EZEKIEL

STUDENT COPY

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Ezekiel

Outline

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Author and Date

Ezekiel is both the name of the sixth-century B.C. prophet and the title of the book that records his preaching. Ezekiel's name (Hb. *Yekhezqe'l*) means "God strengthens" or "May God strengthen," appropriate for a prophet called to proclaim a message of uncompromising judgment and later a message of a restoration for God's sake, not Israel's. Ezekiel lived out his prophetic career among the community of exiled Judeans in Babylon. He belonged to the priestly class and was married (see Ezek. 24:15–24), but it is doubtful that he had any children.

If Ezekiel was thirty years old at the time of the inaugural vision (see ESV Study Bible note at Ezek. 1:1), an intriguing connection can be made with the final vision of the book, which is dated to the twenty-fifth year of the exile (Ezek. 40:1), when Ezekiel would have been fifty. As Numbers 4 makes clear, the ages of thirty and fifty mark the span of the active service of the priests. As a member of the exilic community, Ezekiel would not have been able to participate in the ritual life of the Jerusalem temple, nor would he have undergone initiation into priestly service while living outside the land. But perhaps the timing of these visions coincided with what would have been Ezekiel's "working life" as a priest had he lived in Jerusalem prior to the exile.

The relationship between the Hebrew prophets and the books that bear their names is complex. For both Isaiah (see Isa. 8:16) and Jeremiah (e.g., Jeremiah 36) there is evidence of individuals or groups who preserved the prophet's words. Such is not the case with Ezekiel. No such disciples are named, and Ezekiel's autobiographical style suggests his close involvement with recording the written traditions that bear his name. At the same time, the very preservation of his scroll implies the existence of a support group, which may also have provided some editorial input.

Ezekiel's oracles are more frequently dated than those of other OT prophets. The first date of the book takes the reader to the summer of 593 B.C., five years after the first group of exiles was deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. The latest-dated oracle comes 22 years after that summer, in April of 571 B.C. The book is arranged chronologically in three parts: chapters 1–24 and 33–48 form one sequence, while the foreign-nation oracles of chapters 25–32 have their own order (see Outline). Caution must be exercised in attempting to align Ezekiel's dates with those of the modern calendar, but the rough equivalents are as shown in the chart, Dates in Ezekiel.

Genre & Setting

Genre

The book of Ezekiel is one of the most complex books in the Bible because so many different genres converge in it. It is important to grasp right at the start that this book is an anthology of separate pieces of writing. There is no single overarching story line; the unity is that of a carefully arranged collection (see Outline). The general arrangement of the material is one that several other OT prophetic books also follow—a general movement from (1) oracles of judgment against the prophet's own nation of Judah (usually called Israel in the text), to (2) oracles of judgment against the surrounding pagan nations, to (3) oracles of future, eschatological blessing on those who believe in God.

Several observations are in order. First, much of the book consists of visionary writing, which transports readers to a world of the imagination where the rules of reality are obviously suspended in favor of highly unusual visions. To understand and relish the book of Ezekiel, readers often need to abandon expectations of realism. Second, Ezekiel employs a technique known as symbolic reality, which occurs when a writer consistently transports the reader to a world of visionary experience where the most important ingredients are symbols—symbols like a vine, a boiling pot, or a valley full of dry bones. Third, prophecy is itself a genre, made up of oracles (pronouncements from God through the agency of a prophet) that fall into two main categories—oracles of judgment and oracles of blessing. Oracles of judgment are ordinarily examples of satire, and in the prophetic satire of Ezekiel there are three motifs: (1) *description* of evil, (2) *denunciation* of this evil, and (3) *warnings and predictions* that God will judge the evil. Prophecy often merges with apocalyptic writing about epic, end-time struggles. These sections often portray events at the end of history. Finally, readers should not overlook the obvious—the prophet Ezekiel expresses himself in the form of poetry.

In addition to abandoning expectations of consistent realism, readers should give themselves to the sheer strangeness of what is presented. Ezekiel talks about real, historical events, but much of the time he does not portray these events in literal terms. Instead, he prefers extravagant visions as his mode. Additionally, readers need to be ready for a kaleidoscope of details, always shifting and never in focus for very long. The best approach to the oracles of judgment is to analyze them according to the usual literary rules regarding satire.

Setting

The Near East at the Time of Ezekiel
c. 593 B.C.
Ezekiel recorded his visions and prophecies while living in the vicinity of Babylon, where he had been exiled years earlier. By Ezekiel's time, the Babylonian Empire had engulfed virtually all of the area along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and would eventually subdue even the land of Egypt, where many other Judeans had fled.

Themes & Background

Themes

Ezekiel spoke to a community forced from its home, a people who had broken faith with their God. As the spokesman for the God of Israel, Ezekiel spoke oracles that vindicate the reputation of this holy God. This radically God-centered point of view finds its sharpest expression in Ezekiel 36:22–23 ("It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name. . . . And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name. . . . And the nations will know that I am the LORD"). Thus, the primary purpose of Ezekiel's message was to restore God's glory before the people who had spurned it in view of the watching nations. But Israel's own welfare was bound up with its God. So, the prophet pleads: "Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live" (Ezek. 18:31–32).Ezekiel's message was unrelenting. Of

all the books in the OT, only Psalms, Jeremiah, and Genesis are longer. Ezekiel's uncompromising message is matched by language that often seems hard and sometimes offensive. If there is no softening his language, at least it appears that the grandeur of Ezekiel's vision of God rendered much of the earthly reality he observed as sordid, and worse. The appropriate response, in Ezekiel's terms, is not simply revulsion but repentance and a longing for the restoration of God's glory.

