation, “Who do you think you’re like?” Assyria was like a cedar of Lebanon, tall with majestic branches. Rivers flowed around it, making it full and lush. All the birds of heaven rested on her branches and all the animals of the field gave birth beneath her shade. None of the other nations (compared to a variety of trees in this chapter) could compete with the Assyria for its beauty. No other “tree” in the garden of G-d was its equal. However, they became arrogant. Because Assyria was so full of herself, G-d allowed them to be delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonians metaphorically cut down the tree that was Assyria, her branches broke and all the people left her shade.

Why should Assyria think they’re better than anyone else? They are mortal and destined to die just like the rest of the world. On the day G-d humbled Assyria, all those who relied upon them mourned. The sound of Assyria’s downfall made the nations tremble with fear. When the king of Assyria descended into Hell, the other kings who were there accepted their fate, seeing that it happened to the mightiest among them.

Now, back to Egypt. Does Pharaoh think he’s as great as Assyria? Look what happened to them. The king of Assyria was destined for the grave and so is Pharaoh. He will descend to the nether world alongside the other unrepentant sinners. Pharaoh and his people will lie alongside all the others slain by the invaders.

## Chapter 32

### **Misery Loves Company**

G-d spoke to Ezekiel and told him to lament over Pharaoh, saying that he made himself out like a young lion, lording it over the land, but really he is like a crocodile, unable to thrive out of the water. He left his river and ended up polluting his own waters. G-d will spread out His net and pull him up. The Egyptians will be scattered across the fields and the birds and animals will come upon them. Their dead will litter the mountains and the

valleys. Their blood will water the land and fill the streams. The smoke of their destruction will blot out the sky; the sun, moon and stars will be invisible. G-d will darken the bright lights of Heaven (referring to Egypt's "guardian angels" according to Rashi).

The hearts of the other nations will sink when they hear what happened to Egypt, from fear that it could happen to them. People will be amazed when G-d lets loose His sword, in the form of the Babylonian army. Everyone will tremble when they imagine themselves in Egypt's place. G-d says that the Babylonians will loot Egypt and decimate the populace. The cattle will be obliterated so that neither they nor humans will stride along the Nile for a long time. Because no people or animals will be found there to stir up the mud, the waters will become clear, like pure oil. Fruitful Egypt will become a wasteland, so mourn over it.

Once again, G-d addressed Ezekiel, telling him to mourn for Egypt and all the people descending to the grave. (According to Rashi, this refers to Hell-bound idolators.) Do they think they're any better than the other nations, that they should escape this fate? They, too, will fall to the invaders. The mightiest in the grave will say this of them. Who is there (in the grave)? Mighty Assyria, who caused much destruction, are in the lowest depths. The warriors of Elam also caused much destruction; they're there, too, slain by their enemies. Other once-mighty nations, who created much havoc in their heyday, are also there, dead from their conquerors. In the end, these slain warriors have it worse than those who died natural deaths, since they were buried with the sins of their violence. So, too, Pharaoh will die in warfare and bloodshed and be buried with his sins.

Edom will also fall, with all their kings and officers, despite their great power. They are also destined for the pit. The Babylonian kings will ultimately be humbled and defeated; they, too, shall join them. When this happens, Pharaoh will be comforted over the downfall of Egypt. (Because, Metzudas Dovid says, misery loves company.) G-d will place the fear of Him throughout the land of the living, Pharaoh and his army will join the ranks of the slain.

## Chapter 33

### Music to His Ears

G-d told Ezekiel to speak to the Jews and to tell them that when G-d brings the invaders upon them, the people will appoint one of their own as a lookout. This man will see the army approaching and sound the alarm. Whoever hears the warning and does not react to it will be destroyed by the enemy. They will be held accountable for their own deaths since, had they responded to the alarm, they would have survived. And what if the watchman neglects to sound the alarm that warns the people? Then the deaths will be the lookout's fault, for neglecting his duty.

And what of Ezekiel? G-d has appointed him the watchman over Israel. It's his job to warn them and their job to listen. If they don't listen, what happens is their fault. But if Ezekiel doesn't warn them, it's his fault!

Next, G-d instructed Ezekiel to speak to the Jews about their sins. The people think their repentance wouldn't be accepted, so why bother? Ezekiel is to inform them that G-d doesn't want evil people to perish; He wants them to return to Him and live! (Again, this is part of the High Holiday service.) Why die? Repent, instead!

