

Bible Study Notes

A Note on Ezekiel's Warning to Israel and Judah

A Study of Israel-Judah Interchangeability

By Craig M White
Version 1.2





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Our purpose and desire are to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's message & mission and provides further support to its traditional doctrinal positions.

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Abstract

The Worldwide Church of God proclaimed since 1941, a prophetic message termed the *Ezekiel Warning* (sometimes called the *Ezekiel Message*). Some successor groups have also taught this, but with a reduced emphasis. Its core message is that the Anglo-Keltic nations will be invaded, conquered and many of its people taken captive to foreign lands. An aspect of the belief is that Ezekiel did not take the message directly to Israel at that time, thus proving that the message is only for the end-times. Is that correct? Or was the message for both that day and the end-times similar to many of the other prophets? And is the term *House of Israel* interchangeable with *Judah* in several scriptures? And if so, should we not ask ourselves *why*?

Introduction

In my article *Just What do you mean "Ezekiel's Message?"*, I explained the origin of the *Ezekiel's Message* doctrine, quoted from Herbert W Armstrong's articles on the subject, and the need for the message to go forth again. The term is associated only with the warning to Israel of future punishment, not to other messages in the book – that is how the Church used the term.

Of critical importance is to understand exactly what the doctrine is: a very powerful and stern warning to end-time Israel that they will be attacked by foreign forces, invaded, and fully conquered with many descendants of Israel ending up as slaves. I term this **The Captivity Doctrine**. I do not have to rehash this again as all of this information is contained in the article *Just What do you mean "Ezekiel's Message?"* [accessible online](#).

For instance, in his article "Will Russia attack America?", Herbert Armstrong explained what the message of Ezekiel is all about:

"Notice, the prophecy was inspired and written after JUDAH'S captivity — more than 130 years after the House of ISRAEL had been taken captive to Assyria. The advance — guard of the House of Israel already had begun to arrive in the British Isles before Ezekiel's vision and writing.

Yet, **Ezekiel is a prophet to the HOUSE OF ISRAEL. His prophecy applies to the far future — not to the captivity of Israel which had occurred more than 130 years before he wrote.** Remember that!

Notice, Ezek. 2:3, and 3:1, 4-7, Ezekiel's message, a PROPHECY for the FUTURE, is for the HOUSE OF ISRAEL, not the House of Judah.

In chapter 3, beginning verse 17, Ezekiel is set a watchman to WARN the House of Israel.

Message to Israel, Not Judah

Notice! Beginning chapter 3: After the prophet "eats the roll" — that is, receives the prophetic warning message — he is to "go speak unto the HOUSE OF ISRAEL" — not to the Jews among whom he dwelt.

Remember he is already among the captives of JUDAH. But the Eternal says to him: "Go, get thee unto the House of ISRAEL" (Verse 4).

Surely we do not need to pause here to explain to readers of The PLAIN TRUTH that the twelve tribes of Israel had long before this divided into two nations — the ten Tribes being the House of ISRAEL, while Judah and Benjamin composed the House of JUDAH, who, only, were nicknamed "Jews." ...

The Jewish people of today are descended from the House of JUDAH. But the white, English-speaking people of the United States and Great Britain are the leading "birthright" tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, heads of the ten-tribed HOUSE OF ISRAEL.

Ezekiel's Message is for our day — and it is, therefore, a message for America and Britain, NOW!" ("Will Russia Attack America?" *Plain Truth*, July 1956, p. 3.) (emphasis mine) [the entire article can be read on line – it appears on pp. 3-6, 18-19 of the magazine]

The term *Ezekiel's Message* as interpreted by the Radio/Worldwide Church of God since 1941 is very similar to the term *Jeremiad* used by many Bible scholars. It came to be known as the *Ezekiel Warning* ministry; and that the Church was to function as the Ezekiel Watchman to Israel in the last days.

We need to interpret Ezekiel's Warning Message – who he was railing against and warning in the book's context.

Background Information

David was king over Judah seven years and six months (II Samuel 2:11), prior to ruling over the united kingdom. He was succeeded by Solomon, but after his reign the united kingdom cleaved into two halves: the northern kingdom under Rehoboam and the southern kingdom under Jeroboam.

Centuries later, in 732 BC, Hosea ascended to the throne as the final King of Israel following the assassination of King Pekah, as recorded in II Kings 15:30. Initially, he paid tribute to the Assyrian Empire for several years; however, this practice ceased shortly after King Shalmaneser V took power in 727 BC. In response to the cessation of tribute and the discovery of Hoshea's covert attempts to forge a military alliance with Egypt, Shalmaneser acted decisively against Israel. By approximately 725 BC, the Assyrian forces commenced their assaults on the Kingdom of Israel and its capital, Samaria, as noted in II Kings 17:5. The capital ultimately fell in 723/22 BC, leading to the captivity of the remaining populace (verse 6). This calamity was permitted by God as a consequence of the nation's persistent sins, which they refused to acknowledge and repent of (II Kings 17:7-23). Due to these transgressions, particularly idolatry, the kingdom endured for a mere 208 or so years.