1. As a priest, Ezekiel was deeply concerned with *the holiness of God*, and consequently with *the sin of his people*, that is, with any behavior that offended the holy God. These twin themes can hardly be separated, as attention to matters of purity can be found on nearly every page. Ezekiel's perception of the depth of Israel's sin shows graphically in his version of Israel's history (ch. 20). Even the oracles of restored Israel in chapters 40–48 include provision for dealing with the people's sin so they can survive in the presence of a holy God. This concern also accounts for the many echoes in Ezekiel's oracles of the priestly material in the Pentateuch, particularly in the legislation of Leviticus and Numbers, as well as the resonances of Ezekiel's new temple (Ezekiel 40–42) with the Exodus tabernacle.

2. Israel was of course subject to its national God. However, Ezekiel's God is no tribal deity but rather is *supreme over all nations*. Therefore Nebuchadnezzar, king of mighty Babylon, was simply a tool in God's hand to accomplish God's purpose (e.g., Ezek. 21:19–23; 30:25). God's absolute supremacy finds its most pronounced expression in the battle against Gog, the final enemy (chs. 38–39), where God alone crushes Gog's vast hostile forces.

3. The vigilance for holy living that the holy God demands places a claim both on *individuals* and on *the whole community*. Some see a significant milestone in biblical thought in Ezekiel's preaching on individual responsibility in chapter 18 (cf. Jer. 31:29–30). While this chapter certainly focuses on the individual in the modern sense, Ezekiel's clear expression of the requirements binding on communities should not thereby be ignored.

4. The very structure of the book declares *judgment* on those clinging to (false) hope, but true *hope* for those who accept judgment (Ezek. 37:11). Ezekiel's restoration message was heard both before and after the destruction of Jerusalem, but radically God-centered judgment is partnered with a hope ("salvation") that wholly depends on God's gifts of a new heart and spirit (Ezek. 36:22–32).

5. The *condemnation of Israel's "princes"* (e.g., ch. 19; Ezekiel is reluctant to use the title "king") finds its hopeful counterpart in the *promise of a future "prince"* who would rule with justice (Ezek. 34:23–24) and stand at the point of connection between God and people (Ezek. 46:1–18).

Background

Ezekiel prophesied during a time of great confusion. In 597 B.C. the Babylonians had exiled Judah's king Jehoiachin—only 18 years old, and on the throne for only three months—along with several thousand of its leading citizens (2 Kings 24:10–16). Ezekiel was among their number; he was probably about 25 years old. The political situation was complex: a Judean king was among the exiles (Jehoiachin), but the Babylonians had appointed a puppet king to the throne in Jerusalem (Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah).

Dates in Ezekiel

Reference	Year / month / day following exile of Jehoiachin	Modern equivalent*/year B.C.	Situation
1:2	5th year / 4th month / 5th day	July 593***	inaugural vision
8:1	6th year / 6th month / 5th day	September 592	first temple vision
20:1	7th year / 5th month / 10th day	August 591	elders come to inquire
24:1	9th year / 10th month / 10th day**	January 588 or 587	siege of Jerusalem begins
26:1	11th year / month (?) / 1st day	c. 587–586	oracle against Tyre, before Babylon besieged it
29:1	10th year / 10th month / 12th day	January 587	oracle against Egypt
29:17	27th year / 1st month / 1st day	April 571****	Egypt assigned to Babylon; after end of Babylon's siege of Tyre
30:20	11th year / 1st month / 7th day	April 587	oracle against Egypt
31:1	11th year / 3rd month / 1st day	June 587	oracle against Egypt
32:1	12th year / 12th month / 1st day	March 585	oracle against Egypt
32:17	12th year / 12th month / 15th day	April 585	oracle against Egypt
33:21	12th year / 10th month / 5th day	January 585	fugitive arrives in Babylon
40:1	25th year / 1st month (?) / 10th day (?)	April 573	second temple vision

**For simplicity, here and in the notes that follow, only the second month of the modern equivalent is given (cf. Months in the Hebrew Calendar, p. 34)*
***Unique dating formula in Hebrew; see notes ***earliest recorded oracle ****latest recorded oracle*

The pattern in the history of the exiled northern kingdom of Israel, and now again for the southern kingdom of Judah, was that prophets emerged in times of crisis to bring God's message to his people. The time of Judah's exile was therefore a period of intense prophetic activity. Jeremiah was an older contemporary of Ezekiel (and, like Ezekiel, from a priestly family). Ezekiel clearly knows Jeremiah's message and develops some of the older prophet's themes. However, it is not known whether they ever met, and it seems Jeremiah was not aware of Ezekiel, whose ministry did not begin until after Ezekiel had been in exile for five years.

Although Ezekiel's fellow exiles formed his main audience, it seems likely that his oracles would have been communicated to their compatriots back in Judah. Ezekiel probably lived out his days in exile. His second temple vision—in which a new constitution for renewed, ideal Israel was spelled out—came well into the long exile Jeremiah predicted (Jer. 25:8–14). If Ezekiel was 30 years old when his ministry began, this vision came when he was about 50.

Week 1 Overview and Introduction

Where is God? This is not a question we typically ask when life is going well. But when the bottom drops out from under us, when everything we take for granted is called into question, this is often the first question we ask. The answer we fear, the answer our circumstances might suggest, is that God has abandoned us and wants nothing to do with us. And our response might be angry protestations that God is not being fair, or denial that anything is wrong in the first place, or despair that things could ever be different. Perhaps we even vacillate between all three of these responses.

This is the situation facing Ezekiel and his fellow exiles in Babylon. Their world has been upended after they have been included in the first wave of deportees from Judah following Nebuchadnezzar's initial invasion of the land. At first, they maintain hope, but then news arrives that Jerusalem has fallen and the temple has been burned to the ground. Has God abandoned his people for good? Can the dead bones of Israel ever live again (see Ezek. 37:3)?