Ezekiel was to further tell the people that the deeds of the righteous will not be sufficient to save them from the consequences of their sins. Similarly, the deeds of the wicked will not impede them from returning to G-d if they so will it. The righteous cannot “coast” on the strength of their good deeds and allow themselves to “slack off.” If they do, their earlier good deeds will be forgotten in favor of their later evil. And, if the evil man repents, his earlier bad deeds will be forgotten in favor of his later good. If people think this system is unfair, it’s because they just don’t get it.

In the twelfth year of the Babylonian exile (of which Ezekiel was a part - go back to the first sentence of chapter 1 if you’ve forgotten), a fugitive came from Jerusalem and told them how it was destroyed. G-d had appeared to Ezekiel the night before this man’s arrival and restored Ezekiel’s voice (which had been taken away - see the end of chapter 3!). G-d’s message came to Ezekiel and he spoke, saying that the people reason as follows: “Abraham had only one commandment to observe (circumcision) and he was given the land of Israel. Certainly we, who have many commandments to observe, deserve the land all the more!” (There are other interpretations, including “Abraham was one person and we are many people” and “Abraham worshipped one G-d and we worship many gods!” That last argument, of course, is not particularly compelling.) G-d replied to that claim that they eat blood, worship idols and commit murder and adultery - they don’t deserve the land! G-d promises that these refugees will fall before enemy soldiers, wild animals and plague. The land will become a ruin, without residents. Those who mock Ezekiel will come and hear his words, but not observe them. Instead, they will crack jokes and make light of them. Ezekiel should consider this scorn like music to his ears. When the impending evil befalls the scoffers, everyone will know that there is a prophet of G-d among them.

## Chapter 34

### The L-rd is Our Shepherd

G-d spoke to Ezekiel after the destruction of the Temple and told him to speak to the people about their leaders, the various kings of Judah. G-d says woe to the kings who spoil themselves, rather than taking care of their people! They did not care for the needy of their nation or bring back stray members of their flock; all they did was oppress the people with work and burdens. Because they didn’t have a shepherd, the people strayed and became prey for predatory nations. The members of the flock wandered off and nobody looked for them. Therefore, G-d tells the kings that since His flocks have become prey and their rulers didn’t care for them, He will fire them from being shepherds of the nation. They will no longer be able to indulge themselves with the people’s wealth.

G-d continues that He will personally go and gather the stray “sheep” of His flock. He will bring them back from all the places they wandered, as on a dark and cloudy day. He will extract them from the nations of their exile and return them to the land of Israel. They will “graze” on green pastures, by good streams. G-d will personally care for his flocks, healing the weakened members and destroying those who gorge themselves at the expense of others.

G-d will shepherd his flocks with justice, judging between the sheep, rams and goats (representing the strong and the weak, or the princes and the common man). It's no small thing for His flock to be able to enjoy good grass and clean water, and G-d will set things straight when one member of His flock pushes another around or gores him with his horns.

G-d will appoint a shepherd over His people from the house of David. This will be Moshiach, the Messiah; the people will accept G-d's kingdom, with Moshiach as ruler. Moshiach will forge a covenant of peace and the people will dwell securely. The people will enjoy rains of blessing and abundant produce, as well as relief from those who would oppress them. The Jews will no longer need fear man nor beast. The name of Israel will spread around the world and they will no longer be disgraced. They will feel G-d's presence and be His people.

## Chapter 35

### Lost in Translation

G-d told Ezekiel to face Mount Seir, home of Edom (the descendants of Esau) and foretell their fate. G-d has issues with Edom and He will act against them, making their land a ruin. This is because of their historical animosity against the Jews, dating back to the rivalry between Esau and Jacob. More recently, this manifested in Edom rejoicing in Israel's misfortunes when they were exiled. G-d will repay Edom with blood. The mountain that is their homeland will be strewn with corpses and become a wasteland, bereft even of foot traffic.

What did Edom do? They schemed to inherit two nations. (In its simplest sense, this refers to the two Jewish nations of Judah and Israel. Rashi cites a Midrash relating it to an incident in which Esau tried to turn his father-in-law, Ishmael, against his father, Isaac - who were brothers - in an attempt to inherit them both.) G-d swears that He will do to Edom as they did to others. They will know that G-d repays evil when He judges them for trying to grab that which wasn't theirs. G-d has heard the blasphemous stories Edom has concocted and He is acting upon them. When the rest of the world finally rejoices, united under G-d as the universally-recognized King, Edom will be punished. They rejoiced over Israel's misfortunes and others will rejoice over theirs.