Much later, the subjugation of Judah occurred through three separate invasions by the Babylonians, spanning a duration of twenty years. (1) The initial invasion and subsequent captivity took place in 607 BC, during which Daniel and his companions, along with others, were taken into exile, as referenced in II Kings 24:1, Jeremiah 25:1, and Daniel 1:1-7. (2) The

second invasion and captivity occurred in 597 BC, resulting in the capture of King Jehoiakim and approximately 10,000 individuals. Notable figures among them included Ezekiel and a forebear of Mordecai, who was the cousin of Esther, as indicated in II Kings 24:10-16, Ezekiel 1:1-2, and Esther 2:5-6. (3) The final invasion and captivity transpired in 587 BC, when Jerusalem was besieged, leading to the destruction of its walls, palaces, and the temple, with most of the remaining populace exiled, as documented in II Kings 24:18; 24:1-27; II Chronicles 36:11-21, and Jeremiah 52:1-11. This marked the conclusion of the southern kingdom.

To Whom Was Ezekiel Sent: Israel, Judah or Both?

It is generally recognised that the tribes of Israel cleaved into two portions: the northern House of Israel and the southern House of Judah (II Sam 12:8).

Consequently, throughout Scripture,

“A twofold title is used for the people of God (v.3): “house of Jacob” (a reminder of their humble beginnings: cf. Gen 28:13; 35:11; 49:7) and “the people of Israel” (a statement as to what they had become: a nation) ... Israel would be God’s valuable property and distinct treasure ...” (Walter Kaiser, *Exodus. Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 415-16).

Note that the Israelites or the *House of Israel* term can be utilised in the following ways: Israel in general (all tribes) (eg Exodus 16:31); the northern tribes alone (eg I Kings 12:21); *possibly* the southern tribes which may be peculiar to Ezekiel.

Very definitely Amos and Hosea used the term referring to the northern tribes only, which is usually the usage of the prophets.

However, although originally the term *House of Israel* solely applied to the northern kingdom of Israel and not Judah, some claim (per the above) it eventually evolved to refer to all of Judah. But when and how, if at all, did the people of the southern kingdom of Judah realise that the phrase applied to them following the collapse of Israel?

The arguments are often convoluted when coming to this conclusion. There are a number of authors that argue for that viewpoint, but it would take a lengthy article to review these papers. Rather, this author refers to these stances above, while arguing for a contrasting interpretation.

Recall that it is self-evident that Jeremiah frequently (c636-586 BC) continued to refer to the *House of Judah* even a century after Israel's destruction, making it distinct to Israel. However, some claim that Ezekiel (prophesied c592-570 BC) used the term *House of Israel* on a number of occasions when he was referring to Judah. They contend that since Zedekiah was the last king of Judah c572 BC, when Ezekiel had his vision, the term *House of Israel* which he uses at that time is equal to the House of Judah.

Of course, the term can also be used inclusive of both houses of Israel; or exclusively to the

northern House of Israel. But does it refer to Judah alone in Ezekiel? – that is the question that needs to be answered.

Are certain scholars correct in identifying the southern tribes of Israel (Judah) as having taken on the title of House of Israel during their captivity or is it dual? Perhaps they are mistaken and that it continued to refer only to the descendants of Israel who were scattered (many taken by the Assyrians; but some fled south and were later taken into captivity with Judah into Babylon).

In helping to resolve the issue, consider the following:

In the first instance, the Message was originally to the immediate audience of the day (Judah and a few others from Israel already in captivity in Babylonia) but as with many prophecies, these typologies have a later fulfillment, particularly for the last days. In other words much of prophecy is dual - especially Ezekiel.

House of Israel may refer directly to the northern tribes; or the immediate audience of Judah they argue. Similarly, prophecies concerning Jerusalem were specific for that city, but referred also to Judah and in some cases to all of Israel given its prominence and which original role was capital for both houses (figure of speech *synecdoche*).

In a future prophetic aspect to these prophecies, consider that the Babylonians are no longer residing in the Middle East, nor are the Assyrians and a myriad of other nations. Thus, prophecies referring to them can only be *fully* understood if we know where these nations are today. The city of Babylon had a larger reference to Babylonia; Nineveh to Assyria; Ephraim sometimes to all of Israel; House of Israel to either the northern tribes or, as in many places in Ezekiel, to both northern and southern. It follows that Jerusalem can refer to all of Israel, but the leaders in particular given its capital city status.

In the end-times, God will rescue His people like He did Israel from Egypt (and Christians from spiritual Babylon). Where will Israel be rescued from? A number of gentile nations including Babylon/Shinar according to Isaiah 11:11 and Revelation 18:4.

So, just as the House of Israel is part of the future captivity in end-time Babylon, so some of them were in ancient Babylon along with Judah.

Secondly, in Ezekiel 2:3 God sends Ezekiel to the "nations" of Israel which some commentators interpret as both the northern tribes and Judah.

The *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* online explains:

"to a rebellious nation] Rather, **nations**. First the people are called the children of Israel, then described more particularly as "nations," **the reference being either to the two houses of Israel, the north and south,** or to the people as a whole considered as consisting of larger divisions (Psa 106:5) as "peoples" is used elsewhere (Hos 10:14; Deu 33:19)." [emphasis mine]

It may also indicate that they are likened to the heathen nations roundabout. But of interest is that they are called nations (plural).

Note that in chapter 9:9 we have a prophecy of "Israel and Judah" - not just Judah. And in 16:53 God speaks of bringing the captivity of Samaria (Israel) again.