Amid alternating anger, denial, and despair on the part of the exiles, God calls Ezekiel to speak his words, and *only his words*, to them. Otherwise, the prophet remains mute for more than five years. Often, he is also told to act out God's message in dramatic street theater, since the people are not inclined to listen. At first his message is an uncompromising and unrelenting pronouncement of judgment on Israel and vindication of God's justice. But once judgment falls, Ezekiel's message turns, just as relentlessly, into a message of hope for the restoration of God's people. Although the people's sin drove him from their midst as they broke their covenant with him, God will not abandon his people. He will overcome all their enemies and their sin and lead them like a shepherd to safe pastures. Not only will he make a new covenant with them; he will also make *them* new, and so will dwell with them forever.

But the message of Ezekiel is not only for exiled Israelites. For all who have put their faith in God and his Messiah, Jesus Christ, the answer to the question, "Where is God?" is clear: Despite our circumstances, despite our sin, God is with his people. He always has been, and he always will be. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 1495–1501; available online at www.ESV.org.)

1. Do you have a sense at the outset of this study of any specific emphases of Ezekiel?

2. Without using your Bible, do any particular passages from Ezekiel come to mind?

3. Has this biblical book already been meaningful to your own walk with the Lord in any specific ways?

4. What is your current understanding of what Ezekiel contributes to Christian theology? That is, how does this book clarify your understanding of God, Jesus Christ, sin, salvation, the end times, or other doctrines?

5. What aspects of the prophecy of Ezekiel have confused you? Are there any specific questions you hope to have answered through this study?

6. Why do you think there are no prophets like Ezekiel today?

7. What do you think the benefits of studying the prophecies of old and what they meant for the people whom they immediately affected? What are the benefits of studying the implications for modern times?

8. How can God reveal new truths to us today from old prophecies?

Week 2 Ezekiel's First Vision/The Appearance of the Likeness of the Glory of the Lord (1:1 – 3:27)

The Place of the Passage

After a brief biographical and historical note, Ezekiel begins with one of the most amazing depictions of the glory of God in the entire Bible. Full of strange and potentially confusing symbols, Ezekiel's first vision forms the foundation for his call and commission in chapters 2–3 as the Lord's prophet to the exiles in Babylon. But while the vision assures Ezekiel that God is still on his throne despite the exile, it also raises the question, "What is God doing in Babylon?" Answering that question is what the first section of the book (chs. 1–11) is all about.

The Big Picture

Although God's people are in exile, God still reigns and still speaks to them through his prophet, if they have ears to hear.

Read through the complete passage for this study, Ezekiel 1–3. Then review the questions below concerning the opening section of Ezekiel and write your notes on them. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible, pages 1502–1506; available online at www.ESV.org.)

1. As the book begins, Ezekiel is 30 years old, the age at which he would have been installed as a priest in the temple at Jerusalem (Num. 4:3). Instead, something even more significant occurs: he sees "visions of God" (Ezek. 1:1). Describe in your own words what he sees. Is this something an artist could draw?

2. In Ezekiel's vision, the four creatures not only fly but also are each stationed next to "a wheel within a wheel" (v. 16). Above their wings, they carry an "expanse" on which sits a throne. This is a vision of God's mobile chariot-throne that can go "straight forward" in any direction "without turning," directed by God's Spirit (v. 12). Why would an exile in Babylon need to know that God reigns from a mobile throne? How does such knowledge encourage Christians, who are "elect exiles" (1 Pet. 1:1)?

3. Read Romans 11:33. How does this passage speak to the prophetic message that God was still on the throne, even as the Jews suffered in captivity? How this message applies equally today? What are some of the ways today's God's followers suffer from "captivity"? How can we see God in the midst of that?

4. Ezekiel realizes that he has seen a vision of God, and yet he calls it "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezek. 1:28). In other words, words fail him in his attempt to describe God. What aspects of God's glory do you see in this passage?

5. What is the symbolism of Ezekiel being facedown in the dust when God spoke to him? (See Gen. 1:26; 3:19

6. Ezekiel lies prostrate on the ground in humility before the awesome holiness and majesty of God. Does your view of God produce the same response? What would need to change about your understanding of God to produce this kind of worship?

Week 3 The Prophet Commissioned (2:1–3:15)/The Duty of a Watchman (3:16–27)

The Place of the Passage

Like Jeremiah (1:2), Zechariah (1:1), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:5ff), Ezekiel ("God Strengthens") was called by God from being a priest to serving as a prophet. As God's spokesman to the Jewish exiles in the land of Babylon, he would rebuke them for their sins and expose their idolatry, but he would also reveal the glorious future the Lord had prepared for them. He was thirty years old at the time of his call (1:1), the normal age for a priest to begin his ministry (Numbers 4:1-3, 23). It would have been much easier for Ezekiel to remain a priest, for priests were highly esteemed by the Jews, and a priest could read the law and learn everything he needed to know to do his work. Prophets were usually despised and persecuted. They received their messages and orders from the Lord as the occasion demanded and could never be sure what would happen next. It was dangerous to be a prophet. Most people resent being told about their sins and prefer to hear messages of cheer, not declarations of judgment.

1. Why did God choose a priest to become a prophet? What was unique about this change of "purpose" for Ezekiel? Why didn't he reject God's call? Why might a prophet's influence be more significant in Babylon than a priest's?

2. Jeremiah had been ministering in Jerusalem for four years when Ezekiel was born in 622 BC, and surely as he grew up, he paid attention to what Jeremiah was saying. It's also likely that Daniel and Ezekiel knew each other before the captivity, though there's no evidence they saw each other in Babylon. False prophets were giving Jewish people false hopes of quick deliverance. Jeremiah's letter told the Jews they would be in captivity for seventy years (Jer. 29:8-19). Based on all of this, why would Ezekiel's prophetic ministry be so critical to the Jews? Why was so much prophecy in the Old Testament controversial to the people whom it targeted?

3. The last thing Ezekiel says in chapter 1 is that he "heard the voice of one speaking" (1:28). The culmination of the vision is not visual but aural. God's voice calls Ezekiel to prophetic ministry to a "rebellious house" (2:5). What, then, is the significance of Ezekiel's being commanded to eat a scroll with writing on both sides (2:8–3:3)?