This chapter includes some clever wordplay, which is lost in translation. The word for "their misfortune," "eidam," is similar to Edom. Also, Edom means "red" and is related to the word for blood, "dam," which is a recurring theme in this chapter. So, just to let you know, there's some stuff you miss in translations.

## Chapter 36

### Soon Turned Out, Had a Heart of Stone

After speaking to the various other nations, Ezekiel is now instructed to address Israel. G-d said that since the enemies of Israel rejoiced in capturing the land, He has a message for them. The other nations looked forward

to Israel's destruction and everybody slandered them. That's why G-d directed His anger towards Edom and those other nations. G-d reacted with anger over the derogatory treatment Israel received; the other nations will themselves be disgraced. But what of Israel?

Ultimately, the land of Israel will blossom and bear fruit for her exiles, who are about to return. Large numbers will arrive, building up the cities and settling in them. The land will be populated as it formerly was and, in Messianic times, things will be even better than they had been before. The people will return and the land will no longer mourn for her exiled "children." The world looked upon Israel as a harsh land - the Canaanites were destroyed, and then the Jews - so G-d will see to it that no one else shall be lost there. Other nations will no longer disparage Israel.

G-d spoke again to Ezekiel and said that the Jews had defiled the land with their sins, like a woman is ritually impure at the time of menstruation. (Remember, the relationship between G-d and Israel is described as a marriage and marital relations are not permitted when a woman has her monthly period.) G-d became angry with them because of their violence and idolatry. He punished them accordingly, scattering them throughout the nations. Their presence in other lands was a chillul Hashem, a desecration of G-d's Name. G-d is redeeming Israel not because they have earned it, but to save His own Name from further desecration. When He brings the Jews back to Israel, it will be a kiddush Hashem, a sanctification of His Name.

G-d will gather the Jews from all the nations and return them to Israel, where He will metaphorically sprinkle them with water and they will be cleansed, like those becoming purified from the ritual impurity of corpse defilement. G-d will give the nation a new heart and a new spirit; He will replace their heart of stone (which is cold and unyielding) with a heart of flesh (which is receptive). G-d will help the people be inclined to walk in His path and do His will. Then, they will dwell on a fertile land where He will be their G-d and they will be His people. They will not know famine or hunger anymore and they will regret their former evil ways.

G-d says that on the day He cleanses the Jews of their sins, repopulates the land and builds up the ruins, the other nations will remark that a once-desolate land has bloomed like the Garden of Eden. As G-d has spoken, so He will do. The people will multiply like the flocks of sheep that would be brought to Jerusalem for the festivals.

## Chapter 37

### **Them Bones, Them Bones Gonna Walk Around**

This chapter is one of the best-known in the entire Book and is the source of the old spiritual "Dem Bones" (you know - "the knee bone's connected to the leg bone, the leg bone's connected to the hip bone" - that one), as well as the name of the Israeli comic strip "Dry Bones."

G-d carried Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones, where He asked the prophet whether those bones could in fact live again. Ezekiel replied that only G-d knew. G-d had Ezekiel tell the bones to listen to Him; He then reconnected the bones and covered them with muscles and skin, but they were still lifeless. G-d then had Ezekiel

speak to the spirit of life, which entered the bodies, who stood up. G-d told Ezekiel that what happened to these bodies is what would happen to the nation. They think they are lost, but G-d will open their graves, both physically and metaphorically, and bring them to live in Israel.

Next, G-d had Ezekiel write on two boards, one for Judah and one for Ephraim (representing the heads of the two Jewish kingdoms of Judah and Israel, respectively). Ezekiel was to hold the two planks together and they would become one. When the people would ask about the meaning of this act, Ezekiel was to explain that this is how G-d will reunite the nation in His "hand." They will gather together in the land of Israel, one nation under one king. They will give up idolatry and G-d will purify them of their past sins. David (meaning the Messiah, a descendant of King David) will rule over them and shepherd them. The people and their descendants will remain securely in the land forever. G-d will forge an everlasting covenant of peace with the Jews and permanently restore the Temple.

