



EZEKIEL

EZEKIEL - EZEKIEL - EZEKIEL

**EZEKIEL**

Group Study

First Printing, 2022

**ROCK POINT CHURCH**

rockpointchurch.com

24759 S. Power Rd.

Queen Creek, AZ 85142

Written by Pastor Mark Collins


Lead Director of Adults



# TABLE OF CONTENT

WHY STUDY THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL?	4
WEEK 1   EZEKIEL 1-3	7
WEEK 2   EZEKIEL 4-5	16
WEEK 3   EZEKIEL 8-11	22
WEEK 4   EZEKIEL 12-24	27
WEEK 5   EZEKIEL 25-32	34
WEEK 6   EZEKIEL 33-37	43
WEEK 7   EZEKIEL 38-39	49
WEEK 8   EZEKIEL 40-48	55
GROUP AGREEMENT	61
TIPS FOR LEADING YOUR GROUP	62





# WHY STUDY THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL?

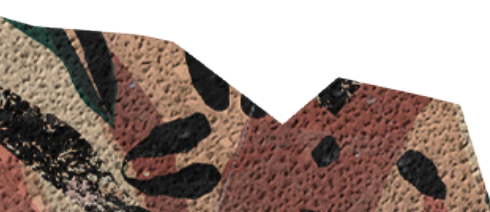
Ezekiel faced immense uncertainty about the future, which is not so different from what we are experiencing in our own time. Some readers think the Book of Ezekiel is a hopeless riddle. However, if we take the time to study it, we'll discover that despite the strangeness of the man and his visions, Ezekiel sought to trust God and consistently obey Him through some of the most difficult circumstances you'll find in Scripture. The priest-turned-prophet was brave enough to express to God his honest reactions, pure emotions, and hard questions. He was also willing to become a bizarre performance artist, which the people thought of as nothing more than a cheap sideshow act; yet, he was predicting their future.



## FROM FEAR TO FAMILIARITY

In the 21st century, one thing that may be lacking in church today is a sincere fear and reverence for the name and the glory of the Lord. At least a hundred times in the book of Psalms, we find the psalmist praising God's holy name. In fact, God's chosen people wouldn't even dare to say God's covenant name YHWH (Yahweh) without immediately taking a mizpah, which was a ritual cleansing bath. Yet, even in our modern-day context, we are promised that when people glorify God's name, they not only bring Him honor, but they bring honor to their families' names as well (Matthew 6:9)!

In America, there are still certain titles that demand respect. Take the title of "President" as an example. If you ever have the privilege of meeting a standing president in the oval office, I think it's probably fair to say that most of us would be a little nervous and stand in awe, even if we didn't agree with his policies or vote for him. Why? There is an awe-inspiring wonder for the position because of the vast power that it yields!



I wonder how many people think of God in this same way. It may seem a bizarre comparison, but I wonder if my familiarity with God has caused me to treat His incomprehensible holiness too lightly. I know our God is loving and that I'm an adopted son because of the work of Christ. I know my sins are forgiven, and I know I'm saved by grace. I know one day I will be with Him in eternity. But I wonder if this familiarity has undermined my reverence for Him. That's why Ezekiel can help us because reverence is the big idea that runs throughout the book.

## GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY OF EZEKIEL

Welcome to the wild and wonderful journey into biblical prophetic literature! Suffice it to say, we're going to skip learning how to float and jump off into the deep end of the pool! Scholars have long considered sections of the book of Ezekiel to be the most difficult to interpret in the entire Bible, and because Ezekiel's work is so vast (48 chapters), we're going to have to take a 10,000-foot approach. This workbook has eight sessions or weeks plus a fairly long introduction, which you are reading right now. So, as always, we'd like to give your small group some study options:

**OPTION 1:** For the gung-ho, brave at heart, your group could read the entire Book of Ezekiel and take it a chapter at a time. That would mean you would be taking an entire year studying the book (one chapter a week) with just four breaks!

**OPTION 2:** Your group could follow the format of this workbook and finish it in eight weeks. This would require your group members to read three to four chapters a week and the group questions before each meeting. This option would also require your members to download their own copies of the study guide. Find a pdf copy at [rpcaz.info/resources](http://rpcaz.info/resources).

**OPTION 3:** Your group can watch the weekly video and discuss the weekly group questions in this workbook. The videos will have about 70% of the content of this workbook and will make it easy for your group members to be able to talk it over and apply it to their lives. Watch weekly Ezekiel videos at [rpcaz.info/ezekiel](http://rpcaz.info/ezekiel).

**OPTION 4:** Your group can discuss the weekly sermon questions that will be provided each week during the Ezekiel sermon series at Rock Point sent via email. They will not be nearly as detailed nor give your group many answers to the questions that will probably arise during your discussion time. On the surface, option 4 may seem like the path of least resistance; however, in the long run, be aware that it may cause the group leader a lot more study and work on the back end.



# TIMELINE OF EZEKIEL'S MINISTRY

**605 BC** Nebuchadnezzar takes the Temple treasures to Babylon; Daniel is taken captive.

**597 BC** Ezekiel is taken captive to Babylon at age 25.

**593 BC** Ezekiel is called to ministry at age 30.

**592 BC** Ezekiel receives a vision of the Temple in Jerusalem.

**591 BC** Ezekiel interprets Israel's history (verse 20:1).

**588 BC** The Siege of Jerusalem begins.

**587-585 BC** Ezekiel gives the message against Egypt and Tyre.

**586 BC** Jerusalem is destroyed by the Babylonian army.

**586 BC** Ezekiel's news of Jerusalem's destruction comes.

**573 BC** Ezekiel receives visions of Israel's glorious future.

**571 BC** Ezekiel relays the message that Babylon will defeat Egypt.



# WEEK ONE

EZEKIEL 1-3

WEEK  
ONE



## FROM PRIEST TO PROPHET

William Shakespeare, the famous playwright, wordsmith, and storyteller, encourages all of us to not fear but to actually “embrace greatness” when he said: “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” However, occasionally, some people possess all three of these traits and are called to lead. Ezekiel was a man called by Yahweh to lead His people, a people who never really learned how to follow. When we are first introduced to Ezekiel, he’s 30 years old. This is the time when every young man who has been in training to become a priest takes on the holy ordinances of God. Ezekiel had a wife whom he adored, and the couple loved God with a passion. And despite the perilous times in which they found themselves, they considered their lives to be truly blessed. In fact, it seemed Ezekiel considered himself in the “born great” category, for he was bred to be a priest. He could trace his priestly lineage all the way back to the first priest, Aaron, the brother of Moses. So it just made sense to everyone who knew Ezekiel that he would continue to carry on the “family business.”

## PLACING EZEKIEL IN THE LARGER STORY

Like the other major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel), Ezekiel stands at a climactic moment in Israel’s history. For centuries, God had patiently waited for His people to repent from their idolatry and sin; yet, His patience had finally come to an end. While Isaiah stood at the beginning of this period, and Daniel at its end, Ezekiel and Jeremiah were at the white-hot center of God’s punishment - allowing His holy city to fall. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem until the final moments before its capture. Ironically, and against his will, Jeremiah was whisked away to Egypt so he could continue his prophetic ministry from the “land of bitter bondage.”

At 30 years old, Ezekiel is roughly the same age as the prophet Daniel. However, Ezekiel probably didn’t know him because Daniel was carried off to Babylon eight years prior to Ezekiel’s arrival there during the second wave of the Babylonian captivity. There’s a chance that Ezekiel may have had contact with the prophet Jeremiah when both men resided in Jerusalem, but they were embarking on diverse career paths. Priests and prophets didn’t usually enjoy the same social circles because oftentimes prophets considered priests to be “blind guides” and “evil shepherds” leading Yahweh’s people away from Him. Yet, despite all the turmoil in Jerusalem, and before Babylon’s second attack on God’s city, Ezekiel had a bright future in front of him. As a Temple priest, he was to serve the people, constantly remind them of God’s promises, and encourage them not to give up hope.

Unfortunately, there was a problem. Ezekiel couldn’t perform the main job that every priest was tasked to do. He couldn’t offer sacrifices. Why? Well, after the Babylonian’s





second siege on Jerusalem, Ezekiel found himself in the wrong zip code over a thousand miles from the Temple in Jerusalem, and according to the Law, sacrifices were to be offered at the Temple. This becomes the turning point in Ezekiel's life. Instead of doing what he had been trained to do, what he was basically bred to do, what he believed that he was destined to do from birth, God calls Ezekiel to become a prophet.

As the book opens, we find Ezekiel sitting on the banks of an irrigation canal near the Israelite refugee camp in Babylon. He has already suffered five years of captivity at the hands of the Babylonians. Ironically, it's his 30th birthday. This is the exact time when Ezekiel would've been ordained as a priest in Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:8-17). God always has impeccable timing! It would've been so much easier for Ezekiel to become a priest for priests were highly esteemed by the Jews. Priests were trained to read and interpret the Law. In the mindset of most Jewish people, it was an honor to become a priest, and it was certainly considered a "white collar" job.

On the other hand, prophets were usually despised and persecuted. They received their messages and orders directly from the Lord. The prophet's main job was forth-telling (proclaiming judgment for sin) rather than foretelling (predicting future events), but Ezekiel was tasked to do both. Most people tend to resent being told about their sins and prefer to hear messages of cheer rather than declarations of judgment. Frankly, it was dangerous to be a prophet, and in this prophet's case, it was even more dangerous to be a prophet's wife. When Yahweh began to break the news to Ezekiel that he was to become a prophet, God also revealed to him that his wife would pass away from a sudden illness. Her death would be a sign, a warning to Jerusalem and its Temple, that they were standing at death's door.

No matter what the children of Israel believed about Ezekiel's prophetic ministry, it was greatly needed among God's people, even if they didn't want to hear it! In the exile, many false prophets had emerged and were giving the Jewish people false hope for a quick deliverance. And quite unexpectedly, another river of optimism had sprung up like an oasis in the desert in the minds of the exiles. They had just received the news that Egypt had aligned with Israel and vowed to defeat Babylon so the Jewish people could return to their homeland, but the Egyptians were no match for the mighty Babylonian military who soundly defeated Pharaoh's army and sent them packing back to Egypt. Still, the false prophets assured the people that Jerusalem would still be safe, for no army on earth could overtake God's city or destroy its Temple.