But some commentaries and researchers are in error when interpreting 9:9, for example the *Pulpit Commentary* online:

“Then said he unto me. The answer holds out but little comfort. The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah (we note the coupling of the names **though Judah only was the immediate subject of the vision**, as if his prayer had gone up for the whole body of the twelve tribes) was immeasurably great.” [emphasis mine]

What is the *Commentary* getting at? Does the term refer only to Judah in context? Or does it also include the northern tribes, some of whom were captive with Judah, though most were by now 100s of kilometres away near the Caspian Sea or further (II Kings 17:5-6)?

Let's move on: the whole House of Israel (not just Judah) is referred to in Ezekiel 20. Judah and Israel are referred to in chapter 37 as coming together again in unison (Isaiah 11:12).¹ Thus Ezekiel is a book for the entirety of Israel, and not mainly Judah as some suspect. Nor the northern tribes alone. Nor for Israel only at the end times – it is, as with most prophecies – applicable to the immediate *and* end-time audiences. In other words, it is dual.

Another point to consider is that the Assyrians who come against Israel (not Judah) are mentioned in 23:1-9, 23; 27:23; 31:3; 32:22. This adds to the view that the term *House of Israel* has reference to the northern tribes and not Judah alone in the context of Ezekiel.

From all this it is clear that Ezekiel prophesied against Judah *and* Israel as a type of the wider end-time Work, that *must* warn all of Israel of its sins and ghastly consequences.

To iterate, Ezekiel did not prophesy only to the end-time House of Israel. Nor only to Judah under the heading of *House of Israel* for that time.

That is true of so many prophecies – they are dual.

Many Israelites joined Judah in Captivity

There is an argument for "House of Israel" to be reference to Judah in Ezekiel and not the northern kingdom - this would be unique among the prophets (perhaps with the exception of Jeremiah).

The line of reason is that Ezekiel opted against employing the phrase "House of Israel" as a

¹ Perhaps typed by the union of Scotland and England - currently under stress - see Isaiah 11:13.

political designation for the northern kingdom of Israel. That he regarded the northern kingdom as illegitimate and unworthy of the title "house of Israel." While the northern kingdom is mentioned in several instances, it is referred to indirectly, often as "Samaria" and similar terms (see Ezek 23:4) For example, they believe that while Jeremiah employs the term "House of Israel" to refer to the northern kingdom, it does not necessarily imply that Ezekiel adopts the same usage. Additionally, Jeremiah does apply the term "house of Israel" to the southern kingdom as well occasionally (for instance, in 5:15; 10:1; 18:6).²

Is this view correct? Of course, such is feasible, but there is more to the story.

As noted earlier on in this article, when Israel fell to the Assyrians, many from the northern Kingdom fled and joined with Judah and stayed with them until the captivity. Below are a few proof scriptures:

"So all Israel was recorded in genealogies, and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel. And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith.

Now the first to dwell again in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the temple servants.

And some of the people of Judah, Benjamin, **Ephraim, and Manasseh** lived in Jerusalem." (IChron 9:1-2)

"Hezekiah **sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh**, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel.

For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month—

However, some **men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun** humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.

The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD." (IIChron 30:1-2, 11-12)

"And **the people of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah** also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the dedicated things that had been dedicated to the LORD their God, and laid them in heaps." (IIChron 31:6)

² For example: "23:4 Jer 3 had described the two women with the qualifying names of *msbh* ["backsliding"] and *bgwdh* (*bgdh*) ["treacherous"], but at the same time added to these freely the names Israel and Judah which were in current use in the political sphere. Since "Israel" in Ezekiel is the emphatic name for the whole people of God, the antithesis Israel-Judah is impossible for him" (Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, p. 483). And "It is remarkable how emphatically in the book of the Judean Ezekiel it is of "Israel" that is spoken. The total of one hundred and eighty-six occurrences of *yisra'el* is contrasted with a total of fifteen occurrences of *yhudah*. This observation has led J. Smith to see in Ezekiel a prophet of the northern kingdom. A closer examination quickly shows, however, that the thesis cannot be sustained." (p. 563) He continues with an unfounded and silly comment: "In any case, however, Ezekiel differs markedly from Jeremiah, his older contemporary by whom he is nevertheless very strongly influenced" (p. 564).

While II Kings 17:18, 22-23; 18:11-12 indicates that the northern tribes went into captivity, this may simply mean that the majority did, not all. As such, the figure of speech for this is probably a form of *hyperbole*.

The above evidently shows that not all from the House of Israel were sent into exile by the Assyrians but that many fled south and took refuge among Judah. Because later, when the people returned from Babylonian captivity we are told:

“These are the chiefs of the province who lived in Jerusalem; but in the towns of Judah **everyone lived on his property in their towns: Israel**, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants...

And the rest of Israel, and of the priests and the Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, every one in his inheritance.” (Nehemiah 11:3, 20)

Also Ezra indicates that there were representatives of all 12 tribes in the land after the Babylonian exodus:

“And **the people of Israel**, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered at the dedication of this house of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.” (Ezra 6:16-17)

“In the temple they had a symbolic center that covered them with an aura defining them as the people of God. So that it is not surprising that Israel occurs twice in verses 16-17, and the God of Israel twice in verses 21-22. In verse 16, Israel, stands for all the returned exiles in their religious and lay groupings... Historically the returnees comprised only three tribes — Judah, Benjamin, and Levi — but for the narrator they were the essential representatives of the traditional twelve tribes, as verse 17 maintains. Later the editor of Chronicles was to qualify this narrow definition, and verse 21 seems to make a move in that direction” (Timothy Laniak & Leslie Allen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. New International Bible Commentary*, p. 50).