Much of what occurs in the Book of Ezekiel actually happened in visions, but most commentators say that the incident at the Valley of the Dry Bones actually occurred. But who were these slaughtered, unburied skeletons? There are several opinions in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 92b), one of which is that they were the Jews of the Tribe of Ephraim who left Egyptian slavery prematurely, only to be killed by the men of Gath (in I Chronicles 7). And what became of them? Again, there are several opinions. One is that they only lived long enough to sing a song of praise to G-d before going back whence they came. Another opinion is that they survived and settled down to raise families, living normal lives. (The Talmudic sage R. Yehuda b. Beseira claimed to be descended from them.)

## Chapter 38

### Gog and Magog

G-d told Ezekiel to face the direction of Gog, king of Magog, and speak of his future. G-d opposes Gog, whom He will lead out along with his great army. Many other nations, including Persia, Ethiopia and Togarmah (which might be Germany), will join Gog and his forces. Gog should prepare himself for the battle to come. His forces will march upon the exiles who have returned to Israel. Gog and Magog (and their allies) will ascend to assault Israel, covering it like a fog. They will plan evil - to oppose G-d and to attack innocent people in undefended cities, to loot and pillage the resettled exiles. Merchants of trading lands stand ready to buy the plundered wealth of Israel.

But... when Gog and his allies attack Israel, it will be "the end of days." It's "Judgment Day" for all the nations. People will know that Gog is the one G-d foretold through two prophets (presumably Ezekiel and Zechariah, although the Talmud in Sanhedrin, page 17a, says that it was Eldad and Medad, who prophesied in Numbers chapter 11). When Gog and Magog attack, G-d will remember their sins and direct His wrath against them. All the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the beasts in the field and people on the Earth will tremble and mountains will fall. Everyone in the massive army will attack one another in the great confusion. Plague, blood, floods, hail, fire and sulfur will rain down on Gog's forces. The nations will observe this and recognize G-d's greatness.

People are used to hearing of the “war of Gog and Magog” and they mistakenly think that Gog and Magog are two opposing nations. They’re not. Magog is the nation, descended from Noah’s son Japheth, and Gog is their leader. (It’s like people thinking that the French fought Indians in the “French and Indian War” - really, the British fought France, who had Native American allies. The name is misleading.)

## Chapter 39

### **Gog and Magog: Take 2**

G-d told Ezekiel to speak further about Gog. G-d will entice Gog to attack a second time, then He will “knock the bow and arrows” out of Gog’s hands. Gog and his forces will fall upon the mountains of Israel, left as carrion for the birds and beasts. Magog, the nation of Gog, will burn, perhaps literally (as in the fire and sulfur of the previous chapter) and perhaps figuratively (as in G-d’s anger). Even those who live in Magog’s satellite territories on islands will be affected by this. When He does this, G-d will keep His Name from being further profaned.

This day is coming, G-d says. Weapons will be made obsolete and the people of Israel will use them as fuel. They’ll have so many bows, arrows, spears, etc. that they won’t have to chop wood for seven years. As for Gog, he and his armies will be buried in Israel, in a valley that will be called Hamon Gog (the multitudes of Gog). There will be so many of them that burying them will take seven months. The nations will speak well of Israel because they showed compassion in burying their enemies. People will be hired specifically to do this job “for the duration,” marking all the places where they find remains until they can be relocated to Hamon Gog. The city of Hamon Gog will be called Hamonah, referring to the multitudes there. (The people of Magog merited to be buried because they were descended from Japheth, who covered his father Noah in Genesis 9.)

G-d told Ezekiel to speak to the animals and birds, telling them gather around the slaughtered masses in order to devour them. They will eat the flesh of mighty warriors and drink the blood of princes until they are full. All the nations will see the judgment that G-d has wrought. They will understand that Israel had been exiled because of their own sins; it was because they turned their backs on Him that He walked away from them and left them to their enemies. But now they have returned and G-d will have mercy on them and He will be zealous that His Name is not disgraced any more. The Jews will be ashamed of their past sins and they will dwell securely on their land. G-d will be sanctified when He returns them from exile and none will be left behind. G-d will no longer turn away from Israel because they will be covered with His spirit.