Ezekiel ministered in a context where Israel's confidence in Yahweh was founded upon four pillars of divine promises: the Promised Land, God's covenant, Zion, and King David. God gave the Jews the land of Canaan as an eternal possession. He made an eternal covenant with Jerusalem (Zion) and its Temple, which was located (according to them) at the very center of the universe. This is where God chose to set up His rule forever, and all the kingdoms of the world were invited to watch and see how He took care of His people. Finally, God promised King David that someone from his lineage would forever sit on the throne. See the image below:



Now, to make matters even more complicated for Ezekiel, Jeremiah is taken to Egypt to escape the clutches of the Babylonians. Jeremiah sends a letter to the Jewish community in Babylon telling them that they would suffer in captivity for 70 years, so they should settle down, raise children, and pray for the prosperity of their captors. Yet, Jeremiah ended his letter by predicting the eventual destruction of Babylon after God's people serve a 70-year prison term.

## SEEING GOD'S GLORY DEPART FROM THE TEMPLE (EZEKIEL 2)

Ezekiel is commanded to "stand and listen" (2:1-2), and God gives him the title "Son of Man" which he is referred to as 92 times in the book. This title was also given to Daniel (Daniel 8:17), and Jesus applied this term to Himself (82 times) when He wanted to emphasize His humanity. As we turn our attention to chapter two, God's people have endured five years of exile. Suddenly, God breaks His silence, and Ezekiel has a vision and sees a powerful storm cloud approaching. In Scripture, a storm is often an image of divine judgment. Since the immense whirlwind Ezekiel saw was coming from the north, it indicated an invasion of Judah by the Babylonian army and the destruction of the land. The city of Jerusalem and the Temple were imminent. Ironically, for 40 years God graciously led Israel by a fiery cloud, but now a fiery cloud was bringing correction to the disobedient Jewish people.



Inside the cloud, there were four creatures. Each had wings outstretched and touching each other. Ezekiel identified these living creatures as cherubim. Each creature had a face (man, lion, ox, and eagle). Ezekiel also saw four wheels beneath each creature. And the wings of the creatures were supporting a dazzling platform. These wings were arranged in such a way that the creatures did not have to turn; they could fly straight forward, and then change direction very quickly. On the platform was God's throne. Sitting on this throne was a human-like person, glowing and shrouded by fire. That's when Ezekiel realized what he was seeing: "the likeness of the glory of the Lord." God was riding His royal throne chariot. It was both a welcoming and confusing sight for the new prophet. It was wonderful that God had not abandoned them.

Yet, it was also very disturbing. What was God's glory doing in Babylon? It was supposed to be above the Ark of Covenant in the Temple of Jerusalem!

## THE COMMISSIONING OF A PROPHET: BECOMING GOD'S WATCHMAN (EZEKIEL 3)

Because Ezekiel was a "son of man," he found himself face down in the dust when God spoke directly to him. This served as a powerful reminder of humanity's humble beginnings, for Genesis 1:26 tells us God knows our frame; He remembers that we are from the dust (Genesis 2:7). God remembers, but sometimes we forget!

After the vision finally concludes, God tells Ezekiel to join some of the other exiles in a place called Tel Abib. Yahweh did this in a unique way. All of a sudden, God's throne chariot was on the move! God was taking His new prophet on his first assignment. The Lord brought Ezekiel to Tel Abib just to sit with the captives and feel their burden of disappointment and grief. Psalm 137 reveals their misery and their hatred for the Babylonians. By the tone of the Psalm, it's clear that they should've been repenting and seeking God's face. Instead, the Jews were regretting what had happened and praying that one day they might be able to retaliate and defeat their Babylonian captors who taunted them.

As Ezekiel sat there with the people, he realized the seriousness of his calling and how great the responsibility was that God had placed on his shoulders. He also understood it was a good thing for the servant of God to be among His people to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. For Ezekiel will become a better minister to them when he knows their hearts and feels their pain. It isn't enough simply to proclaim the message of God; we must also seek to have the caring heart of God!



## THE ROLE OF THE WATCHMAN

The watchmen who stood on the walls of cities at that time were important for the safety and prosperity of those who lived inside those walls. God called the prophets to be faithful and to warn the people of impending judgment. It was the people's responsibility to heed their warnings and turn from their sins. Spiritually speaking, the wall that protected Israel was their covenant relationship with God. If they obeyed the terms of the covenant, God would care for His people, protect them, and bless them. Yet, if they disobeyed God, He would punish them. But whether He was blessing or chastening, God was always faithful to uphold His part of the covenant. After listening to the people's despair for a long time, Ezekiel began to explain to the captives both his and their responsibilities.

Some of the captives were blaming God for their sad plight, while others blamed their ancestors. Ezekiel made it clear that everyone is held responsible and accountable before God. The prophet had been given two main objectives. First, he was to get God's people to stop sinning against one another and stop retaliating against their Babylonian captors. His second task was much more difficult - help the people get back in a right relationship with God by returning to the covenant. So, to get the process started Ezekiel presented four possible scenarios.

In the first scenario, people would die because the watchman (the prophet) was unfaithful and didn't warn them. In that case, their blood would be on the watchman's hands, and he would be held to blame.

The second scenario depicted the watchman being faithful to warn the wicked, but they refuse to listen (that was the problem that Ezekiel faced as he preached to those in Tel Abib).

Scenario three described the righteous to die because they turn away from their covenant obedience and the watchman does not warn them. A faithful prophet not only warns sinners to turn from their sins, but he must also warn those who are obeying the covenant not to turn from it and disobey God.



The final scenario occurs when the righteous heed the watchman’s warning and are not judged. Yet, if the watchman saw faithful people about to break the covenant, it was his job to also warn them of coming judgment. Sometimes even Christians today have the idea that their obedience in the past has earned them the right to do as they please in the present. This is like when people walk down the aisle of church or raise their hand in response to the gospel and have an “I said yes” moment, or get baptized, and then use these actions as a get-out-of-jail-free card to live their lives with little or no restraint. Yet, this idea is a great lie. God gives people many privileges, but He never gives us the privilege to sin.

The third chapter of Ezekiel ends with God making one last strange command. (I think we better get used to strange.) Ezekiel wrote: “Then the Spirit came into me and set me on my feet. He spoke to me and said, ‘Go to your house and shut yourself in. There, son of man, you will be tied with ropes so you cannot go out among the people. And I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be speechless and unable to rebuke them, for they are rebels.’” (Ezekiel 3:24-26 NLT) Ezekiel is going to become a living picture of the exiles’ captivity. His imprisonment will be both self-inflicted (go shut yourself) and inflicted by others (they will tie). Lastly, all of this will be caused by God (I will make).

Then God cheers him up with more bad news: “with all of these things happening at once, there will be no escape for you.” Paraphrasing verses 26 and 27, God says, “You will be silent and will only be able to speak when I’m speaking through you. I will open your mouth to the people.” What does all this mean? It means for seven and a half years, until the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel would be unable to speak, except on the handful of occasions when God gave him a message to deliver. His muteness would set him apart from the false prophets who never shut up! And it would make Ezekiel’s rare speeches even more dramatic and have a better chance of striking the hearts of his hearers.



# NOTES



# NOTES



# TALK IT OVER: GROUP QUESTIONS

(Choose 4-5 to discuss.)

1. In our 21st-century context, who would you say are the “prophets” of today? What qualifies these people as prophets?
2. What are some of the reasons that people tend to reject prophets? Do you have a prophet in your life? Is that a good thing or a bad thing? How could you benefit from a prophet?
3. Describe a time when you felt God calling you to do something He wanted to accomplish through you. What happened?
4. Name someone you consider to be your “watchman on the wall.” How did they gain such an important place in your life?
5. Has God ever called you to become a watchman to help guide someone’s spiritual journey? How did that go? If you haven’t served someone in this way, where do you think you’d start?
6. The Israelites thought they were invincible because of God’s promises (see Israel’s House of Pride). How can a 21st-century church like Rock Point learn from their mistakes?
7. If God was to judge our nation, do you think He would keep devoted Christians free from suffering? Why or why not? How does being salt and light play into your answer?
8. Next week we are going to try to do the impossible. We’re going to try to cover chapters four and five of Ezekiel. The best way to accomplish this is to have everyone read the chapters in one sitting and then jot down some of the things that stuck out the most.



# WEEK TWO



## EZEKIEL 4-5

WEEK  
TWO



## THE DEATH OF GOD'S CITY?

There's a famous saying that you'll hear from time to time: "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." It's actually a popular misquote attributed to author Samuel Clemens whose pen name was Mark Twain. The humorous quote is based on a letter Twain sent to a newspaper reporter who had asked Twain about rumors that he was dying. Although it's not an accurate quote, it remains associated with Clemens and is often used to praise Twain's skill as a humorist. So you might be wondering, "How does this have anything to do with God's city Jerusalem and its destruction?"

Let me assure you if you've heard that God's city of Jerusalem has somehow been destroyed, it's fake news, which is always completely exaggerated, or just categorically untrue. Anyway, what you might not know is how many times armies have tried to wipe Jerusalem off the map.

Here's a snapshot of the major conflicts in the history of Jerusalem, a city that has been fought over sixteen times. During its long history, Jerusalem has been destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times. Like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, it remains. (If you didn't catch that, it was a shameless plug for the resiliency of Phoenicians who may not have been "under fire" as much as the residents of God's city, but we've felt the "blast furnace" almost on a daily basis!)

Despite Jerusalem's structural results after such resiliency, it's always been considered one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It's a place where people come from all over the globe to live. It's a place that forever lives in them. If you ever get a chance to go, you should. Most of the people that I know who have been, always come back with the same feeling: "It was like I was at home, but a home that I have never been to before." Even the Babylonians appreciated its beauty. It was said by one of their poets, "Of the ten measures of beauty that came down to the world, Jerusalem took nine." That's a high praise because Babylon and its hanging gardens have long been considered one of the greatest wonders in the history of the world.