This seems to be a bit of a stretch and an example of convoluted thinking.

A better and more thought-out interpretation: Keil & Delitzsch's *Bible Commentary on the Old Testament*:

“The sons of Israel, more exactly the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the sons of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy. עבד חנכה equals the Hebrew עשה חנכה, to celebrate the dedication (2 Chronicles 7:9). בחדוה, Hebrew בשמחה; see Nehemiah 8:10. They brought for the dedication a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs as burnt-offerings, and twelve he-goats for a sin-offering **for all**

Israel, according to the number of the tribes of Israel, because the temple was intended for the entire covenant people, whose return to the Lord and to the land of their fathers, according to the predictions of the prophets, was hoped for (comp. e.g., Ezekiel 37:15., Jeremiah 31:27.), not, as older expositors thought, because certain families of the ten tribes, who had before settled in Judah, were also among those who returned (J. H. Mich. ad h. l.).” (emphasis mine)

While the *Benson Commentary* online explains:

“Ezra 6:16. *The children of Israel — **Probably some out of each of the twelve tribes; the priests and Levites, &c., kept the dedication of the house of God with joy.***” (emphasis mine)

“The people of Israel” does not seem to be referring to Judah, but all those from the twelve tribes (the vast majority were already migrating into Europe).

A New Testament example can be found in the book of Luke:

“And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, **of the tribe of Asher**. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin...” (Luke 2:36)

Paul himself was a Benjamite:

“I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member **of the tribe of Benjamin.**” (Romans 11:1. See Philippians 3:5)³

This is proof that some representatives of the northern House of Israel were among Judah. This was also addressed in the old Worldwide Church of God article (in response, apparently, to criticisms of its British-Israel belief) “Was All of Ancient Israel Really Carried Captive?” Good News, June 1974, pp. 13-15 by Lawson C Briggs.⁴

“It would be surprising, in such times of trouble, if many Israelites did not take flight to safer lands — to Egypt, across the sea to Crete, Asia Minor and Greece, and to other places. In the stress of those times, others experienced a revival of true religion, returning to the worship of YHWH at Jerusalem (II Chron. 34:6-9; 35:18). Some of these perhaps ultimately moved southward and blended into Judah.

The Bible hints at this also. Hezekiah's son — the wicked king Manasseh who finally repented — married a woman from Galilee who became the mother of his son and successor Amon (II Kings 21:19). So did good king Josiah, Amon's son (II Kings 23:36). Josiah's Galilean wife became the

³ The tribal origin of the other Apostles is not nominated, but possibly represent all or some of the other tribes of Israel.

⁴ See also section Rick Sherrod, *Israel in Prophecy. Where are the Lost Ten Tribes?* (1997) section “Review of United States and Britain in Prophecy. Part II”, paragraph 318 (Dec 1996).

mother of King Jehoiakim.

Even earlier some had left Israel and joined Judah for reasons of religion

(see II Chron. 15:9)." (p. 15)⁵

Just as Judah and a few of Israel were involved in the ancient exodus from Babylon, so they will flee end-time Babylon and be led to the Promised Land in the last exodus upon Christ's return.

The various Babylon prophecies in end-time context include Israel and not only Judah: Jeremiah 20; 21; 22; 24; 25; 25; 26; 27; 28; 29; 32; 34; 35; Micah 4:10-13; Habakkuk 1:12-17; Is 13; 14; 21; 39:5-8; 43; 47; 48; Zechariah 2:7.

Arguments for Ezekiel Addressing Judah and not Israel

This is where Ezekiel appears on the scene: the visions and his consequent warnings were given c592-570 BC - he was prophesying 120 or so years since Israel went into captivity.

Commentators, looking at this, ask themselves "who was he prophesying against; who was his audience?"

Many or most assume that he was prophesying against Judah alone, or mainly Judah.

Additionally, if one had to carefully track when Israel, Judah and Jerusalem are referred to by Ezekiel, the reference to Jerusalem piques the interest of commentators due to its referral 23 times in the first 24 chapters. In other words, it is Jerusalem that he is railing against due to its sins *at that time*. One can understand why they come to the conclusion that they have.

But that is not all there is to the story.

What most don't realise is that this is also a prophecy for Israel in our day given the rule of prophetic duality (ie the immediate audience and those in the last days) and the figure of speech *synecdoche*.

So who was Ezekiel addressing at *that* time – who was his audience?

We find this audience in verses such as:

⁵ "like the rest of the prophets, Ezekiel uses the designation "Israel" for all who are left of the nation, currently represented primarily by the rump state of Judah and the exilic community in Babylon" (Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 51). What Block should have added is that the exiled community included many from the northern House of Israel. He further asserts: "The only people worthy of the name "Israel" are in exile [in Babylonia]. It can no longer be applied to those left behind in Jerusalem." (p.347) But where is the proof? Block makes a number of assertions in his commentary to try and prove that Ezekiel is prophesying to Judah only and not Israel (eg pp. 51, 118, 176, 178, 352, but they are not all addressed in this article. Some others with similar views include Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-27. The Anchor Yale Bible*, pp. 62-63, 75 and Steven Tuell, *Ezekiel: New International Bible Commentary*, p. 26).

"And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the **people of Israel**, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day.

The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.'

And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.

And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.