## Chapter 40

### **The Third Temple**

In the twenty-fifth year of the exile, which was fourteen years after the destruction of Jerusalem, G-d came to Ezekiel. (The Navi uses the term “Rosh Hashana,” but it was actually Yom Kippur of a Jubilee year, the day on

which slaves are freed.) G-d picked up the prophet and brought Him to Jerusalem, where He showed him a vision of the third Temple. There was a “man” (an angel), whose appearance was like copper, standing in the gateway with a tape measure and a yardstick. The “man” told Ezekiel that he was to report all he was shown back to the nation.

There was a wall all around the Temple, which the man measured. He then measured the eastern gate and the adjacent rooms. He measured the hall and the pillars and the width of the gate. The “man” measured the windows and doorposts; Ezekiel notes that the tops of the pillars were designed to look like palm trees.

The angel brought Ezekiel to the outer courtyard of the Temple, where he saw a balcony with thirty rooms. The angel measured the courtyard areas and their various rooms and pillars. Ezekiel notes that there were seven steps. The angel measured from gate to gate and all around.

Near the northern gate, there was a room where the olah, the burnt offerings, would be rinsed. In the hall, there were two tables on the east and two on the west, where sacrifices of various types would be slaughtered. There were four on either side, for a total of eight. Four tables were made of stone and were used for burnt offerings. There were meat hooks affixed around the room.

The angel told Ezekiel that the southern room was for the Kohanim (priests) who served in the Temple. (Rashi suggests that this actually refers to the Levites who sang in the Temple.) The northern room was for the Kohanim who watched the altar, descendants of Tzadok, who was the Kohein Gadol (High Priest) when Solomon first built the original Temple (see I Chronicles 29). The angel continued with his work, measuring the hall.

The idea of the third Temple in Messianic times is well known, but relatively few people actually study the source material. All of the measurements taken by the angel in this chapter (and subsequent ones) are given in the text. One could actually make a very detailed blueprint of the third Temple from these chapters!

## Chapter 41

### Two-Faced Cherubim

Continuing the measurements of the third Temple from the previous chapter, the angel measured the pillars and the width of the entrance. He came to the inside and measured there. He measured a room that was 20 x 20 cubits, then informed Ezekiel that it was the Holy of Holies (the room where the Ark would be kept). He measured the wall and the rooms behind it, of which there were 33. There is then a detailed discussion of how the rooms were arranged. The upper rooms were wider than the lower rooms and there was a spiral staircase to ascend to them.

There were rooms to the courtyard in the northern and southern ends, with a 20-cubit area all around the Temple. The width of the building on the western side was 70 cubits, and the wall was 90 cubits (including the clear area). The length of the third Temple was 100 cubits, inclusive. The eastern side, which was the front, was also 100 cubits. (It was 30 cubits wider in the front than in the back because there were two rooms there, where the knives for the sacrifices were stored.)

The angel measured the south side, which was 100 cubits; he measured the Heichal (the “inner room”) and the halls. The windows narrowed and there were cedar planks from the floor to the windows, which were closed. There were also planks over the entrance until the Holy of Holies and the walls. (There was gold plating overlaying the wood, although that is not mentioned here.) The cedar planks were decorated with carvings of cherubim and palm trees. (Again, see chapter 10 for a description of cherubim.) These cherubim had two faces, a lion facing one way and a human facing the other.

The doorway of the third Temple was rectangular and the Holy of Holies shone with a bright light like Ezekiel saw in the vision of G-d’s “chariot” (in chapter 1). A wooden table stood in place of the altar (or perhaps it was the altar for incense, rather than for sacrifices). The angel told Ezekiel that it was the table before G-d. (The verse starts by calling it an altar and ends with calling it a table; nowadays, the tables where we eat ARE our “altars!)

The Heichal and the Holy of Holies each had two pairs of doors, inner and outer. Like the panels on the walls, the doors were carved with cherubim and palm trees. The chapter ends describing the supporting beams of the third Temple.

Please note that we have phrased things in the past tense, as these are the things Ezekiel saw. Remember, though, that Ezekiel was shown a vision of the future, so it really hasn’t happened yet.

## Chapter 42

### Chamber Music

The angel took Ezekiel to the outer court, by way of the north, to one of the chambers there, There was a walkway ten cubits to the innermost chamber. There were three floors of chambers and the upper chambers were narrow because space was taken up by the supporting pillars. The outside wall opposite the chambers was fifty cubits. Below the chambers was a path from the outer court, to the east.