In chapters four and five, the Lord appears to Ezekiel in the form of a mighty warrior and commissions him to send a message of judgment to both His people in Babylon and those who were still in Jerusalem. Yet, these messages of judgment weren't to be communicated using words. They were to be "acted out" to get God's message across to His people. These "sign acts" were a form of street theater or performance art. Ezekiel would go out in public and start behaving in bizarre ways, often acting out live parables from his prophetic visions. For example, he built a tiny model of Jerusalem and then staged an attack on it. He set up clay fortifications around the city and siege



ramps. He fashioned small battering rams which signified that when the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem, God's people would have no means of getting in or out, but what came next was even more disturbing.

At a specified time each day, Ezekiel would lay on his left side in the dirt with his arms tied. This is what the priests would do to the scapegoat during the Passover when the sins of the nation were placed upon it. This ensured that predators outside the walls would make quick work of the sinful animal. For 390 days, Ezekiel ate beans and lentils cooked over human excrement as a sign of what the inhabitants of the city would have to endure during the siege of Jerusalem. After 390 days passed, Ezekiel flipped over on his right side and repeated the ritual for 40 more days.

God explained to Ezekiel that each day he laid on his side represented a year in the sinful history of the Jewish nation. So, why did God choose the numbers 390 and 40? It's safe to assume that the 40 probably represented Israel's rebellion during their 40-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. However, the first number of 390 may be a little more difficult to discern.



Most Old Testament scholars have concluded that the 390 represents the years between King Rehoboam and the evil King Zedekiah. Rehoboam was the son of King Solomon, and he chose not to ease the tax burden of the 10 Northern Tribes of Israel after his father died. This decision caused the 10 tribes to secede from Israel and form their own nation. The 10 tribes also built their own temple and worshiped foreign Gods, which became an abomination in the sight of God. Eventually, these tribes were destroyed by the Assyrian empire.

After over a year of Ezekiel lying down each day, God delivered His most disheartening revelation to the prophet. Sadly, despite all Ezekiel's best efforts to urge God's people to repent, they were not going to listen to him.

Ironically, the fact that Ezekiel only spoke when God gave him a message to deliver by acting out his doom-and-gloom "sign acts" did pique the interest of the people, much like an entertaining court jester in the Middle Ages. Yet, God's people never fully understood Ezekiel's messages. Sadly, the Jewish people became so calloused that they could no longer hear God's Word. These "sign acts" were God's way of reaching His "spiritually deaf" people. Ezekiel must have been a pretty good actor because he became somewhat of a celebrity among the captives. People would gather in front of his house and wait to see what he was going to do next.

In Ezekiel 5:1-17, the prophet compared the invasion of an enemy to shaving off a man's

hair and beard. Shaving was part of the purification rituals. However, the Jews had to always be careful how they dressed their hair and their beards. The priests had to be especially careful. When Ezekiel, a “former priest,” publicly shaved his head and face, the people must have been stunned. By this time, it required extreme measures to keep the people’s attention long enough so they could get the message. The shaving of the head and the beard would be a sign of utter humiliation, great sorrow, and mourning. And that’s the way the Lord felt about the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. By using a sword instead of a razor, Ezekiel made the message even more dramatic: an army was coming whose swords would “cut down” God’s city and the people of the Promised Land.

Then, the prophet was commanded to weigh the hair carefully and divide it into three parts. He placed the first part of his hair upon the “siege model,” and then burned it to symbolize the people who would die of famine and pestilence in Jerusalem. The second part of Ezekiel’s hair was hacked to bits with a sword symbolizing those who were to be slain by the Babylonian soldiers. The third part was thrown to the winds to send a message that the Jews would be scattered among the Gentiles and even more exiles would be taken to Babylon. However, before Ezekiel threw the hair to the winds, he took a small portion of it and hid it in the hem of his garment. This was a symbol of God’s special care for a remnant of the people who wouldn’t be destroyed and eventually return to the land of Israel.

For the Lord in His covenant promised that He would spare a remnant because Israel still had work to do in the world. As far as God’s eternal purposes were concerned, Jerusalem was Yahweh’s city and the center of the nations. Salvation was to come through God’s people. Yes, Israel was a privileged people, but privilege involves responsibility and accountability, and the day of reckoning had come and there would be no escape. Israel was called to be a light to the Gentiles, to lead them to the true and living God, but instead, they adopted the wicked ways of the Gentiles and became sinners rather than save their neighbors.







# TALK IT OVER: GROUP QUESTIONS

(Choose 4-5 to discuss.)

1. Talk about a time when you felt exiled and far from home. It could have been a time when you moved to another city, went to a new school, or maybe even lived in another country. What were some of the feelings you experienced? Did you ever acclimate? What did you lose? Gain?
2. Ezekiel became a curiosity, even a celebrity among his fellow Jews because of his unorthodox preaching/teaching style. Do you have favorite communicators that you follow? What is it that you like about him or her? Have you ever allowed someone to become your Bible for you? What happened?
3. God used silence to get the attention of His people. How would you feel if you were unable to speak? Have you ever seen silence communicate more than words? Explain.
4. Of all the sins of Israel, why was idolatry the one God spoke about the most through the prophets? What are some of the idols that today's church worships in our modern context? Which idols are trying to get a stronghold in your life? How can you fight them?
5. During the siege of Jerusalem, the Bible tells us that God turned His face away from His people. Do you think God would turn His face from us if we found ourselves in a similar situation? Please explain your reasoning.



WEEK

THREE



EZEKIEL 8-11

WEEK  
THREE

## THE GLORY LEAVES, RETURNS, LEAVES, RETURNS, STAYS

The Gentile nations had their temples, priests, religious laws, and sacrifices, but only the nation of Israel had the glory of the true and living God dwelling in their midst (Romans 9:4). When Moses dedicated the Tabernacle, God's glory moved in (Exodus 40:34-35), but the sins of the people caused God's glory to depart (1 Samuel 4:19-22). When Solomon dedicated the Temple once again, God's glory filled the sanctuary. Centuries later, the prophet Ezekiel watched the glory leave the Temple and then come back again! Without the presence of the glory of the Lord, God's people were just another religious crowd going through the motions. Moses said when leading the children of Israel out of the Land of Goshen, "If your presence doesn't go with us, do not bring us up from here" (Exodus 33:15). Therefore, the people of God were always identified by the presence of God.

Chapters 8-11 record a remarkable vision that God gave Ezekiel, which he shared with the elders of the people of Israel. It wasn't an easy message to preach because it dealt with three great tragedies in the life of the Jewish nation. The Temple was defiled causing the people to be doomed, the leaders were deceived and couldn't see truth, and false prophets and the officials who followed them claimed that God would never permit His Holy Temple to fall into the hands of pagan Gentiles. The truths that Ezekiel shared were opposite of what the false prophets were proclaiming in Jerusalem and Babylon. And in their blind overconfidence, they were proven to be wrong. Ezekiel was either teleported or taken on a virtual tour from his house to the Temple in Jerusalem. The first thing that he saw in front of the Temple was a huge idol, and it was named "The Image of Jealousy" because God is jealous over His people.

As the nation decayed spiritually, the religious leaders incorporated the worshiping of other gods into the Temple rituals along with the worship of Jehovah. These stages in their idolatry were easy to see. First, the Jewish people became curious about their neighbors' religions, and then they investigated them. These pagan religions incorporated sexual rituals which appealed to the Israelites' fleshly appetites. It didn't take very long for God's people to begin secretly participating in pagan worship. From there it was just a short step to start worshipping idols openly. By then, it was much more convenient to move this false worship into the Temple, as though Jehovah was just one of many gods. Since Yahweh and Israel were married in a covenant relationship, Israel's religious prostitution aroused the Lord's holy jealousy much like a husband or wife would be jealous if another lover invaded their marriage (Exodus 20:5). And without God in the Temple, it was just another building! To make matters worse, the women in the Temple court were openly worshiping a Babylonian god named Tammuz, a fertility god the Egyptians called Osiris and the Greeks called Adonis. According to their myths, Tammuz was killed by a wild boar and went to live in the underworld,



and this tragedy brought on winter every year. It was nothing but superstition. Yet, in Ezekiel's vision, the Jewish women had forsaken the truth of God for a lie and were depending on gods who didn't exist. The rituals associated with the worship of Tammuz were unspeakably vile, as most fertility rituals were. Just think of the bravery that Ezekiel displayed by confronting the leaders of Jerusalem.

Still, the elders of Israel continued to insist that the captives in Babylon would be returned to Israel because Yahweh had promised to deliver them and return them to their land. In ancient days people believed that each nation had its own god, and when you left your home country, you left your gods. But Yahweh made it clear that only He could save the Israelites, and only if they would return to Him alone. Also, in that day, God would make a new covenant with Israel in which He would turn their hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. At this point in the vision, Ezekiel seems to be teleported into the future where he sees and describes a global homecoming for all the Jewish people who have been scattered across the world. God was calling His people back to the land that He promised them. What Ezekiel may not have fully understood was the fact that this part of his vision would take place in the end of times. That's when God's one and only Son returns to reconcile all who believe in Him. For He is the long-awaited Messiah who will fulfill the rest of God's promises to Israel.



In Ezekiel 11:22-25, the chariot throne that had been lingering at the threshold of the Eastern Gate of the Temple suddenly moves and rests on the Mount of Olives. But instead of leaving this time, Ezekiel saw a new Temple that will stand during the reign of Christ when He returns. After the last Temple was destroyed in 586 BC, the glory of God disappeared from the earth and didn't return until the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. Wicked men crucified the "Lord of Glory," but He rose again and ascended back to Heaven on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. One day He will return to deliver His people and establish His Kingdom forever. This time His glory will never leave His people for eternity!

When the vision was over, Ezekiel found himself back in his house in Babylon, and he told the Jewish elders and other exiles what the Lord had shown him. Some of them may have taken Ezekiel seriously and prayed for the peace of Jerusalem. Others decided to listen to and believe the false prophets and their soothing words of God's soon-coming deliverance. However, four years later, Ezekiel would receive the message that the siege of Jerusalem had begun. The date was January 15, 588 BC. Three years later (January 8, 585 BC), a fugitive would arrive in Babylon with the news that Jerusalem, the unconquerable city, had fallen. God's Word never fails!