And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house." (Ezekiel 2:3-7)

"But the **house of Israel** will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart.

Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads.

Like emery harder than flint have I made your forehead. Fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house."

Moreover, he said to me, "Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears.

And go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' whether they hear or refuse to hear."

Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake: "Blessed be the glory of the LORD from its place!"

It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, and the sound of a great earthquake.

The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the LORD being strong upon me.

And I came to **the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal** [ie in Babylon], and I sat where they were dwelling. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days." (Ezekiel 3:7-15)

"The word of the LORD came to me:

"Son of man, set your face toward the **mountains of Israel**, and prophesy against them,

and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places.

Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain before your idols." (Ezekiel 6:1-4)⁶

⁶ "Some try to solve this problem by arguing that "mountains of Israel" and "house of Israel" in this chapter refer exclusively to Judah. But the whole context of the mock siege is that it is to represent a punishment on the

"In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the **elders of Judah** sitting before me, the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me there.

So I went in and saw. And there, engraved on the wall all around, was every form of creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel.

And before them stood seventy men of the elders of the **house of Israel**, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the smoke of the cloud of incense went up.

Then he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the **elders of the house of Israel** are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.'"

He said also to me, "You will see still greater abominations that they commit." (Ezekiel 8:1, 10-13)

"In the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me:

"Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day. **The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem** this very day.

And utter a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: "Set on the pot, set it on; pour in water also;

'Say to the **house of Israel**, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will profane **my sanctuary**, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and the yearning of your soul, and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword.

And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men." (Ezekiel 24:1-3, 21-22)⁷

Judah is mentioned specifically in 4:6; 8:1, 17; 9:9; 21:20; 25:3, 8, 12, 17; 37:16, 19; 48:7-8, 22, 31. While Israel is mentioned over 70 times throughout. A casual reading of Ezekiel 36-48 shows clearly a difference between Judah and Israel demonstrating that two separated groups of Israel (ie the two houses) are referred to – so why would it be any different elsewhere in the earlier chapters of Ezekiel?

Their argument is that in the early chapters of Ezekiel the term *House of Israel* does not refer to the ten-tribe house of Israel which had been largely displaced from their territory by the Assyrians more than a century prior to Ezekiel's prophecies. They claim that the phrases "house of Israel" and "house of Judah" are often used interchangeably to denote the

house of Israel *and* the house of Judah—clearly delineating between the two (Ezekiel 4:4-6). Putting all of this together, it should be clear that Ezekiel 6 is a prophecy of the future destruction of the northern tribes of Israel in the end time. (In fact, all of chapters 3-7 can be similarly understood, realizing there is probably a measure of multiple fulfillments, involving the ancient destruction of Jerusalem and some historical periods of oppression endured by the Jews and Israelites.)" (*Ezekiel 6. Beyond Today Commentary* online, 21 Aug 2003)
⁷ "It should also be recalled that the siege of Jerusalem is presented earlier in the book of Ezekiel in a dual sense—as signifying literal events of Ezekiel's own day but also to represent the fiery destruction that will come on all of Israel in the end time. No doubt that was also meant here. Certainly, it is easy to draw parallels between the immorality of ancient Judah and that of all the Israelite nations today." (*2 Kings 25:1 and Related. Beyond Today Commentary* online, 3 Nov 2003).

southern kingdom by Ezekiel. It is important to note, they say, that the designation "house of Judah" is not applied to the ten-tribe house of Israel but rather vice versa.

Another argument surrounds the intriguing prophecy contained in chapter 4 for Ezekiel. In this chapter, Ezekiel engaged in various "prophetic signs." This was similar to Isaiah, who went without clothing for three years (Isaiah 20:2-3), and Jeremiah, who wore a yoke (Jeremiah 27:2-3), to enact a prophecy concerning Israel. He was to create a model of Jerusalem and simulate its siege. Additionally, he was to lie on his side for 430 days and consume minimal rations prepared with manure. Both of these signs illustrated the suffering that the inhabitants of Jerusalem would face.

This is thought to symbolise those kept captive in the land and those in Babylon. For example Carly Crouch argues that

“the sign-act concerns the competing claims of the two royal lines created by the deportation of Jehoiachin to Babylon and the appointment of Zedekiah in Jerusalem. It should therefore be understood as part of a wider corpus of texts attesting to the ideological and practical struggle between the Babylonian golah and those left behind in the land.” (*Duelling dynasties: A proposal concerning Ezekiel's sign-act of the two sticks*, p. 1. A paper published at Fuller Theological Seminary)

This is what happens when one abandons pre-millennialism and conservative interpretation of scripture, jumping through hoops and mental gymnastics to find an alternative understanding to the logical.

So let us have a look at this sign-act In Ezekiel 4:4-6 where the prophet is told to lie first on his left side and then on his right side. The passage is commonly interpreted as reference to northern and southern kingdoms, respectively; or alternatively as two different references for the same peoples (ie Judah, not the northern tribes).

The latter conclusion is arrived at by re-examining the terms' use in both immediate and wider contexts in the book to contend that the condemnation of the house of Judah in chapter 4:6 extends a sign-act that was originally limited to the inhabitants of Jerusalem to the inhabitants of all the land of Judah (not northern Israel).

Yet another argument is that the union of the two sticks referred to in Ezekiel 37 similarly refers to those kept captive in the foreign land of Babylon and those still in the holy land, but not to a future union of Israel and Judah.