4. The Lord draws a contrast between foreigners with difficult speech and the Israelites. The former would have listened to Ezekiel, but God knows that Israel will not listen (3:4–7). Why would God send a prophet to people he knows will not listen? What does this suggest about the purpose of Ezekiel's ministry?

5. It takes seven days of silence for Ezekiel to recover from this first vision. What accounts for the "bitterness in the heat of my spirit" that he experiences (3:14)?

6. The responsibilities of a watchman are common to several prophets (see Isa. 21:6–9; Hos. 9:8; Hab. 2:1). Watchmen were stationed on a city wall to warn of impending danger. What is the particular emphasis of Ezekiel's duty as watchman? How does that duty affect his life?

7. The initial vision is reprised in Ezekiel 3:22–27. How does God ensure that Ezekiel will be a faithful watchman, speaking only the words God gives him? What does this tell us about the importance of these words?

Week 4 A Promise of Judgment and Hope (4:1-11:25)

The Place of the Passage

In Ezekiel 4–24, the prophet speaks an almost unrelenting message of impending judgment against Israel. This message begins in chapters 4–11 not only with verbal warnings but also with sign-acts dramatizing the fate awaiting Jerusalem and its people (chs. 4–5).

The Big Picture

Because of Israel's unfaithfulness and idolatry, the Lord will judge his people. Yet because of his grace and faithfulness, the Lord will become their sanctuary.

1. Why was the proclamation that Jerusalem would be destroyed such a terrible message for the Jews to hear? What must they have been feeling as Ezekiel presented this prophecy? Why would it have been difficult for them to believe? To accept?

2. Ezekiel was known to preach in an unusual way (through "action" sermons). Why was such creativity necessary to reach the people?

3. What was the advantage of his becoming something of a curiosity because of his methods? What would that have cost him?

4. Read Ezekiel 5. How would Ezekiel's mention of a sword to shave the head be more dramatic than if he'd spoken of what would be expected – a razor?

5. What implications does the sword have that the razor doesn't?

6. Why was his hair divided into three parts? What did he do with each? What did each action symbolize? Reference Isaiah 7:20; Numbers 6:5; 8:7, Lev. 19:27; Deut. 14:1 and Lev. 21:5-6.

Week 5 The End has Come (6:1-7:27)/The Glory of Good Departs (8:1-11:25)

Ezekiel's message is not, "Repent before it is too late," but rather, "It is too late; the end is here" (chs. 6–7). This study's section ends about a year later with another vision. Ezekiel is given a tour of the temple in Jerusalem, where he learns the reason the glory of the Lord has departed from Jerusalem and has come to Babylon (chs. 8–11). But the final word from God is not one of judgment. Rather it is one of hope, that after judgment there will be grace for a remnant of the nation.

1. Review Ezekiel 6. What was Ezekiel's warning to the people? Why was God about to punish them? In 6:14, God told Ezekiel, "Then they will know that I am the LORD." What is the purpose of this specific phrase in this context? The phrase appears over 60 times in the book of Ezekiel.

2. Why did the Jews keep returning to the worship of idols every time God delivered them? How was the captivity in Babylon God's response to this continued disobedience? What does this tell us about how seriously God regards His covenant and our disobedience? Is our obedience as important to God as the Jews' obedience was in Ezekiel's day? What difference does this make?

3. Why was the vision God gave Ezekiel such a difficult message to preach? What three tragedies did the message address? (See Ezek. 8:1-18, 9:1-10:22; and 11:1-25).

4. Why is it important that Ezekiel's message was the opposite of what the false prophets were teaching? How did that complicate his ability to share God's truth? Think about this when answering these questions: *Ezekiel was still having his vision of Jerusalem and the temple, and the Lord showed him twenty-five men at the eastern door of the temple, worshipping the sun (See Ezekiel 8:15-18).*

7. What were the vivid experiences Ezekiel had in chapters 8 and 9? What was the sad conclusion that followed these experiences? What was God's response after the repeated rebellion on His people? Can this happen today? Explain.

8. What is God's glory? Why is glory such an important theme in Ezekiel's message? What does this theme tell us about God's people during this time in history? What were some of the ways they were being irreverent? What are similar challenges in the church today?

9. In 9:3, "the glory of the God of Israel" moves from the Most Holy Place to the threshold of the temple. Then, in chapter 10, "the glory of the Lord" mounts the chariot-throne seen in chapter 1 and moves to the "east gate of the house of the Lord." Finally, in chapter 11, "the glory of the God of Israel" departs Jerusalem entirely, heading east, to the Mount of Olives. Why does God depart in stages? What does this reveal about God? How does this help us understand God's appearance in Babylon in chapter 1?

10. For the second time, Ezekiel asks if God will make a “full end of the remnant” (11:13; compare 9:8). In reply, God declares that the true sanctuary for God’s people is not a building in Jerusalem but the Lord himself. Further, he promises to make his people fit to worship in that sanctuary. How will he do so? How has he already begun?

Week 6 The Exile is Coming (Ezekiel 12-16)/False Hope Demolished

The Place of the Passage

Having announced the irreversible judgment of God against Jerusalem, Ezekiel now takes on the role of district attorney, prosecuting God's covenant lawsuit against Israel and answering the people's objections. Chapter 12 provides another sign-act, prophesying the coming exile and death of Zedekiah and all who remain with him in Jerusalem. In chapters 12–14, Ezekiel answers several objections: (1) his prophecies are of the distant future and might never be fulfilled; (2) other prophets are announcing "Peace"; and (3) the leaders of Israel are seeking the Lord, so surely, he will answer. Ezekiel concludes this section with two parables, each illustrating that God's judgment is both certain and well deserved. And yet, for no other reason than God's faithfulness, there is also a note of hope at the end of chapter 16, one shaft of light in the unremitting darkness of chapters 12–24.