In the south there were also chambers, an entrance at the start of the path, by the musicians’ wall. The angel told Ezekiel that the northern and southern chambers are holy places, where the kohanim (priests) would eat the sacrifices. The priests were not to leave wearing their special priestly garments; they had to change clothes first.

As the angel finished making his measurements of the Temple, he took Ezekiel out by the eastern gate, and he measured that side. He then measured the other three sides; each was 500 rods long. (Rashi says a rod is six cubits.) We are told that the wall around the Temple separated “between the holy and the profane,” the same text we use in the havdalah ceremony that ends Shabbos.

## Chapter 43

### Shechinah Redux

The angel led Ezekiel to the eastern gate of the Temple, where the Shechinah, the glory of G-d's presence, was returning from the east. (It was what Ezekiel had seen before, in previous visions.) The Shechinah entered the Temple through the eastern gate and it filled the Temple. (You may recall that the Shechinah withdrew from the Temple prior to its destruction, way back in chapter 11. Here, Ezekiel sees its eventual return.)

Ezekiel heard G-d speaking. He said, "My throne is in Heaven and the Temple corresponds to it on Earth." (Even though it's in quotes, I have paraphrased the meaning of the verse, rather than the exact wording. Basically, G-d calls the Temple His footrest.) G-d continued that He would dwell among the Jewish people forever and never again would His Name be defiled by their acts of idolatry and violence. Here, G-d mentions that the kings of Judah were buried not far from the Temple and altars to their idols were erected near their graves. This is a sin about which we had not previously been informed. Now, such sins would no longer be done and G-d would reside among them forever.

G-d told Ezekiel to describe the third Temple to the Jews; they would be ashamed of their sins when they see that G-d does not reject them, despite their deeds. When they feel this way, Ezekiel will let them know the grandeur that lies ahead. He was to write down all the measurements so that the people would be able to build the third Temple properly when the time comes. (The second Temple, which we will see built IY"H when we come to the Book of Ezra, included some aspects of the first and some of the third.)

G-d says that all of Jerusalem is holy, but the Temple mount is "most holy." He then gives the dimensions of the altar and instructs Ezekiel about the sacrifices to be offered when it is constructed. The kohanim (priests) will offer a bull to G-d as a sin-offering. G-d says that Ezekiel (who is a Kohein - priest) will give it to them, suggesting that he will be Kohein Gadol (High Priest), or possibly Segan Kohein Gadol (Deputy High Priest), serving under Aaron, following the resurrection of the dead. On the second day, they are to offer a goat as a sin-offering. When they're done inaugurating the altar in this fashion, they are to offer a bull and a ram. For seven days, they are to offer a goat, a bull and a ram. When these days are done, on the eighth day, the altar will be ready to offer the people's sacrifices, which G-d says He will readily accept.

## Chapter 44

### Leviticus II

The angel brought Ezekiel back by way of the eastern gate. This gate had opened to admit G-d's presence (in the previous chapter), but it was now closed. G-d told Ezekiel that the eastern gate was to remain closed, since it was the gate He had used. There was only one exception: the "Nasi" (ruler) was allowed to use that gate. Rashi believes the leader referred to is the Kohein Gadol, since the verse speaks of him eating there and

the Kohein Gadol would have eaten sacrificial food. Most commentators, however, including the Radak, say that it is the Moshiach (Messiah), who will rule as king, since the term "Nasi" is used elsewhere to describe him. Whoever he is, this Nasi is also allowed to come and go by the same gate, which we will see in chapter 46, other people were not permitted to do.

The angel brought Ezekiel by the northern gate, where he saw the glory of G-d had filled the Temple and he fell on his face. G-d told Ezekiel to note well all the details of the Temple so that he will fully understand them. Ezekiel should tell the people that they've done enough with their abominations, allowing those of uncircumcised hearts and uncircumcised flesh to serve in the Temple. ("Uncircumcised heart" refers to apostate Jews, who have rejected G-d in favor of idolatry. "Uncircumcised flesh" refers to kohanim who were not circumcised for medical reasons. This is not a sin, but they are not permitted to serve in the Temple.) By allowing people with these physical or spiritual disqualifications to serve in the Temple, the people failed in their responsibility to safeguard the sanctity of the sacrifices.