“The word of the LORD came to me:
“Son of man, take a stick and write on it, ‘For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him.’
And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.

And when your people say to you, 'Will you not tell us what you mean by these?'

say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him. And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand.

When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, then say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land.

And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.

They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

"My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes."
(Ezekiel 37:15-24)

However, Jeremiah 3:18 throws light on Ezekiel 37:

"In those days **the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel**, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage." (read the entire chapter for context)

Compare with Hosea's prophecy:

"And the **children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered** together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel." (Hos 1:11. cp Isaiah 11:13; Jeremiah 16:15; 31:8; 50:4; Amos 9:15)

Verse 23 of Ezekiel 37 (highlighted) links Israel and Judah (and not two parts of Judah) to the railings against their unfaithfulness referred to in previous chapters, therefore the House of Israel in these chapters refer to the northern tribes (or representatives thereof) and not just Judah.

Note that this dovetails in with Ezekiel:

"And the word of the LORD came to me:

"Son of man, your brothers, even your brothers, your kinsmen, **the whole house of Israel**, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Go far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession.'

Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: **Though I removed them far off**

among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.'

Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you **the land of Israel**.'

And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations.

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God." (Ezekiel 11:14-20)⁸

How Ezekiel 37 could refer only to Judah in other chapters of Ezekiel, as some postulate, is rather puzzling.

This author opposes that view given the other prophecies and argues that the act of Ezekiel in chapter 4 and the vision in chapter 37 inform us of the rest of the book. Further, does the vision of Ezekiel 38 & 39 refer to Judah as the House of Israel? 38:8; 39:7, 9, 12, 23, 25 indicate otherwise. Similarly, the chapters dealing with the Millennial Temple and land allocations (40-48).

A further reasoning for the 'Judah alone' view is that the northern kingdom lacked authority over Jerusalem, having seized it only once. This occurred when Joash of Israel (c798-782 BC) triumphed over Amaziah of Judah, subsequently looting both the temple and the royal palace before returning to Samaria, as recorded in II Kings 14:12-14.

Hence, the transgressions that took place in Jerusalem were attributed to the house of Judah only. In Ezekiel 8, the abominations are mentioned three times as being perpetrated by the "house of Israel"; however, on the fourth and final occasion, these wrongdoings are ascribed to the "house of Judah."

So, interchangeability is possible, but further thought must be brought to bear. Could it be that Judah is chastised along with those Israelites that joined Judah in captivity as a type of what will happen to Israel just prior to Christ's return? Adding to the belief that these prophecies are dual?

Other Scriptures that can be used to support the Interchangeability View

The interchangeability aspect for Ezekiel, point toward other specific verses that support this view. Let us have a peek at some of them. I shall simply quote the relevant scripture followed by an extract from a commentary.

⁸ "Notice that Israel is again identified with Jerusalem here, which may point to an end-time fulfillment. However, Israel also designates the Promised Land (compare verse 17) and these verses could conceivably apply to what happened to certain leaders in Ezekiel's own day." (*Ezekiel 11. Beyond Today Bible Commentary* online, 31 August 2003).

Be cognisant that commentaries vary on interpretation and there are several views 'out there.'

"Say to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and **to all Israel in Judah** and Benjamin ..." (IIChronicles 11:3)

Pulpit Commentary online:

"Verse 3. To all Israel in Judah and Benjamin. There is difference of opinion as to who are intended in the expression, "all Israel," already confessedly ambiguous in two other passages. When we consider the mention of Rehoboam personally in the former clause of the verse, **it would seem most probable that the meaning is all the people of the nation, resident in the Judah and Benjamin allotments**, i.e. the nation called collectively Israel. This will include "the remnant" spoken of in the parallel (1 Kings 12:23, compared with 17). 2 Chronicles 11:3." (emphasis mine)

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers online:

"Others suppose **a reference to members of Northern tribes dwelling in the territory of Judah and Benjamin**. Syriac, "to Rehoboam . . . and to the house of Benjamin, and to all Israel, and to the remnant of the people." LXX., "to all Judah and Benjamin" ... " (emphasis mine)

But the online *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* viewpoint:

"3. *to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin*] **The Chronicler does not hesitate to use the term "Israel" in speaking of Judah**. Thus the princes of the Southern Kingdom are called "the princes of Israel" (2 Chronicles 12:6; 2 Chronicles 21:4), the populace as a whole is called "Israel" (2 Chronicles 12:1; 2 Chronicles 15:17), Jehoshaphat and Ahaz are each called "king of Israel" (2 Chronicles 21:2; 2 Chronicles 28:19), and the sepulchres of the kings at Jerusalem are called the "sepulchres of the kings of Israel" (2 Chronicles 28:27). (Cp. Driver, *Joel*, p. 9 note, for a similar use of the word.) *Israel* in Chron. then = the covenant-people. In Kings on the contrary *Israel* generally means the Northern Kingdom." (emphasis mine)

The *Pulpit Commentary* referred to IKings 12:17, 23, so let us have a look:

"But Rehoboam **reigned over the people of Israel** who lived in the cities of Judah.