The Big Picture

God is faithful to his promise to judge Israel's sin, but despite Israel's unfaithfulness, he is faithful also to his covenant of love.

1. What is God telling Ezekiel in 12: 1-2? Explain.

2. In your own words, explain Ezekiel 12:3-8.

3. Ezekiel is told once again to act out an element of the coming judgment, this time the experience of fleeing into exile. The focus is on the fate both of Zedekiah, the puppet king installed by Babylon in 597 BC (vv. 12–13), and of the people (vv. 14–20). What is the goal of this prophecy? What does it suggest the exiles were futilely hoping for?

4. Ezekiel now addresses three false hopes. (12:21–14:23) **First**, there is the hope that Ezekiel's prophecies are about the distant future and might never come to pass. This is the thrust of the proverb recounted in 12:22. What is the Lord's response? In light of 2 Kings 25 and the *ESV Study Bible* notes, was the Lord proved right? Do you live as if the fulfillment of God's promises are imminent?

5. The **second** false hope is that other prophets, both male and female, are prophesying "Peace" in the Lord's name and promising a strong defense for Israel (Ezek. 13:10), even resorting to magic to deceive (13:18–19). How does God describe these people? What will the judgment be against these false prophets? How will God prove their prophecies false?

6. The **third** false hope is that the leaders of the exiles are inquiring of the Lord through Ezekiel (14:1–3). What is the problem with their inquiry? What does it mean that they have "taken their idols into their hearts" (see 14:4, 7)? How are we tempted to do the same?

Week 7 Judgment Deserved, Yet Hope Remains (15:1–16:63)

The Place of the Passage

Chapter 14 ends with the sobering warning that not even the prayers of the most righteous saints of the Old Testament could save Jerusalem in her unfaithfulness. And yet God promises to spare a few (vv. 22–23; compare 5:3).

1. Ezekiel now relates two parables demonstrating that Israel's judgment is well deserved. Israel has long been described as God's vine (see Ps. 80:8ff.; Isa. 5:1ff.) What is it about the vine that makes its burning appropriate?

2. What does this say about the inhabitants of Jerusalem (see Rom. 9:21–24)?

3. The second parable, one of the most famous in the whole Bible, describes the history of Israel in terms of a foundling that God rescues, nurtures, and eventually marries, raising her to the status of a beautiful queen (16:1–14). How does the queen repay her husband's generosity and love (see vv. 15–34)?

4. Who are Israel's "lovers"? What does Israel's "whoredom" tell us about the nature of idolatry?

5. What other forms does Israel's unfaithfulness take (see 16:20–21, 23–29)?

6. In 16:35–58, God announces the judgment for Israel's crimes, comparing her crimes to that of her sisters, Samaria and Sodom, who were bywords for wickedness and unfaithfulness. In what ways could the judgment be described as "poetic justice," in which the judgment fits the crime perfectly? What is the role of shame in God's judgment? Is it deserved? Why?

7. The chapter ends on an unexpected note of hope, as God remembers the covenant Israel broke and determines to make a new covenant (vv. 59–63). Why does he do this? What is the role of Israel's shame now, and how does God redeem it for his glory?

Week 8 The Case for Judgment Closed (17:1-24:27) Part 1

The Place of the Passage

Ezekiel continues to prosecute God's covenant lawsuit against Israel. Chapters 17–20 address four additional self-deceptive defenses upon which Israel relies. By the end of chapter 20 God has settled his case, even though Israel still refuses to listen. Chapters 21–24 unfold the coming judgment prophetically with cinematic imagery. The sword is drawn in chapter 21, and as it is poised to strike, chapters 22–23 provide a flashback summary of why the judgment is deserved. Chapter 24 opens with a precise date, as God reveals that on that very day the final siege of Jerusalem has begun. The sword has struck. The section closes with heart-wrenching street theater, as God makes Ezekiel a sign to the exiles once again, this time through the unmourned death of his wife.

The Big Picture

Do not trust in man or anything man does for salvation, but trust in the Lord, for when the Lord saves, he saves for the sake of his name, not ours.

1. Ezekiel addresses four self-deceptive defenses that the people of Israel rely upon to assure themselves that judgment will not happen. Chapter 17 addresses the political defense, that strong allies will save them, using a parable of two eagles and a vine. Whom do the eagles and the vine represent?

2. Why does God say that the oath to Babylon that Zedekiah broke was actually broken against God (17:19)?

3. Chapter 18 addresses the ethical defense that claims that Israel does not deserve judgment. Who does Israel think is responsible, according to the proverb of sour grapes (v. 2)? How does God respond to this argument?

4. In light of their responsibility, God calls Israel to repentance. What is Israel's objection to repentance (v. 25)? What are they trying to protect by claiming that God is not fair?

5. What happens when God judges us by the standard of our own self-assured righteousness? What does God's call to repentance reveal about him (see v. 32)?

6. The third defense, in chapter 19, rests upon national pride in the Davidic throne. Self-assurance in the might of princes is implied ironically, however, for the entire chapter is a lament for the princes of Israel. What sort of kings did the Davidic throne produce, and what happened to them, according to verses 1–9? Who are the two cubs?

7. The imagery shifts from lion cubs to a regal vine in the second half of the lament (vv. 10ff.). What is the fate of the vine? What are the intended effects of this lament on those who put their hope in the strength of the king in Jerusalem?

8. The final defense, in chapter 20, centers on Israel's special relationship with God, represented by the elders' inquiring of God through Ezekiel. But God instructs Ezekiel to turn Israel's history into a judgment against them (v. 4). What are some of the recurring themes about both God and Israel that Ezekiel's history highlights? Were there ever any "good old days," in Ezekiel's telling?

Week 9 The Case for Judgment Closed (17:1-24:27) Part 2

1. The case against Israel ends with God's assurance that, though they want to be like the nations, God will never let that happen (20:32). What follows is the main passage of hope for this entire section. God declares that he will be their King (20:33), and though he judges them, he will also gather them and accept them (20:40). Why does God commit himself to them in this way?