The only ones qualified to serve in the Temple are Levites who never served idols. A Levite who once worshipped idols and repented will be forgiven, but will be limited in the role they can play in the Temple service. They can slaughter sacrifices (which need not be done by a Kohein) and can assist the people bringing offerings, but they cannot be involved with the altar or offerings of holiness. They must bear the consequences of their actions, though G-d will make them watchmen in the Temple. The Kohanim, descendants of Tzadok, who remained true while the rest of the nation was straying, will serve in all priestly functions and matters of holiness.

The priests are to wear linen vestments when they serve in the inner court; they are not permitted to wear wool. They must gird themselves in a place that does not sweat, which is why their belts were worn rather high. When they go to the outer court, they are to change clothes and not mingle with others in their priestly garments. They must keep their hair neatly trimmed, neither shaved nor too long. The priests may not drink wine before performing their service in the inner court. They may not marry divorcees or women widowed from Israelites, only Israelite virgins or the widows of other Kohanim.

The Kohanim are to instruct the people in religious matters, teaching them to differentiate between holy and profane and between pure and impure. They shall serve on courts to judge financial disputes and, of course, they are responsible for the sacrifices of Sabbath and holidays. The kohanim may not become impure for a corpse, except to bury a parent, sibling or child. ("Wife" is not listed here, as a kohein is permitted but not required to do so.) The kohanim have received the priesthood as their inheritance, rather than real estate. They get to eat certain sacrifices and gifts as their payment. While they may eat many things that others may not, they may not eat non-kosher animals, so they must be careful in performing sacrifices not to do anything to render them unfit.

You will notice that many of the rules for kohanim outlined in this chapter are more stringent than the way we know them to be (for example, that a kohein may not marry the widow of an Israelite, which according to the Torah he may). In fact, the rules in this chapter more closely approach those of the High Priest. The Radak says that this reflects the greater spirituality in the third Temple.

## Chapter 45

### Re-Dividing the Land

In Messianic times, the land will be re-divided among the Tribes, as it was in the time of Joshua. A portion must be set aside for the Temple mount and the surrounding area. Everything within this area of 25,000 x 10,000 rods is considered holy. Aside from the Temple and its open area, this portion of land would include the houses of the kohanim and the land of the Levites, as well as an area inhabited by Israelites. After that, the land to the east and the west belonged to the monarch. This is his land and rulers will have no more reason to try to conscript land from their subjects. (Remember Ahab and the vineyard of Naboth in I Kings 21?) G-d wants the rulers to give up violence and oppression in favor of righteousness and justice, not evicting people from their rightful property.

G-d enjoins the people to have only honest and accurate weights and measures, so that they will not cheat in business. (G-d defines these weights and measures: one-tenth of a homer is an ephah, a shekel is 20 gerah, etc. We'll just take that part as a given.) The Jews are told to bring an tithes of a certain quantities of wheat, barley and oil, and sheep for offerings. The people will bring this offering on behalf of themselves and the ruler. The obligation of the sacrifices on Sabbath and holidays falls on the ruler. (Rashi again says that this refers to the High Priest, although he acknowledges the opinion that it refers to the king.)

G-d says that on the first day of the month of Nisan, they should dedicate the altar of the third Temple by offering a bull, whose blood the High Priest should place on the corners of the altar and the doorposts. They should do this for seven days in order to cleanse the Temple of the deeds of mistaken and simple-minded people. On the fourteenth day of the month, they will begin Passover, to last for seven days. The ruler will bring a bull on that day, corresponding to the calf that Aaron brought as part of his inauguration. For seven days, he shall offer daily bulls and rams as a burnt offering and goats as a sin offering, along with the usual meal and oil. He shall do likewise on the holiday of Succos.

## Chapter 46

### Coming and Going

G-d said that the eastern gate of the inner courtyard would remain closed on regular weekdays, but be opened on Sabbath and Rosh Chodesh ("New Moon"). The ruler would enter through the hall of the outer gate and stand by the doorway while the kohein (priest) offers his sacrifices. He will bow and exit, but the gate would not be closed until evening so that the people of the nation might also use this gate on these special days.

The burnt offering of the ruler on holidays would be six lambs and a ram. (Rashi points out that really it should be seven lambs and two rams, but this verse shows us that missing one does invalidate the service altogether.) On Rosh Chodesh, he should offer a bull in addition to the lambs and the ram. (Same as before: it really should be two, but one still works.) These animals should have the requisite amounts of meal and oil brought with them.