NOTES



NOTES



## TALK IT OVER: GROUP QUESTIONS

(Choose 4-5 to discuss.)

1. Israel's sin caused God's glory to depart from the Temple. How does our sin affect God's glory and presence with us?
2. What are the things that come to mind when you think of God's jealousy?
3. There were many false prophets in Ezekiel's day. What are some false prophecies that you see Christians believing in the 21st century?
4. God Himself became the Temple for the exiles in Babylon. How is the triune God the Temple for us today?
5. How do you envision what it will be like when God's glory returns at the second coming of Christ? Does Jesus' return cause you to fear or become excited? Please explain your answer.
6. Often in Scripture, we find God sending judgment, not because unbelievers have sinned, but because His people have sinned and disobeyed His commands. In our country where do you see this truth being lived out today?



# WEEK FOUR



EZEKIEL 12-24

WEEK  
FOUR

## THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT'S FALSE: THE JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL

Last week's Chapter 11 served as a turning point and a key transition to help us understand how the rest of the book is designed. The next three sections are all announcements of God's judgment (that's nothing new). In Chapters 12-24, Ezekiel is going to show his fondness for using parables and allegories to get his message across instead of using "sign acts" (that's new). In Chapter 15, the prophet depicts Israel as a burnt, useless vine. He compares Israel to a rebellious wife in Chapter 16. Three chapters later (19), Ezekiel portrays Israel to be nothing more than an endangered lioness about to be captured. And in Chapter 24, he pays the highest price of being God's watchman - the death of his wife who he wasn't allowed to mourn! These are all depictions of Israel's rebellion. In Chapters 14, 18, and 20, Ezekiel acts like a prosecuting attorney and proves that Jerusalem's destruction is truly deserved after centuries of covenant violations. The prophet even goes on to say: "If the heroes of the faith like Noah, Daniel, or Job were pleading for God to forgive Israel's rebellion, God wouldn't accept their prayers." God's goodness demands that He bring justice on this generation.



The worthless vine (Ezekiel 15) is an image found frequently in Scripture. Jesus compared Himself to a vine and the disciples to branches attached to the vine because they depended wholly on Him for their lives and fruitfulness. John 15 tells us without Him we can do nothing. Yet, Revelation 14:17-20 speaks of the "vine of the earth," a symbol of a corrupt Gentile society at the end of the age, ripening for judgment in the winepress of God's wrath. In this case, the vine is applied to the nation of Israel. Once upon a time, Israel was a lonely vine when God planted her into the Promised Land, and by His blessing, the vine increased and prospered. During the reign of David and the early years of Solomon, the vine was fragrant and fruitful, and it was a witness to the Gentile nations of the blessing of God on Israel. However, Solomon introduced idolatry into the nation and the kingdom divided, and the Jewish people began to bear wild grapes. Thereafter, the kings who followed both in Israel and Judah worshiped idols and engaged in evil practices of the neighboring nations. That is when God allowed the Gentiles to invade the land and eventually destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. The holy vineyard was defiled and devastated. Vines that don't bear fruit are useless.

The only thing a dead vine is good for is fuel for the fire. Ezekiel saw the nation's first taste of the fire in 605 BC when Nebuchadnezzar took the Temple treasures to Babylon along with some of the best of the young men, including Daniel in 597 BC. There was a second deportation of exiles, Ezekiel among them, so the fire was growing even hotter. The siege of Jerusalem began in 588 BC, and that's when the fire began to blaze. In 586 BC the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and took thousands of Jewish

captives to Babylon. They even destroyed the walls of the city and burned the king's palace. The image that the prophet is trying to render of a burning branch is a picture of a worthless life, a life useless to God.

## THE REBELLIOUS WIFE (EZEKIEL 16)

This prophetic oracle was written as a divorce decree that is addressed to the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. This entire chapter traces the spiritual history of the Jews from birth (the calling of Abraham) all the way through their covenant marriage vows (the Law). It also details the actions that led to Israel's spiritual prostitution and the sad consequences that followed in the exile. The Lord takes His wife to court. His prosecuting attorney is the prophet Ezekiel who lays out his case and bears witness of Israel's unfaithfulness to God (he defends his client and is also a witness). Later, the Lord takes the stand and addresses the complaints of the people who contend that He had not kept His promises when He allowed the Babylonians to invade the land.

Then, Yahweh proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was Israel who broke her marriage commitments and broke the heart of her Lord. For Israel had experienced a great love. She was like an unwanted child, exposed, abandoned, and left to die, but the Lord came and rescued her, and she became His wife. The Lord cleansed her and clothed her in beautiful expensive garments fit for a queen. He made her prosperous during the reigns of King David and Solomon. But when Israel became prosperous and famous, she forgot who gave her wealth and began to use God's generous gifts for worshiping idols. She didn't just occasionally commit adultery, as wicked as that is, she became a professional prostitute. Worse yet, unlike other prostitutes, she sought out her lovers and paid them to sin with her.

She even went so far as to trust the other nations to protect and defend her rather than trusting the Lord, her husband. She hired the armies of other nations to fight for her instead of believing that the Lord would protect her. King Solomon made treaties with other countries by marrying the daughters of their rulers, and this is what led the land to commit adultery. Israel even made alliances with the Egyptians, the same empire that held them for years in bitter bondage before Yahweh rescued them. In response, the Lord announced their sentencing: He would call her lovers, these heathen nations, to be her executioners, and they would gather around her and see her nakedness! She would publicly be exposed as an adulteress and a harlot. Her enemies would strip the city of Jerusalem, and then it would be destroyed. The Jews knew all the laws and the consequences. Yet, they flagrantly defied the Lord and persisted in their abominations.



## ISRAEL IS LIKE A LIONESS (19:1-9)

Now, the lawyer-prophet turns his attention to the leaders of Israel. David's exalted reign had come and gone over 600 years before Ezekiel was called to be a prophet. King Zedekiah of Israel had agreed to a treaty with Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. But then he broke their agreement and sought help from Egypt. It was this foolish act that moved Nebuchadnezzar to send his army to Jerusalem to destroy the city and the Temple. It's been said that people get the leaders that they deserve, and so it seems that this maxim certainly proved to be true for God's people at this time. Ezekiel wouldn't even call Israel's leaders kings but instead referred to them as princes. Ezekiel's prophetic oracle was written in the form of a funeral dirge ridiculing the rulers of Israel for their weaknesses and prophesying their ultimate fates.

Ezekiel sees Israel being led by a lone lioness without a male lion to protect her. This may be the darkest time in Israel's history, rivaling the time of the Judges. As the nation faced utter destruction, a series of weak kings ruled in quick succession, one after the other. Although each of these kings found their lineage from the royal tribe of Judah, their bloodline didn't help their leadership abilities. King Jehoahaz only reigned over Judah for three months. He was taken away to Egypt by Pharaoh Neco, and that's where Jehoahaz was buried. His successor, Jehoiakim, only reigned for three months and 10 days. Nebuchadnezzar took him to Babylon with 10,000 other captives including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego along with many of the Temple treasures. Babylon was Jehoiachin's final resting place. Next up was Jehoiachin. During his reign in Jerusalem, Jehoiachin turned a deaf ear to the preaching of the prophet Jeremiah mostly because the prophet didn't have anything good to say about his leadership. In this period, it became very clear that these kings of Judah thought themselves to be great leaders, but they ignored the Word of God and so Yahweh cut short their reigns.

## THE END OF A MARRIAGE (24:15-27)

Not only did Yahweh change Ezekiel's career path, send him into exile, make him unable to speak for long periods of time, and act out the Lord's messages in a variety of strange ways, but He also asked Ezekiel to suffer maybe more agony than any of His other prophets had to bear. Ezekiel endured seeing his wife die suddenly, and then he was forbidden by God to mourn her death publicly. On the day of his wife's death, Ezekiel gave his morning message to the elders just as usual. That evening, his wife suddenly died, and the next morning he buried her. When his fellow Jews came to console him, they were shocked to see that he wasn't weeping out loud or displaying the usual signs of bereavement nor did the prophet accept any food that people brought him to help with his sorrow. Finally, the people asked Ezekiel for an explanation of why he wasn't in mourning. He told them that the Lord gave him this message to share with the exiles, then Yahweh opened the prophet's mouth so he could speak.



Ezekiel's wife was the joy of his life and the desire of his eyes, but the Lord took her away. The Temple in Jerusalem was the joy of the Jewish people, for no other nation had such a sanctuary, but now the Lord had taken the Temple away. On August 14, 586 BC, the Babylonians set fire to the Temple in Jerusalem. In Scripture nothing is said about Ezekiel's children, so we don't know if he had any, but God announced to Ezekiel in a vision that along with the destruction of the Temple, all the relatives of the exiles still living in Jerusalem would lose their lives that day. Once again, Ezekiel's loss was given to the exiles as a sign to understand what the Lord was doing. This had to be the most painful and costly of all Ezekiel's sermons preached to God's people living in Babylon. In order to preach this message, Ezekiel had to internalize his wife's passing and not mourn for her. And then, he was not allowed to mourn the deaths of everyone he loved in Jerusalem. To add insult to injury, God told Ezekiel to command the exiles not to mourn over the loss of the Temple, the city, or its inhabitants. There was to be no public wailing, screaming, weeping, or any change in their dress or eating habits.

The death of the prophet's dear wife was an act of God, and so was the destruction of the Temple. The woman who had died was innocent of any gross sin. Conversely, the Temple had become a den of thieves. God gave Ezekiel only one day's notice that he would become a widower. Yet, God sent many prophets to warn sinful Judah for many years, and still, they hadn't listened. The destruction of the Temple and the city should not have come as a surprise to anyone.

At this point in the story, you may be asking yourself, "How did the people really know that the prophet was telling them the truth?" Was Ezekiel's message informing the exiles in Babylon that Jerusalem had fallen really true, or was it "fake news?" In 586 BC, they didn't have instant news services as we have today. Could it be that the whole thing was only Ezekiel's way of dealing with his wife's death? Did the prophet just make the whole story up so the exiles would feel the same agony that he was going through? Miraculously, God sent a messenger to Babylon with the news of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. It took a few months for news to spread, five months later on January 8, 585 BC, but this message confirmed the August 14 fall of Jerusalem, which was the day after Ezekiel's wife died (Ezekiel 33:21-22)!