2. What does it mean for us that God ties his reputation to our salvation?

3. God declares that he has drawn his sword of judgment against his people, and it will not be sheathed until it has accomplished its purpose (21:1–5). That sword is embodied by Nebuchadnezzar, but it is God who wields it. How does Ezekiel's sign-act of drawing a map and making a signpost make this point (21:18–23)?

4. Before the sword strikes, in two scenes that function almost like movie flashbacks, Ezekiel reviews the justness of the judgment about to fall. In chapter 22, Ezekiel is told by God to judge the "bloody city" (v. 2). Why is it bloody? What does its bloodiness signify before the Lord? How is this idea reinforced and developed in the image of dross, beginning in verse 17?

5. Chapter 23 allegorically reviews Israel's unfaithfulness toward God as demonstrated in trusting in foreign powers and their gods. The two sisters represent the capitals of the northern and the southern kingdom, respectively. And, if anything, this portrayal is even more graphic than the one in chapter 16. While we do not talk this way in polite company, why does God use such explicit and graphic imagery to describe his people and their actions?

6. Ezekiel describes the shameless hypocrisy of Israel's religion (23:36–42) and the people's exhaustion as, "worn out by adultery" (v. 43). While these images are shocking and sickening to us, do we recognize the hypocrisy of our own sin? Do we recognize sin as a cruel taskmaster who uses us and wears us out? How can we gain this perspective?

7. The drumbeat of judgment for Israel comes to an end in chapter 24, when the Lord tells Ezekiel that the siege of Jerusalem has begun. It will last 18 months, and then take additional weeks if not months for a messenger to bring news of it to Babylon. God describes Jerusalem under siege as a pot of stew. Look back at Ezekiel 11:1–12. Why is this image particularly apt? What in fact happens to the pot and the meat in it?

8. When Jerusalem falls under siege, in a heart-wrenching sign-act the Lord takes Ezekiel's wife in death and tells the 35-year-old widower that he may not mourn for her (24:15–18). What is this sign meant to convey to the exiles (vv. 19–24)? What does it say about Ezekiel that he obeys?

Week 10: Judgment against the Nations (25:1–32:32) Part 1

The Place of the Passage

Ezekiel is told at the end of chapter 24 that a fugitive from Jerusalem is coming to announce that the city has fallen. But it will take weeks, if not months, for him to arrive. Into the midst of their anxious waiting, God declares his judgment on seven nations and their gods. This second major section of the book is carefully structured, both geographically and stylistically. The fulcrum of the passage is a brief statement of restoration for Israel (28:24–26). Thus, this section serves not only to demonstrate that God is sovereign over the nations but also to offer backhanded hope to God's people. The judgment of their enemies implies the security of Israel's future. The drumbeat of judgment has begun to give way to the hope for salvation.

The Big Picture

God will ultimately deliver his people by defeating their enemies so that the whole world will know that the Lord is God.

1. In chapter 25, the first four nations judged (Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia) are Israel's closest neighbors. What is the common complaint that God has against each of them (see vv. 3, 8, 12, 15)? Why would this particularly invite God's wrath (see Deut. 32:41; Rom. 12:19)?

2. Chapters 26–28 of Ezekiel are directed against Tyre and her sister city, Sidon. Using the text and the *ESV Study Bible* notes, identify God's complaint against this city-state. Why does Tyre receive such inordinate treatment, compared to Israel's other near neighbors?

3. Wealth, success, and pride go hand-in-hand. In what ways do you see wealth or success tempting you to trust in yourself?

4. Egypt was not only Israel's historical enslaver but also her recurring temptation to seek help apart from the Lord. It was Egypt that encouraged Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon, which led to the current catastrophe. Once again using the text and the *ESV Study Bible* notes, identify God's complaint against Egypt. How does this parallel the charges against the other nations?

5. How does the conclusion of the oracle (32:17–32) serve as a fitting answer to the pride of Egypt and the rest of the nations?

6. Read Ezekiel 32:17-32. Why did God deliver such a grim and macabre picture in this message to Egypt? How does the phrase "death is the great leveler" apply to the theme of his oracle? Read 1 Corinthians 15:55-57. How does this passage give believers hope over death?

Week 11: Judgment against the Nations (25:1–32:32) Part 2

The Big Picture

God will ultimately deliver his people by defeating their enemies so that the whole world will know that the Lord is God.

1. Why is pride such a dangerous sin? Why did God use Nebuchadnezzar to punish the Egyptians for their pride? What does this reveal about God's character? What unexpected means does God use to accomplish His goals today? Why do the nations never seem to learn that God will always get His way? What does this say about mankind?

2. In the ancient Near East, battles between nations were considered battles between their gods. The victorious nation would believe it had won because its god was victorious. How does God's statement that Nebuchadnezzar "worked for me" subvert this idea (29:20)?

3. What does God's description of Pharaoh as "the great dragon" seem to imply about who is being defeated (29:1–5)? Why do the exiles need to know that *spiritual* battles are being fought behind the military ones?

4. Chapter 28 contains two laments, one over the prince of Tyre (v. 1) and one over the king of Tyre (v. 11). Write them here.

5. While the same person is clearly in view, the language of the second lament moves beyond the natural to the supernatural, much as the language about Pharaoh does in 29:1–5. It is as if, flickering behind the face of Tyre's ruler, stands another prince, animating the rebellion of all the rest (compare Isa. 14:12–21). What about this language suggests that a supernatural figure is being addressed? Why is he condemned (Ezek. 28:15–18)? Why would this oracle be important in order to complete the encouragement of Israel?

6. God Will Gather His People (28:24–26) At the center of this section stands a brief promise that God will gather his people securely. When will this gathering happen (v. 26)? At that time, God declares, there will no longer be "brier to prick or a thorn to hurt" (v. 24). To what does this image allude (see Gen. 3:18)?