The ruler enters and leaves by the same gate on Sabbath and Rosh Chodesh (although not on festivals). When the people come for the festivals, they should enter by the north gate and exit by the south gate, or vice versa, but not exit the way they came in, and the ruler should do likewise. (He cannot enter through the eastern gate on festivals because there was no western gate across from it by which to exit.)

When the ruler brings a voluntary sacrifice on a regular weekday, they should open the east gate specially for him. In this case, they are to close it when he leaves.

The chapter then describes the daily sacrifices: a yearling lamb every morning, with the requisite meal and oil. (The afternoon sacrifice is not mentioned; the Radak takes this to mean that it will not be offered in the third Temple.)

If the ruler gives real estate to one of his sons, that son may keep it, since he would inherit it anyway. If the ruler gives land to one of his subjects, that is only until the Jubilee year, when land reverts to its Tribal owners. The ruler may not confiscate land from his subjects to give his sons; he may only give his own.

Ezekiel was escorted to the place where the kohanim (priests) cooked their sacrificial portions, which were not to be brought to the outer courtyard. Ezekiel was brought to the outer courtyard, where there was a small, enclosed area in each corner. Each was thirty by forty cubits. According to the Mishna in Middos 2:5, one chamber was for the Nazirites, one was for those recovering from tzaraas (commonly translated as "leprosy," but not really the same thing), one was where firewood was checked for worms, and one was where wine and oil were stored. All four of them had a wall of stones with a place to light a fire and place a cooking pot. The angel told Ezekiel that this was where the priests would cook their portions from the people's sacrifices. (These chambers were uncovered so that the smoke of the fires could exit.)

## Chapter 47

### Dead Sea Fishing

The angel returned Ezekiel to the inner courtyard, where he saw water flowing from under the door in the east towards the south, and from there to the city. He exited by the northern gate, went around to the outer gate facing east, and the water continued to the south. The angel (who still had his tape measure, from chapter 40) went east and measured 1,000 cubits, then he led Ezekiel through ankle-deep water. He measured another 1,000 cubits, then led Ezekiel through knee-deep water. The angel measured another 1,000 cubits, then led Ezekiel through hip-deep water. Another thousand cubits, then the water was too deep to cross.

The angel asked Ezekiel if he had seen how the little trickle of water starting in the Temple grew into a mighty river. Ezekiel looked back and saw many trees growing on either bank of the stream. The angel told Ezekiel that the water would go down the eastern side of the mountain and go out to the seas, even healing the Dead Sea so that sea creatures might live there. Fish will become abundant and it will be a popular site for fishing. The banks of this new river will have many full fruit-trees. They will be especially prolific, since the water comes from the Temple, and the fruit will be good for cures.

The angel told Ezekiel that they were at the border by which the land would be re-divided. The angel then gave Ezekiel the borders of the land. (We won't go into all the details here. Landmarks like the Mediterranean Sea, the Jordan River and Damascus would be pretty easy for us to identify here, but cities like Cheslon and Tzedad considerably less so.) The land is to be re-divided among the 12 Tribes (including the sons of Joseph as two tribes, and not Levi). This will be an inheritance for them and for those who converted to join them while still in exile; converts are to be treated as members of the Tribe which they joined, receiving a portion among them.

## Chapter 48

### **"G-d is There."**

The new portions of the Tribes are then described, from Dan in the north, to Asher, then Naftali, Menashe, Ephraim and Reuben. Then came the territory of Judah, with the Temple in its midst, including the land set aside around the Temple in chapter 45. (The land in this portion designated for Kohanim - priests - and Levites could not be sold or exchanged for other land.) There was an open space of less holiness around this where Israelites might live. Grain grown in this territory would be used to feed those who serve the city, such as the Gibeonites who cut wood and drew water (see Joshua chapter 9). On either side, east and west, was land belonging to the ruler.

After the territory of the Temple came the portions of Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad, in the south. (Unlike the original division of the land in Joshua, here each Tribe received an equal portion in strips from north to south.)

There were twelve gates to the city of Jerusalem, each named after a Tribe, in order to show that each Tribe had a share in the Holy City. (North: Reuben, Judah and Levi. East: Joseph, Benjamin, Dan. South: Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun. West: Gad, Asher, Naftali. You'll note that here Levi is included and Joseph is one Tribe.) The city of Jerusalem from that day forward would be called "G-d is There."