The next day God opened Ezekiel's mouth and removed the discipline that He had imposed upon him at the beginning of his ministry (3:25-27). From this point on, the prophet was free to speak as he felt led, and at the same time, the focus of his ministry shifted. He had exposed the nation's sins and announced her judgment. Now he would announce God's plans for the Gentile nations, including victorious Babylon, whom they now served. Then, he would minister hope to the Jewish exiles and share with them the visions of God's Kingdom yet to come. Ezekiel was a faithful servant of God even to the point of enduring the death of his beloved wife so he could declare the Word of God to the exiles in Babylon. What an example of true love and dedication!



NOTES



NOTES

Lined writing area for notes, consisting of horizontal lines across the page.





## TALK IT OVER: GROUP QUESTIONS

(Choose 4-5 to discuss.)

1. What do the social manners of a civilization (how people treat one another) reveal about the morals and character of that civilization?
2. Ezekiel prophesied against the extortion-like business practices of the Jews. Where should people draw the line between running a profitable business and taking advantage of people?
3. Ezekiel describes God's judgment in terms of destruction and fire. What kinds of judgment from God do you see taking place in the world today?
4. In the Bible, the people of Judah were described as blatantly hypocritical. Where do you see hypocrisy in the 21st-century Christian church today? What are the dangers of hypocrisy?
5. Ezekiel used the term "adultery" when describing the relationship between God and the nation of Israel in his day. What words come to mind that would describe God's relationship with America? The American church? Rock Point? And if you're brave, your small group?
6. The Jews believed nothing bad could happen to them because they were chosen. Name some other reasons why people at times think they are untouchable.
7. What kinds of things keep us from repenting of sin even when we hear about God's judgment?



# WEEK FIVE



EZEKIEL 25-32

WEEK  
FIVE

## JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS SURROUNDING ISRAEL (25-32)

The destruction of Jerusalem was a welcomed sight by the Gentile nations, which were in close vicinity to the Kingdom of Judah. Especially during the “golden age” of their nation (the reigns of Kings David and Solomon). The Jews had been a separated people, and this irritated their neighbors. Yet, the decedents of Abraham were consistent in claiming that Jehovah was the only true and living God. This meant that the other nations worshiped only dead idols. Both Saul and David had met many of these nations on the battlefield, and the Gentiles remembered and resented those humiliating defeats.

As the Kingdom of Judah drifted away from the Lord, the Jewish people adopted some of the gods and the practices of the Gentiles. To their neighbors, the Jewish people began to look like hypocrites. After all, if Jehovah is the only true and living God, why would the Jews need other gods? Also, why would the kings of Judah look to human allies for their protection, especially since Jehovah had infinite power to protect and care for them? Nothing would please the Gentiles more than being able to taunt the Jews in their day of humiliation. Finally, they could claim that the Babylonian gods were stronger than the God the Jews worshipped.

What the nations didn't realize was that the destruction of Jerusalem wasn't just a punishment for the Jews; it was also a warning to the Gentiles. Think about it, If God would display His wrath against His own people, what would He do to the pagan nations who scoffed at His inability to protect His own? There's a great difference between a loving parent correcting His children and a just judge punishing a guilty criminal. Israel knew God's Word and agreed to the terms of the covenant. This was what they deserved. On the other hand, the Gentiles were without an excuse for their evil ways, for they also had a clear witness of Yahweh's goodness demonstrated by His wonderful creation.

## JUDGMENT ON NATIONS RELATED TO ISRAEL (25:1-14)

God's first warning shots were aimed at the nations related to Israel. The Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites were related to Israel through Lot who was Abraham's nephew. Ammon and Moab were two sons born out of the incestuous union of Lot and two of his daughters (Genesis 19:29-38). Edom is another name for Jacob's twin brother Esau. While Jacob fathered the twelve tribes of Israel, Esau fathered the people group who eventually became known as the Arabs. You'd think that nations related by blood would be supportive of one another, but these three nations stoked a longstanding hatred against Israel and kept the fire blazing hot!



In the past, Yahweh had been kind to the Ammonites. In the days of Moses and Joshua, Israel was marching toward the Promised Land defeating one nation after the other. God commanded Moses not to attack the Ammonites for He had given them their land. Later, Ammon united with Moab and attacked Judah, but both countries were soundly defeated. Now, the Ammonites were rejoicing at the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, so the Lord announced that He would deliver the Ammonites into the hands of the “men of the east,” referring to the Babylonian army. During the campaign to expand his empire, Nebuchadnezzar had paused at the juncture of two roads, one which led to Jerusalem and the other to Rabbah, the capital of Ammon. There, the king sought guidance from his diviners and God saw to it that Nebuchadnezzar marched to Jerusalem and the Ammonites breathed a sigh of relief. So, instead of pitying Jerusalem, they were joyful when they heard the city was ruined and the Temple desecrated. Now, their time of judgment had come. God would destroy Ammon, and their nation would perish from the earth forever!

### MOAB (25:8-11)

It was Balak, the king of Moab who hired Balaam to curse Israel as they camped on the plains of Moab (Numbers 22-24). The sin of Moab was slander against God's people. Moabites were a proud people because they thought their nation was impregnable. Moab was protected by the highest mountains that surrounded the Dead Sea. God told them He would bring invaders through their inaccessible northwest border even though it was made up of sheer cliffs. God kept his promise for it was the Assyrians who invaded and destroyed Moab. Today, Moab is no longer remembered among the nations.

### EDOM (25:12-14)

The last nation that was related to Israel was the Edomites. Edom's hatred of the Jews began when Esau foolishly sold his birthright to his brother Jacob with the help of his mother's scheme to secure the patriarchal blessing for her favorite son. When Jerusalem was being attacked, the Edomites cheered for the Babylonians and gave no help to the Jewish refugees who were trying to escape. Instead, they helped round up many fleeing Jews and returned them to the Babylonians. Edom rejoiced over these terrible calamities that had been perpetrated against the Jews, and along with the Babylonians, they looted the city and robbed their own blood relatives.



## JUDGMENT ON THE NEIGHBORING NATIONS (25:15-26:21)

Having dealt with the sins of the nation related to Israel, Ezekiel now turns his attention to Philistia, Phoenicia (especially the capital city of Tyre), and Egypt. After the Israelites entered and occupied the land of Canaan, the neighboring Philistines became serious enemies. Both King Saul and King David had to contend with them.

It was David who finally defeated the Philistines, and they were kept under control until the end of Solomon's reign. When the Jewish nation was divided into Northern and Southern Kingdoms, the Philistines asserted their independence and became successful traders along with the Phoenicians. The Philistines aligned with Egypt in an attempt to withstand Nebuchadnezzar, but Babylon was too much for them. They were defeated and deported like the other vanquished nations.

Ezekiel devoted several messages to the sins and the fate of the capital of Phoenicia, the city of Tyre. Also, it was at this time that Israel became an ally with Egypt hoping that they could stop the Babylonians from destroying Jerusalem. Their dependence on Egypt, rather than trusting Yahweh to deliver them, led many of the Jews to adopt Egyptian gods and idols.

In response, Yahweh accuses the Egyptian king of arrogantly viewing himself as a god. Yahweh promises that He will hold the Pharaoh accountable for his pride and announces through Ezekiel that He will use Babylon to bring down the Egyptians and anyone who aligned with them. It was also at this time that Ezekiel had a vision of a storm producing massive tidal waves and destroying the city of Tyre, which is situated along the Mediterranean coast. Yet, these tidal waves didn't come from a category-five hurricane. Rather, the deadly "storm surge" came from the Babylonian military. Nebuchadnezzar began his siege upon the city of Tyre in 585 BC directly after he destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. (Remember, dates go backward when talking about BC.)

Since the city of Tyre was at the very center of commerce along the Mediterranean coast, her fall was devastating to the entire economy of the region. People all along the coastline trembled at the prospect of losing everything. Imagine what would happen in the U.S. and the rest of the world, if in an instant Wall Street were to be destroyed? The last time that Wall Street went belly up, traders jumped out of windows of skyscrapers. The destruction of Tyre is merely a foreshadowing of what it will be like when the Antichrist organizes his great world network named "Babylon," and the Lord destroys everything in a single day (Revelation 18). Throughout history, there have been many rises and falls of one civilization after another. Yet, there's a common theme: Leaders develop a hunger to be "like God." This hunger was first manifested when an angel



rebelled and led a revolt to secure God's throne. That's when Satan boasted, "I will be like the Most High." And that's how he tempted Adam and Eve, by promising "You will be like God if you eat from the tree in the middle of the Garden."

## PROMISES TO ISRAEL (28:20-26)

After delivering this long oracle of judgment, Ezekiel was quick to run back to hope. Much like the Apostle Paul wrote in the Book of Romans, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" He exclaimed, "But where sin abounds grace abounded much more." (Romans 5:20) One of the major themes that run through Ezekiel's prophecy is the final deliverance of God's people. Not just freedom from their Babylonian captors but a future regathering of the Jewish nation. Eventually, the might and power of the Babylonian army will be overtaken by the Persian Empire (and they achieve this great feat in a single night!) After a seventy-year exile in Babylon, God moved in the heart of the Persian King Cyrus who allowed the Jewish people to return to the Promised Land and rebuild the Temple.

Yet, that's not the end of the story! There will be a time in the future when God will call His chosen people together into their own land, judge them, cleanse them, and re-establish His glorious Kingdom (Zechariah 10:8-12, Matthew 24:31). God gave the land of Palestine to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 13:14-18). He then again renewed this promise to Jacob (Genesis 28:10, 35:12). The Jews owned the land because God gave it to them. During the exile in Babylon, they were put out of the land because they rebelled against God. Ezekiel will have more to say in Chapters 37-38 about Israel's future, but this brief promise must have brought encouragement to those who remained faithful, even in the poor conditions in Babylon. And it should bring encouragement to us, for we also wait, for the sure promise of Christ's return to rule and reign the nations in power, justice, and freedom, forever.