"Say to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people ..." (IKings 12:17, 23)

Of IKings, *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* states:

“and to the remnant of the people] (R.V. the rest). **We see from 1Ki 12:17 above that there were some people belonging to the ten tribes who were dwelling in the cities of Judah.** These would have their ties in the place where they had long lived, and so would cast in their lot with the southern kingdom, rather than, because of the division, remove from their homes and seek new ones in the north. These must be intended by ‘the remnant of the people.’” (emphasis mine)

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers online:

“(17) The children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah.—The expression is doubly significant. (a) Historically the tribe of Judah had its semi-dependent tribes—Simeon, already absorbed into Judah; Dan, in great part transferred to the extreme north; and Benjamin, closely united to Judah by the position of Jerusalem. All these, it would seem, are here included—so that the territory of the southern kingdom would be really the *Judæa* of later times. In addition to these, we find from 2Chronicles 11:13-16, that, at any rate **after the idolatry of Jeroboam, priests and Levites and other Israelites made their way into the cities of Judah.** (b) But, besides this, there may be a significance in the phrase “children of Israel.” Although the northern kingdom henceforth inherited the proud title of the kingdom of Israel, the phrase, as here used, is perhaps intended to remind the reader that in Judah also dwelt “children of Israel”—true descendants of the “Prince of God,” and inheritors of the promise.” (emphasis mine)

From the final paragraph, a view of several commentaries I have read are of the opinion that the southern kingdom viewed themselves as the true continuum of Israel; but that is an assumption without proof. That cannot be ruled out of course, but even if true, is not a support for interchangeability in IKings or Ezekiel because of assumptions.

Following are several other verses that appear to support interchangeability:

“When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the LORD, **and all Israel with him**” ...

“Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah, who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, “Thus says the LORD, ‘You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak’ ...

“Then the **princes of Israel and the king** humbled themselves and said, “The LORD is righteous” ...

“But the high places were **not taken out of Israel.** Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true all his days.” (IIChronicles 15:1, 5-6,17)

“He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah, Michael, and Shephatiah; all these were the sons of **Jehoshaphat king of Israel.**” (IIChronicles 21:2)

"When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also **some of the princes of Israel.**" (IIChronicles 21:4)

"For the LORD humbled Judah because of **Ahaz king of Israel**, for he had made Judah act sinfully and had been very unfaithful to the LORD." (IIChronicles 28:19)

"And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem, for they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel. And Hezekiah his son reigned in his place." (IIChronicles 28:27)

Of 28:19, the *Pulpit Commentary* online states:

"Verse 19. Ahaz King of Israel. So Jehoshaphat was called in 2 Chronicles 21:2 "King of Israel." If these two occasions are not merely cases of the writer's or of a copyist's easily imaginable mistake, **they must be regarded as naming the king of the chief divided kingdom by the title of the whole kingdom or people.** He made Judah naked; Revised Version, had dealt wantonly in Judah; or margin, Revised Version, had cast away restraint in Judah; Hebrew, הִפְרִיעַ. 2 Chronicles 28:19." (emphasis mine)

And indeed Ahaz was given the title for the whole kingdom, but I ask "why?" The only solution this writer has come to, having read the views promoted in various commentaries, is because all Israelitish tribes were represented among Judah.

Jeremiah and Interchangeability

Jeremiah may be an example of interchangeability:

"Declare this in the **house of Jacob**; proclaim it in Judah ..." (Jeremiah 5:20)

One commentary states:

"The *house of Jacob* is usually a name for the northern kingdom, which was led into exile in 722. Here the words are spoken specifically to Judah, but the name *Jacob* reminds them of Israel's history from the beginning, bringing home the fact that their relationship with God is a long-established one and should be taken seriously" (Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations. An Introduction and Commentary, Volume 21. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, p. 98).⁹

⁹ Another view: "These verses are specifically addressed to the house of Jacob (used only one other place in Jeremiah [2:4], but frequently in Isaiah [2:5, 6; 8:17]). One would think this is a reference to the whole nation, since Jacob is another name for Israel. However, this reference is sharpened in the second colon by the naming

But this could include the northern tribes. Notice

"If you return, **O Israel**, declares the LORD, to me you should return. If you remove your detestable things from my presence, and do not waver, and if you swear, 'As the LORD lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory."

For thus says the LORD to the **men of Judah and Jerusalem**: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.

Declare in Judah, and **proclaim in Jerusalem**, and say, "Blow the trumpet through the land; cry aloud and say, 'Assemble, and let us go into the fortified cities!'" (Jeremiah 4:1-5)

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers online explains 4:3:

"(3) For thus saith the Lord . . .—The words seem the close of one discourse, the opening of another. The parable of Israel is left behind, and the appeal to Judah and Jerusalem is more direct.

To the men of Judah.—Literally, *to each man* individually."¹⁰

Concerning 4:3 *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*:

"For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem,.... The two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who were at the time of this prophecy in their own land; and so are distinguished from Israel the ten tribes, who were in captivity; unless the same persons should be meant, who were called by these several names, the people of the Jews; and it was in Judea that our Lord appeared in the flesh, and to the inhabitants thereof he ministered ..." [emphasis mine]

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* online states the following in relation to 4:1-2:

"Jer 4:1-31. **Continuation of Address to the Ten Tribes of Israel.** (Jer 4:1, 2). The Prophet Turns Again to Judah, to Whom He Had Originally Been Sent (Jer 4:3-31)."¹¹ (emphasis mine)

of Judah, a reference to the remaining southern part of the kingdom" (Tremper Longman III, *Jeremiah. Lamentations. New International Bible Commentary*, p. 59).