Week 12: Jerusalem Has Fallen (33:1–33)

The Place of the Passage

If the tone of the book began to change from judgment to hope after the announcement of the siege of Jerusalem in chapter 24, that pivot is complete by the time of the fall of the city in chapter 33. Ezekiel's role as watchman is reprised, but after these final words of judgment, the prevailing tone of the book becomes hopeful. Since the beginning, Ezekiel has been mute, speaking only when the Lord opens his mouth. With the arrival of a fugitive announcing the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel's mouth is opened, signifying a new disposition of the Lord toward his people.

The Big Picture

In the face of God's judgment, his people should neither trust in their own righteousness nor despair in their sin, but rather heed God's word and repent.

1. Much of this section, composed of a reiteration of Ezekiel's responsibility as a watchman (vv. 1–9) and the people's responsibility to heed his warning and repent (vv. 10–20), repeats and parallels earlier material from 3:16–21 and 18:19–32. What might be the purpose for this reprise after the section outlining the judgment of the nations? Is there any indication that the response might be different this time?

2. The call to personal responsibility in verses 10–20 starts and ends differently than does the parallel in 18:19–32. The earlier passage started with an objection concerning God's justice and ended with a call to repentance and the command to "make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit" (18:31). This passage begins with the despairing question, "How then can we live?" (v. 10) and ends without the command being repeated. What might account for this change (see Ezek. 36:22–32; 37:1–28)? What does the fact that God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves teach us about him? How does this reinforce the message of 33:11?

3. The Fall of Jerusalem (33:21–22). Two years after the siege began (see 24:1), and five or six months after the city fell, a fugitive arrives with news of Jerusalem's demise. How has the structure of Ezekiel reinforced the sense of waiting and impending doom the exiles must have felt between the announcement of the siege and the announcement of its success?

4. God had promised Ezekiel that on the day the fugitive arrived, Ezekiel's mouth would be opened and he would no longer be mute (see 24:25–27). How has Ezekiel been a sign to the exiles in his muteness? What does this suggest about the kind of sign he will be in his speech now?

5. A Warning for the Survivors (33:23–33). Ezekiel warns both those left in the land and the exiles. What is his warning to those left in Israel? What are they trusting in? Why is their trust misplaced? What is the danger in trusting in our heritage or current status?

6. By contrast, what is the misplaced trust of the exiles (see vv. 31–32)? What is the danger in treating God's Word as entertainment and his spokesmen as celebrities? What does James say about the fate of one who is a "hearer of the word and not a doer" (see James 1:22–27)? How are we tempted to turn God's Word into entertainment to be enjoyed rather than words to be obeyed?

Week 13 Hope for God's People (34:1-37:28) Part 1

The Place of the Passage

The intimation from chapter 33 that God is going to act on behalf of his people now comes into full view. Condemning the faithless shepherds of Israel, God declares that he himself will be their Shepherd and will bring them into a place of prosperity and security in a covenant of peace (ch. 34). Condemning Edom and its wrongful grab for Israel's inheritance (ch. 35), the Lord promises that the mountains of Israel will burst into life and God will put his Spirit in his people, who will live with God as if in a new garden of Eden (ch. 36). This great reversal of fortunes is illustrated as God brings life to the valley of dry bones. Israel's future is not death but life under their Davidic shepherd-king, in a covenant of peace with their God who dwells in their midst (ch. 37).

The Big Picture

For the sake of his name, God will restore his people under the faithful rule of the Messiah by cleansing them from their impurity and putting his Spirit within them.

1. The Good Shepherd and His Sheep (34:1–31) Who are the shepherds of Israel? Why does God condemn them (vv. 1–10)? What does their condemnation tell us about the elders are to shepherd the church (see Acts 20:28). Can we learn anything from this passage about what sort of men they should be?

2. What does it mean when God says that "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (v. 15)? What does God say he will do for the flock (vv. 11–16)? How will he do this (vv. 17–24)? Who is the shepherd-king that God will "set up over them" (v. 23)?

3. The language of verses 25–31 recalls the covenant blessings enumerated in Leviticus 26:1–13. But the old covenant also enumerated covenant curses. Why are the curses not mentioned in relation to the new covenant of peace that God will establish through the messianic King?

4. The Desolation of Edom and the Restoration of Israel (35:1–36:38). Why is Edom condemned (35:5, 10, 12–13)? What will its punishment be (35:6–9, 14–15)? How does this contrast with the future of Israel (see 36:8–15)? How is this an example of poetic or ironic justice? What is the purpose of such justice?

5. What justification does God give for his judgment of the nations (36:2–7)? What does it mean to you that God is jealous over his people? What encouragement and hope should we find in this aspect of God's character?

6. In 36:16–20, God explains that he judged Israel "for their deeds." But in 36:21–38, God declares that he will save and restore Israel out of "concern for my holy name." How had Israel "profaned" God's name in exile? And what is required, therefore, for God to "vindicate" his holiness in their salvation (36:24–32)? How will he accomplish the required internal cleansing?

7. The language of new hearts in a land echoing the garden of Eden (36:35) recalls Moses' promise that when God restored Israel from its exile, he would "circumcise your hearts" (Deut. 30:6). What is the effect of such new hearts? What does this say about the nature of the restored community? What effect will such a community have on the surrounding nations (Ezek. 36:36)? Is this the effect of your local church in your community? Why or why not?

Week 14 Hope for God's People (37:28) Part 2

The Big Picture

For the sake of his name, God will restore his people under the faithful rule of the Messiah by cleansing them from their impurity and putting his Spirit within them.

1. The Valley of Dry Bones (37:1–28). While the promise of chapter 36 is wonderful, God himself asks the question that must have been on Ezekiel's and his listeners' minds: "Can these bones [i.e., dead Israel] live?" (37:3). In other words, could this promised restoration actually happen? In response, God gives Ezekiel his third major vision (37:1–10). How does this vision answer the despair of the exiles (37:11–14)?