## EGYPT WILL FALL (29-32)

It makes sense that Egypt receives more attention than any of the other nations the prophet addressed. Centuries before Ezekiel's call to be a prophet, Egypt had made the Jewish people suffer greatly as slaves. And even after arriving in the Promised Land, the Egyptians were a thorn in the flesh of the Jews, and usually, they were a most undependable ally. Yet, the longer the Jews were away from Egypt, the more they idealized their experiences there and forgot about the slavery and all the toil. Also, King Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess exacerbated the problem. It did provide Judah with a considerable amount of business with Egypt, but after Solomon died, those ties began to unravel. The prophet Isaiah warned Israel's leaders: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for deliverance, for help comes from the Lord!" (Isaiah 31:1-2).



## PHAROAH HOPHRA'S SINS

The Lord compared Hophra to a monster that dwelled in the waters of the Nile and claimed the river for himself. The Nile River was essential to the life of Egypt. It became so essential that they treated it as a god. Yet, Hophra claimed that he was the one who made the river and that it belonged to him. God compared this Pharaoh to a ferocious crocodile guarding the rivers of the land. Hophra suffered from the sin of pride, taking credit for what the Lord had done. Whatever greatness belonged to Egypt, it was because of the gracious gifts of God and not because of what this pharaoh and his people had accomplished.

But the Lord wasn't impressed by the crocodile nor was He afraid of him! Yahweh promised to catch him, put hooks in his mouth, and drag him and the fish clinging to his body (this was a reference to the Egyptian people) out to the fields where they would be exposed to the sun and die. Although it was customary for Egyptian pharaohs to be diligent when preparing their burial places, Hophra would be left for dead like a common criminal.

This pharaoh's second sin was his disloyalty to Israel for it was Egypt who convinced Judah's King Zedekiah to break their agreement with Babylon, and this foolish act is what incited the Babylonian attack against Jerusalem. While Nebuchadnezzar was attacking Jerusalem, the Jews tried to negotiate with Egypt to send their army to deliver Judah. For a short time, the Babylonians turned away from Jerusalem so they could deal with Egypt, but the scheme didn't work. The people in Jerusalem rejoiced that the siege had ended, but God warned his people that the army would return to Jerusalem and finish the job. As a result of God's judgment, the power and pride of Egypt were destroyed, and the nation would never rise to its former heights again. Sadly, nations never seem to learn that God is serious about what happens to His chosen people.



## EZEKIEL'S FINAL EPITAPH OF EGYPT: THE CORPSE IS BURIED (32:17-32)

In Ezekiel's seventh oracle, the prophet described a vision of the people of Egypt descending into Sheol, the world of the dead. Ezekiel was instructed to wail because of the multitudes of people who were slain by the swords of the Babylonians. The scene even becomes more macabre as the people from the surrounding nations welcome the people of Egypt including Pharaoh (the supposed god) by taunting them as they arrive. They said, "You thought you were so beautiful and strong? Look at you now! You prided yourselves in being a circumcised people, but now you are lying down in death with the uncircumcised. Like us you thought you were invincible, but now you have joined

us in death and decay. You are no longer on a throne; you are in a grave. Your bed is a sepulcher.”

Ezekiel names some of the nations great and small that welcome Pharaoh and his people into Sheol: Asher, Assyria, Elam (modern-day Iran), Meshach, and Tubal (modern Asia Minor). One of the most painful truths in Scripture is that death awaits both the just and the unjust. Death is the great leveler as John Donne reminds us in his famous poem, “When the funeral bell tolls, it tolls for thee.” But when Christians think of death, they should remember the Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.”





**NOTES**



**NOTES**

## TALK IT OVER: GROUP QUESTIONS

(Choose 4-5 to discuss.)

1. The Gentile nations surrounding Judah were enemies who delighted in Jerusalem's downfall. Who would delight in Christianity's downfall today?
2. List some reasons why God punishes His own children before He punishes unbelievers who disobey Him more openly.
3. Many of the enemy nations of Israel were extended family. In what ways are family disputes often hotter and longer standing than nonfamily disputes?
4. In what ways do you think God holds people groups or nations accountable for their actions today as He did in proclaiming the judgments on the nations through Ezekiel?
5. God worked through the national conflicts between Tyre, Egypt, and Babylon to accomplish His plan. In what ways do you see God working at an international level today?
6. If Ezekiel were here today to prophesy about the fate of our country, what do you think he would say?
7. In what ways does America look to the world for help rather than trusting God?
8. Pharaoh Hophra's sin was pride. Where are you the most vulnerable to fall to the sin of pride in your life?



WEEK  
SIX



EZEKIEL 33-37

WEEK  
SIX

## THE CONFIRMATION OF JUDGMENT AND THE MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR JERUSALEM: THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

Wow! I don't know about you, but it seems like it's been eons since we first embarked on the study of the Book of Ezekiel. In fact, it was all the way back in the second installment where we unpacked Chapters 4-5. That's when Ezekiel informed the Jewish captives in Babylon that Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians. It's taken months to receive confirmation for what Ezekiel already knew in the Spirit. In Chapter 33, on January 8, 585 BC, while the prophet was still praying for his homeland, he is met by a fugitive/refugee who had just arrived from Jerusalem. He gives the exiles the sad confirmation that Babylon had attacked the city of Jerusalem and the city had fallen. The walls were burned to the ground, and the Temple had been destroyed. When did this happen do you ask? On the day after Ezekiel's wife passed away, August 14, 586 B.C.

This validated the prophecies of Ezekiel and proved that he was indeed a prophet of God (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). The night before he had heard the news, Ezekiel had been in a prophetic state with God's hand upon him, so Ezekiel knew something special was about to be revealed. The hearing of this news brought about the opening of Ezekiel's mouth, so he was no longer mute when he wasn't declaring the message of God (Ezekiel 3:26-27). Since then, he has been able to converse with the people and have a pastoral ministry among them apart from his prophetic preaching.

So now that Jerusalem had been destroyed, the exiles wondered if there was any hope for God's scattered people. Think about it. Everything that the Jews had put their faith in: the land - taken, the covenant - broken, Zion - destroyed, and a greater king than David who would sit on the throne forever, seemed to be nothing but a pipe dream. When everything is hopeless, that's when Yahweh always does His best work and often in the most unusual ways. The hope for Israel begins with God promising to raise up a new David, a future Messianic King who is going to be the kind of leader who Israel desperately needed but never got, and Israel is going to come under this Messianic King's rule and is going to become a transformed people. God's going to deal with their rebellious heart problem by giving them new hearts.

Just after that announcement, the Spirit transported Ezekiel to a valley filled with many bleached bones scattered on the ground. These were the skeletons of corpses that had decomposed long ago after carrion-eating birds and animals stripped away their flesh. The people who were slain were probably the soldiers of the Jewish army who tried to resist the Babylonians. What made this scene even more horrific, at least from a Jewish perspective, was that in their culture it's humiliating for the body of a dead Jewish person not to be washed, wrapped, and buried with dignity in a grave or a



tomb. These bodies were left on the battlefield to become food for vultures rather than given a proper burial. In fact, God warned Israel if they continued to break the covenant that “The Lord will cause them to be defeated before their enemies.” He specifically told them, “Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and no one shall frighten them away” (Deuteronomy 28:25-26).

The Lord also told Ezekiel to walk among the bones so he could appreciate their vast number and see how dry they were. As a priest, Ezekiel was never to be defiled by the dead, and even though this was a vision, one would assume that the bones were toxic. Then, the Lord posed the prophet a question: “Can these bones live?” Now, from a human point of view, the answer is no, but from a divine point of view, nothing is impossible. The prophet understands that it is God who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did (Romans 4:17). Ezekiel decided not to question God and told Him that he didn’t know, but he knew that Yahweh was able to do it!

God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind and told him exactly what to say. In the Hebrew language, the word “Ruah” can mean wind, breath, or Spirit. When Ezekiel spoke the living Word of God, Yahweh’s breath entered their dead bodies and immediately they stood to their feet, and even skin grew over their bones. As Ezekiel described the vision to the exiles, they probably were taken back to the story of the creation of humans found in Genesis 2. That’s when God made humans out of the dirt and added His divine breath to animate them into living beings. Sadly, these same humans rebelled against the Life-Giver, and this resulted in their physical deaths along with all their offspring.

Therefore, the only hope for humanity in the future is that Yahweh would perform a new act of creation and remake humans in such a way that they can truly live in a relationship of love with God and with each other. God will have to fix the hearts of His own people. Yet, this vision left the exiles with more questions than answers: “What about the disunity of the divided state of Israel? What about the Jewish exiles, who are spread all over the world? What about the evil that is still rampant among all the unbelieving nations? Where is God going to dwell since the Temple has been destroyed?” And the biggest question of all: “Who is this coming King that will shepherd God’s chosen with ‘love and grace?’”



## REUNION: THE KINGDOMS UNITED (37:15-28)

The nation of Israel was a united people until the death of King Solomon. Solomon's son and successor Rehoboam pushed some very unwise and arrogant policies, which divided the kingdom in 931 BC. That's when the northern ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom soon fell into idolatry and apostasy due to weak leaders. In 722 BC, the Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria, and eventually, God's people were scattered across the Assyrian empire. Judah survived, mainly because Judah had some good kings and maintained the Davidic line and the ministry in the Temple.

Prior to having this vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones, Ezekiel in one of his "action sermons" prophesied that in the future the Lord will gather His people to one place, their own land of Israel. In Chapters 40-48, Ezekiel tells us in that day God's presence will be so strong that it will sanctify His people, the land, the Temple, and the nation. As a result, the nations of the earth will come to worship the Lord with the people of Israel, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. Most scholars believe this is a direct reference to Jesus' Millennial reign.



Whether it's the children of Israel or Christians in the church today, the Lord wants His people to be united. Psalm 133:1 reminds us, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for the brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity." Paul appealed to the believers in Ephesus to make every effort to "keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Sometimes it takes prayer, sacrifice, and patience to maintain the unity of God's people, but it's important that we do. Jesus prayed that His people might be one to show a lost world the living unity between Christ and His Church. A divided Church is a weak Church, and it does not bear witness to the grace and the glory of God. In our 21st-century context, the church today needs a fresh wind of God's Spirit to give us a new life and a new love for one another.