¹⁰ Yet some believe that Ezekiel is prophesying only against Jerusalem: "As Ellison rightly points out, 'Ezekiel was in fact prophesying *of* but not *to* Jerusalem'. Although several years had passed since their deportation had taken place, the exiles still lived for Jerusalem and home. It was the centre of their interest and their hopes; every snatch of news that came through to Babylon was treated like a grain of gold-dust. Apart from the duration of their stay in exile, events in Jerusalem were the only supremely relevant factor in their thinking. It would be strange indeed if Ezekiel did not give it the prominence it deserved in his ministry to the exiles" (John Taylor, *Ezekiel. An Introduction and Commentary. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, p. 26). He needs to reconsider this position.

¹¹ "It is interesting to note that though God says He issued a certificate of divorce to Israel (verse 8), He still claims to be married to the Israelites in verse 14. This is because, though God put away Israel as a whole, He maintained His covenant relationship with a *remnant* of Israel—in Jeremiah's day meaning the faithful of Judah. Yet God would also consider *individuals* of the house of Israel as part of this remnant if they would

Now let us turn to yet another scripture:

“Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the LORD. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say.”
(Jeremiah 5:15)

Regarding 5:15, *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible* online:

“... and publish it in Judah: the house of Jacob and Judah are the same, namely, the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah; for, as for the ten tribes, as observed on Jeremiah 5:15, they had been carried captive before this time ...”

From the above it may be deduced that interchangeability is possible, though rare. It certainly does not change the doctrine of duality or that there is a future captivity pending for the House of Israel.

Conclusion

It seems to this writer that while *House of Israel* and *House of Judah* may be used interchangeably, that is seldom the case. In Ezekiel this seems possible in a couple of places, but it is more likely that Ezekiel was addressing the few remnants of the House of Israel among with the House of Judah as a type of an end-time warning to all of Israel of coming doom.

Lydia Lee seems to understand this better than some commentators:

“Zimmerli suggests that the triad of the sanctuary, the house of Judah, and the land of Israel forms a concentric circle (*Ezekiel*, 2:563–565). **Judah is not set in contrast to the old northern kingdom, but is rather subsumed and included within Israel.** H. G. M. Williamson also follows this inclusive understanding of Israel in Ezekiel (“The Concept of Israel in Transition,” in *The World of Ancient Israel*, ed. R. E. Clements [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 141–61, esp. 144). As such, in this chapter, we will refer to God’s people most of the time as “the house of Judah,” **but we will also bear in mind that Ezekiel mostly perceives Judah as an integral part of the larger “house of Israel.”**” (*Mapping*

repent and return to Him (same verse). In verse 12 Jeremiah is told to proclaim the message to the north. This may well have been directed to those Israelites (the Scythians) who came back into the land of the northern kingdom at this time. They are said to be “more righteous” than Judah—which makes sense when we realize that many of these Israelites (perhaps humbled from their captivity) were soon going to help Josiah purge the land of idolatry and observe his great Passover.

Yet, as explained in the highlights for chapter 2, the message was meant for *all* the families of Israel—meaning this call to repentance is likely intended primarily for the end time. In the last days, much of end-time Israel is still to be found mainly to the north of Judea—northwest that is—prior to and during their final captivity ...”
(*Jeremiah 3:1-4:4. Beyond Today Commentary* online, 2 June 2003)

Judah's Fate in Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations, pp. 54-55, footnote 14). [emphasis mine]

So, the Church has been correct on this since 1941, though like so many things, this needs to be expanded upon, calibrated, upgraded and clarified, because Ezekiel *did* warn some of the House of Israel in his day in addition to Judah.

“... as we will see in going through his book, many of Ezekiel's prophecies were intended for all of Israel—that is, the northern 10 tribes as well, who had gone into captivity about 130 years earlier. So Ezekiel's commission must be understood in a broader context. He was to “go” to the rest of the house of Israel in a metaphoric sense by sending them a message—His book. He would not personally deliver the message to these recipients. Instead, others would later bear the responsibility of getting the word to them. Jesus Christ sent His disciples to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6). And His disciples today still have that duty.” (*Ezekiel 2-3. Beyond Today Commentary* online, 15 Aug 2003)

Commentator Daniel Block himself concedes the following, although he generally thinks that Israel refers to Judah in parts of Ezekiel:

“The target audience is identified initially as *the descendants of Israel* (*bene yisra’el*, lit., “the sons of Israel”).... although the nation had divided into two kingdoms centuries earlier, and ten of the twelve tribes had been swallowed up in the neo-Assyrian empire in the 8th century, **like the rest of the prophets, Ezekiel continues to use the designation *Israel* for all who are left of the nation.** As 3:11 indicates, however, his primary audience consists of only a small segment of the family, who are in exile...” (Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 118) [emphasis mine]

He should know that “all who are left of the nation” is not only Judah, but also many of the House of Israel that went into captivity with Judah. This is a prophetic type of the House of Israel’s doom in the Great Tribulation.

Ezekiel preached to both Israel and Judah as a type of an end-time warning (the Ezekiel Warning or Captivity Doctrine) which the Church of God must restore and proclaim again someday in its full intensity.

Further Reading

- A Timeline of Ezekiel https://www.preceptaustin.org/jehovah_shammah
- Bible Timeline – Ezekiel <https://biblehub.com/timeline/ezekiel/1.htm>
- Walter Kaiser, *Exodus. Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

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A Note on Ezekiel's Warning to Israel and Judah

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