**NOTES**



**NOTES**

## TALK IT OVER: GROUP QUESTIONS

(Choose 4-5 to discuss.)

1. Have you ever tried to minister to someone who was suffering deep grief? How did you approach the situation? Were you able to enter his/her pain? What did it personally cost you? What did you learn?
2. Talk about a time in your Christian walk when you felt like “a body of dry bones.” How did you get there? How did God rescue you? What advice would you give to someone who’s experiencing a spiritual desert?
3. The prophet Ezekiel experienced incredible intimacy with God; yet, it came at a great personal cost. Talk about a time when you suffered for being obedient to God. How did it change the trajectory of your life?
4. One of the ways Ezekiel described the future Kingdom was being “safe and secure.” How do you think your walk with God would be affected if you lived in a place where you could be persecuted for your faith in Christ?
5. What do you look forward to the most in the coming Kingdom of God? If you were going to explain to someone what Heaven will be like when God makes a “new heaven and a new earth,” what would you say? (For help, turn to Revelation 21-22).





# WEEK SEVEN



EZEKIEL 38-39

WEEK  
SEVEN

## HOPE FOR THE NATIONS: THE DEFEAT OF GOG

Chapters 38 and 39 promise God’s final defeat of evil among the nations which becomes personified by a ruler whose name is Gog from the land of Magog. The name Gog is derived from a genealogy of ancient kingdoms and lands from Genesis 10. It refers to powerful nations of the past. Many Bible scholars consider this section of Ezekiel to rank among the most difficult prophetic passages in all of Scripture, and they don’t all agree on the interpretation. Some scholars have taken a more figurative approach. They believe that these images in Ezekiel’s vision represent all the violent nations of the world. They’ve surmised that in Ezekiel’s mind, Gog is nothing more than the sum-total of all the most violent people found in God’s Word; in other words, Gog is the archetype of all human rebellion against God throughout history. Yet, one of the main difficulties of this approach is the fact that there’s a lot of detail if Gog only personifies evil, as an example.

At Rock Point, when it comes to end-time prophecies, we tend to take a more literal approach, but we don’t want you to think we have it all figured out! In fact, if you attend our Membership Dessert, or check out our Statement of Beliefs online, you’ll find this quote: “In essential beliefs, we have unity (what we believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the Bible, and people.) In non-essential beliefs, we have liberty (what we believe about end-times events such as Revelation and other prophetic literature in the Bible, the earth’s age, church government, service order, and the like). In all our beliefs, we show love.” We want to live out Psalm 133:1: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for the brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity.”

Before we can examine Ezekiel 38-39, we should consider looking at the Book of Revelation and attempt to synthesize it with the prophetic visions of Ezekiel. From our vantage point in the 21st century, the next crisis event on God’s prophetic calendar is the rapture of the Church, and that event could occur at any moment (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Jesus will come in the air and call His people to be with him in Heaven.

According to Daniel 9:24-27, the nation of Israel will make an agreement with a world leader who heads up a ten-nation coalition to protect Israel for seven years so they can rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem. We don’t know how much time will elapse between the rapture of the Church and the signing of the covenant between Israel and this world leader. Yet, it is the signing of this covenant that triggers the start of the seven-year tribulation described in Matthew 24:1-28 and Revelation 6-19. After the first three and a half years, this leader will emerge as the Antichrist. He will break the covenant with Israel, set up his own image in the Jewish temple, and try to force the world to worship and obey him. During the last half of the three and a half years, the entire world will



experience “the wrath of God.” There’s a lot of debate surrounding the timeline of the rapture. Some scholars believe that Jesus will gather His bride (the Church) before the Antichrist reveals himself. Others believe the Church will have to endure the tribulation period. Yet, one thing is for sure, this seven-year period will climax with the return of Christ to the earth to defeat Satan and the Antichrist and establish His Kingdom. That’s when the battle of Armageddon will be fought.

## EZEKIEL’S “SPOILER ALERT” FOR GOG (38-39)

Now after our excursion to attempt to synthesize some of the Apostle John’s prophecies in the Book of Revelation with Ezekiel’s visions, let’s jump back into the story of Gog, the ruler of Magog. Magog actually means “the land of Gog.” It’s located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. In verse 38 we find out that Gog is also the ruler of Meshech and Tubal. These lands are in eastern Asia Minor along with Beth Togarmah and Gomer. That would make Prince Gog’s allies: Persia (which is modern-day Iran), Cush (which would be ancient Ethiopia), Put (Libya), Gomer, and Beth-Togarmah which are both located near the Black Sea.

This time Ezekiel provides his listeners (and readers) a spoiler alert by telling them the end of the story even before it begins. God will defeat this vast coalition army and rescue His people Israel and their land (38:3-4a). What’s amazing about this conflict is how God, with no help from His people, will destroy the coalition army of Gog. Yahweh will send an earthquake to destroy Gog and his coalition. This earthquake will be felt over the entire world. After the earthquake, he’ll send blinding rains, hailstones, and fire and brimstones from Heaven.

This attack will be so devastating in the eyes of the Jews that Israel will recognize the sheer power and holiness of God and be convicted of their sins (39:7). Then, God will gather them back into their own land, but they will not be a converted people yet; it will not be until they see their Messiah that they will loathe their sins and put their trust in Christ and become a regenerated people, but this great victory will be the beginning of their spiritual experience with the Lord. Both Israel and the nations will know that Jehovah is the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. During this difficult tribulation period, the Jewish people will remember and celebrate forever God’s victory over their invaders.

The sudden destruction of this great army will leave behind a multitude of corpses. At this time in the future, the people from the cities of Israel will go out and gather and destroy weapons and supplies and burn bodies left by Gog’s army. Many Jewish scholars who study Ezekiel’s predictions believe the final burial place for Gog’s army will be east of the Dead Sea. Right now, this location is named “The Valley of the Travelers.” The new name will be “The Valley of Gog’s Hordes.”



When Ezekiel wrote down what he saw in his vision, he didn't try to explain modern equipment but used ancient military weapons like bows and arrows and clubs and spears to explain to his hearers what is going to happen. In Ezekiel's context, if he had written about jet planes and rockets, he would have been completely misunderstood.

Yet, the victory over Gog and his hordes will speak loud and clear to the people of the Gentile nations who will be left behind at the rapture. It will tell them that the Jews are indeed the people of God who were chastened by Him in the past but now are accepting Jesus as the Messiah and entering His Kingdom. Hopefully, there will come a day when all of the rebellious nations will come to their senses and be cleansed and forgiven. Only then will Yahweh pour out His Spirit on His people. That will happen when they recognize the good Shepherd as their Messiah, repent of their sins, and trust Him for their salvation. Many of the Gentile nations and the people of Israel will experience great suffering during the seven years of tribulation, but the Lord in His mercy will also save a great multitude of Gentiles to share in His Kingdom.



**NOTES**



**NOTES**

## TALK IT OVER: GROUP QUESTIONS

(Choose 4-5 to discuss.)

1. How do you respond to the fact that there are passages, such as the ones in these chapters, upon which even the most knowledgeable scholars can't agree?
2. Can you think of some reasons why it's important to study Scripture passages that are difficult, even impossible to understand definitively?
3. Why do you think God gave us so many details about the end times? As you dig into the prophecies of Ezekiel, do you find yourself encouraged or discouraged?
4. What current events have you seen lately that cause you to believe the stage is being set for the end-time prophecies of Ezekiel?
5. How do you interpret prophecies that were written in ancient times but describe the future? For instance, why would Ezekiel not attempt to describe modern weaponry of the future, but instead describe employed weapons of his day: arrows, clubs, spears, and shields?
6. What kind of reasoning do you think Satan employs to keep believing that he has a chance to defeat God in the end?
7. Knowing that Ezekiel encourages everyone who reads his prophecy to be ready for the end of the world, what should we do to be ready?



# WEEK EIGHT

55

EZEKIEL 40-48

WEEK  
EIGHT

## A NEW TEMPLE...AGAIN? (EZEKIEL 40-48)

Before we jump into our last lesson in the Book of Ezekiel, I believe there are some congratulations in order. If you could see me right now, I'm throwing confetti up in the air and blowing one of those little paper horns that make a sound like Canadian geese honking in mid-flight. Your group has made it to the end, well almost to the end, for Ezekiel is going to describe a time when the Jewish people finally realize that Christ is truly the Messiah.

Now I'd love to tell you that in this last section you'll be provided the answers to all or some of your nagging questions that you've endured during this study. Well, drumroll please...the answer is...without further ado...the answer is...no. In fact, these last nine chapters may be the most tedious and difficult to understand in all of the Bible. Group leaders, can I give you a word of advice? Hide your TV remotes this last night so no one hijacks your study by turning on Right Now Media! Desperate times require desperate measures!

The Book of Ezekiel closes with a vision of a Temple. In Chapter 40, the prophet is transported from Babylon to his homeland, Israel. There, Ezekiel sees a divine messenger holding a measuring rod. This messenger gives Ezekiel a tour of the Temple, measuring the various walls, gates, and courts. At one point during the tour, Ezekiel who had seen the glory of the Lord depart from the Temple in an earlier vision now sees God's glory return...again (Ezekiel 43:1-4).

Now, here's the hundred-million-dollar question (I raised the price of the question because of recent inflation): who's Temple is Ezekiel seeing? Is it Solomon's Temple? When Ezekiel saw this vision in 573 BC, no Temple was standing in Jerusalem. Solomon's Temple had previously stood there, but it had been destroyed 13 years earlier by Nebuchadnezzar when he conquered Jerusalem and deported many of its citizens to Babylon.

Could it be Zerubbabel's Temple? (You may be asking, "Who's Zerubbabel?"). When the Jews were finally freed from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem, Zerubbabel led them. Yet, Zerubbabel's Temple ended up being much smaller and less elaborate than the one Ezekiel describes. Some Christian commentators have decided that this passage is best interpreted spiritually. They point out that church, in the New Testament, is often referred to as God's "Temple" and is made up of "living stones" who make up the Church which is "built on the foundation of apostles and prophets" (1 Peter 2:5). The problem with this interpretation is the fact that Ezekiel described this Temple with all the features of Temple worship: priests, altars, and sacrifices. Because of the





death, resurrection, and present ministry of Christ, our High Priest, we no longer need earthly temples, priests, or sacrifices. The new covenant of grace has suspended the old covenant law, and to go back to the old covenant is to reject the messages of the Books of Galatians and Hebrews. Yet, this interpretation falls into the trap of spiritualizing Old Testament promises to Israel. So, the only way that this interpretation could work is that Israel would have no establishment of an earthly kingdom after Christ comes back to rule and reign for a thousand years.

To this present day, Israel has had four different sanctuaries: the Tabernacle of Moses, the Temple of Solomon, the second Temple after the captivity, and Herod's Temple in the time of Jesus. There are two temples left in Israel's future: the Tribulation Temple which will be taken over by the Antichrist, and the Millennial Temple which the Apostle John describes in Revelation 11:1-15:5.

**At this point we're only left with one option: Ezekiel is describing a Temple to be used during the millennial reign of Christ. Ezekiel's design is actually a literal Temple that will be the center for worship during the Kingdom of Christ, better known as His Millennial Reign.**

The biggest objection to this literal interpretation has been if Christ is present, why do the Jewish people need a Temple because they have Jesus ruling and reigning over them with an "iron rod" (Revelation 19:15)? This is a difficult question because Ezekiel suggests that blood sacrifices for the Jewish people are reinstated at this time. The best answer is that the Jewish people who have survived the Great Tribulation have come to Christ because they could "see Him." They saw Him in the clouds at the rapture. Therefore, at this time their faith is built on sight, not faith. Jesus' "iron rod" denotes that during the Millennium, Christ will rule all the nations, but not everyone will be aligned to Him. This becomes painfully clear when after Jesus' thousand-year reign comes to an end, Satan, the false prophet, and the Antichrist, are let out of their prison one more time. Sadly, the enemy is able to gather an army which is described as "numberless as the sand along the seashore." They surround Jerusalem, ready for their attack, and when God sends a fiery lake of burning sulfur upon them, they are immediately consigned to await the final judgment at God's Great White Throne (Revelation 20:7-10).

The closing chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy explain how the land of Israel would be divided during the millennial age between God's people. Yet, one of the most fascinating stories in the entire book is found in Ezekiel 47:1-12. After seeing the kitchens in the Temple, the prophet notices a trickle of water leaking from the Holy of Holies just past the altar on the south side. Ezekiel's guide leads him out to the Eastern Gate



where Ezekiel saw water coming out from under the building. The guide measured the depth of the water four times as the river became so deep you could swim in it. Ezekiel learned that the river flowed to the Dead Sea where it brought new life to that forsaken area. The water from the Temple would heal the Dead Sea as well as the rivers, and the water creatures would multiply wherever the waters flowed. The trees on the banks of the river provided food for each month, and the leaves would be used for healing. This time around life comes from the Temple of God, not from a palace or a government building! Jerusalem is the only great city in the ancient world that wasn't located on a river, and in the Middle East, a dependable water supply is essential for life and defense.

During the Millennial Age, Jerusalem will have a river that will be different than any other river in the earth's history. Yet, scholars still argue whether this body of water is real or merely a sacred symbol of the life-giving power of the Lord. Perhaps it's a little of both. Joel 3:18 and Zechariah 14:8-9 speak of this river as a literal entity. Yet, spiritually it also illustrates and accomplishes the life-giving work of God. Jesus saw such a river as a symbol of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39), and the apostle John experienced a similar scene in the heavenly city of God (Revelation 22:1-2). It was a river that played an important role in the Garden of Eden. And in the end, Ezekiel prophesies that the story of humanity ends where it began - in a lush garden where God walked with His children and desired to provide for their needs forever.



**NOTES**



**NOTES**



## TALK IT OVER: GROUP QUESTIONS

(Choose 4-5 to discuss.)

1. The Book of Ezekiel is full of images of Temple worship and religious rituals. Describe what you think it means to truly worship God with all your heart, mind, and strength.
2. God commanded the Jewish people to bring blood sacrifices to Him to help them understand that sin always results in “death.” Talk about a time in your life when God allowed something to “die” because it was getting in the way of your relationship with Him.
3. In Old Testament times, God gave His people many spiritual rituals to help them remember His goodness and love for them. What spiritual habits have you developed to help you grow in Christlikeness?
4. Over and over again, the Book of Ezekiel reminds us to revere God’s holiness. Are there any parts of your life where you no longer fear God’s correction? What’s at stake?
5. In what ways do you think we will experience the Lord’s presence differently in His future Kingdom than we do now? How will worship be different in Heaven?
6. What will be some of the most important things you take away from your study of Ezekiel?



# GROUP AGREEMENT

People come to groups with a variety of different expectations. The purpose of a group agreement is simply to make sure everyone is on the same page and that we have some common expectations.

The following group agreement is a tool to help you discuss specific guidelines together during your first meeting. Modify anything that does not work for your group, then be sure to discuss the questions on the next page under our game plan. This will help you to have an even greater group experience!

We agree to the following priorities:

**TAKE THE BIBLE SERIOUSLY:** To seek to understand and apply God's truth in the Bible.

**GROUP ATTENDANCE:** To give priority to the group meetings (call if I'm going to be absent or late).

**SAFE ENVIRONMENT:** To create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (that means there should be no snap judgments or simple fixes when it comes to others).

**BE CONFIDENTIAL:** To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group.

**SPIRITUAL HEALTH:** To permit group members to help each other live a godly, healthy spiritual life that is pleasing to God.

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS:** To get to know the other members of the group and pray for them regularly.



# TIPS FOR LEADING YOUR GROUP



**BE PREPARED.** Your personal preparation can make a huge difference in the quality of the group experience. We strongly suggest previewing each lesson in the study guide.

**PRAY FOR YOUR GROUP MEMBERS BY NAME.** Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of every person in your group. Expect God to challenge and change people as a result of this study.

**PROVIDE REFRESHMENTS.** There's nothing like food to help a group relax and connect with each other. For the first week, we suggest you prepare a snack, but after that, ask other group members to bring the food so that they share in the responsibilities of the group and make a commitment to return.

**RELAX.** Don't try to imitate someone else's style of leading a group. Lead the group in a way that fits your style and temperament. Remember that people may feel nervous showing up for a small group study, so put them at ease when they arrive. Make sure to have all the details covered prior to your group meetings so once people start arriving, you can focus on them.

**TAKE IT IN.** If you are using a video, get it ready ahead of time. Also, it will be more profitable for your group members if they would read the contents before attending the meeting.

## TALK IT OVER

Make this a discussion, not a lecture. Resist the temptation to do all the talking and answer your own questions. Don't be afraid of a few moments of silence while people formulate their answers.

Also don't feel like you need to have all the answers. There is nothing wrong with simply responding, "I don't know the answer to that, but I'll see if I can find out the answer this week."

**ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO PARTICIPATE.** Don't let one person dominate, but also don't pressure quieter members to speak during the first couple of sessions. After one person answers, don't immediately move on; ask what other people think, or say "Would someone who hasn't shared like to add anything?"

**AFFIRM PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AND INPUT.** If an answer is clearly wrong, ask, "What led you to that conclusion?" Or ask what the rest of the group thinks if a disagreement arises. Don't be too quick to shut it down! The discussion can draw out important perspectives, and if you can't resolve it there, offer to research it further and return to the issue next week.

However, if someone goes on the offensive and engages in a personal attack of another person, you'll need to step in as the leader. In the midst of a spirited discussion, we must also remember that people are fragile, and there's no place for disrespect.

**DETOUR WHEN NECESSARY.** If an important question is raised that is not in the study guide, take time to discuss it. Also, if someone shares something personal and emotional, take time for him/her. Stop and pray for him/her right then. Try to keep the group on track, but allow the Holy Spirit to maneuver and follow His prompting when the discussion changes direction.

**SUBGROUP.** One of the principles of small group life is "when the numbers go up, sharing goes down." So, if you have a large group, sometimes you may want to split up into groups of three to five for the discussion time. This is a great way to give everyone, even the quieter members, a chance to say something. Choose someone in the group to guide each of the smaller groups through the discussion. This involves others in the leadership of the group and provides an opportunity for training new leaders.



**PRAY.** Be sensitive to the fact that some people in your group may be uncomfortable praying out loud. As a general rule, don't call on people to pray unless you have asked them ahead of time or have heard them pray in public, but this can also be a time to help people build their confidence to pray in a group. Consider having prayer times that ask people to say a word or sentence of thanks to God.

**OH, AND JUST ONE MORE THING...** Keep an eye on the clock. Be sensitive to time. Whatever the agreed-upon time commitment, try to stick with it. It's always better to finish the meeting with people wanting "more" rather than people walking away feeling stressed out because the meeting went long.

## LIVE IT OUT

Be sure to collect everyone's name, email, and phone number. This is so that the group can stay in touch with each other. Send out an email list to everyone in the group.

**GET THE GROUP TO INTERACT OUTSIDE THE MEETING.** Encourage emailing or calling each other during the week to share good news, a prayer concern, or a lesson learned.

**CONTACT ANYONE WHO MISSES A GROUP MEETING.** Yet, don't take this on yourself. Ask another couple or individual to do so as well.

**IN BETWEEN EVERY STUDY,** get together for at least one fellowship event apart from your group meeting.

**BE SENSITIVE TO WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE LIVES OF YOUR GROUP...BIRTHDAYS, ANNIVERSARIES, ILLNESSES, OR EVEN A NEW JOB INTERVIEW.** Use these opportunities to bless your people with notes, cards, or even meals.

**GET OTHERS INVOLVED TO GIVE THEM A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP.** Ask for help with emailing prayer requests to the group. Ask someone in your group to plan the next fellowship event or lead the next discussion. Be on the lookout for anything you can give away to others in your group.

**PRAY REGULARLY.** Be sure that your group prays for one another by name.





**NOTES**



**NOTES**



**NOTES**



**NOTES**