2. If we were writing this vision, we would probably have God put flesh on the bones before telling Ezekiel to speak to them. After all, how can someone hear without ears? But what is the point of Ezekiel's prophesying to desiccated bones? How does this recall the creation narrative of Genesis 1–2 (see Gen. 2:7)? How does it look forward to resurrection? Why must salvation be an act of re-creation, rather than merely reformation?

3. How does God create and re-create? What does this say about the role of preaching and God's Word today?

4. Ezekiel 37 ends with a promise of Israel's restoration as a single nation, living under David's rule, with God dwelling in their midst in his sanctuary (37:15–28). At this point, the northern kingdom has been in exile for 150 years, the line of David is broken, and the people have just learned that the temple had been razed. How might the exiles have felt about the promise of a restored nation and sanctuary?

5. Review Ezekiel 37:15-28. What is the theme of this action sermon? How was the people's response similar to the way Jesus' disciples often responded to His parables? Why was the message of unity so important to the people? What would maintain that unity?

6. How do you respond to God's promises that feel impossible?

7. Has God given us a "valley of dry bones" out of which we can take hope for God's seemingly impossible promises made to us?

Week 15 The Last Battle (Ezekiel 38:1-39:29)

The Place of the Passage

Although this is one of the most enigmatic passages in all of Scripture, the basic point of these chapters is clear. Having promised to restore his people and dwell in their midst (Ezekiel 34–37), God now declares that in the latter days he will bring against Israel a mighty foe, allied with all the nations, and then will utterly defeat that foe. God will thus display "my greatness and my holiness . . . in the eyes of many nations" (38:23). This defeat will be so complete and final that Israel will never again doubt that the Lord is God (39:22).

The Big Picture

God will not only restore his people but will also vindicate his reputation by delivering them from every enemy forever.

1. The Defeat of Gog (38:1–23. The precise identity of Gog of Magog (38:2) is unknown. Some have suggested a future ruler from Asia Minor, which is to the north of Israel, or from even further afield. At one level, it is possible that this is even a reference to Babylon, the only contemporary neighbor of Israel not judged in chapters 25–32. But other details suggest that Gog is a symbolic figure, representing all of the forces of evil intent on destroying God's people. This is how John appears to use this passage in Revelation 20:7–10. What descriptions in 38:1–23 suggest a symbolic interpretation? What does "the latter years/days" (38:8, 16) refer to?

2. Why does Gog seek to pursue this war against God's people (38:10–13)?

3. Who is the ultimate author of Gog's plans (38:4, 16)? How does this help us to understand the relationship between human plans and designs and God's sovereignty?

4. How does God respond to Gog's attack on his people (38:18–22)? The imagery of God's war-like wrath is drawn from the plagues against Egypt (see Exodus 7–10; Psalm 18) and is picked up by John in Revelation 16:18–21. What does this suggest about the nature of this battle and the deliverance God brings to his people?

5. Why does God precipitate this climactic battle (Ezek. 38:23)? What does this teach us about God and his plans?

6. The Sacrifice of Gog (39:1–24). Chapter 39 reiterates the message of the previous chapter and develops it. How does 39:1–8 further develop and apply the idea that God is in total control of Gog's war against Israel? Why do these events reveal God to be the "Holy One in Israel" (39:7)?

7. Three different images are used to describe the final fate of Gog and his armies. They are plundered (39:9–10), buried (vv. 11–16), and devoured as a sacrificial feast (vv. 17–20). How does each image contribute to the sense of the finality of this battle? Is there irony, or poetic justice, at work in these images? If so, how? What is particularly ironic about the sacrificial feast imagery? Why would God invert this image? (see Isa. 34:1–10; Zeph. 1:7–9).

8. There are seven nations included in Gog's alliance (Ezek. 38:2–6). Seven kinds of plunder are listed in Gog's defeat, and they are burned for seven years (39:9). It takes seven months to bury the dead and cleanse the land (39:12). Seven judgments are listed in 38:21–22, and there are seven items on the menu in 39:18. The two chapters together are composed of seven oracles introduced by the phrase, "Thus says the Lord God." What is being communicated by this repeated use of the number seven? What encouragement are we to take from these grisly scenes?

9. Once again, what is God's purpose in this judgment, first for the nations and then for Israel (39:21–22)? Why does God want the nations to know that Israel has already been punished for her iniquity through her captivity and exile (39:23–24)?

Week 16 The New Temple (Ezekiel 40:1-46:24)

The Place of the Passage

With the final defeat of both human and spiritual evil (Ezekiel 38–39), the way is paved for God to dwell with his people. Chapter 40 introduces the beginning of the end of the book, and these chapters relate the final vision Ezekiel receives. In contrast to the abominations Ezekiel saw in chapters 8–11, he now sees a new temple. After a tour of its rooms (chs. 40–42), Ezekiel witnesses the glory of the Lord returning to fill his temple (43:1–12). As the tour resumes (43:13–46:24), Ezekiel is given instructions for Israel's renewed worship. Through this vision God makes clear that he will never again leave his people, and they will never again leave him.

The Big Picture

Despite their sin, God will be with his people forever.

1. A New Temple (40:1–42:20). How does Ezekiel let us know that we should read this vision against the contrast of chapters 8–11 (40:1–4)? Why is Ezekiel given this vision?

2. While many architectural and ornamental details are provided, much of the temple is left without description. As with the vision of God's chariot-throne in chapter 1, Ezekiel is given not a blueprint but rather "visions of God" (40:2). The final measurements, 500 cubits square, are ideal and perfect (42:15–20). In light of this, who is the implied builder of this temple, and what does the temple reveal about that builder?

3. 2. The Glory of God Returns (43:1–12). In 43:1, God returns from the same direction in which he had left. Having earlier witnessed his departure, Ezekiel now beholds how "the glory of the Lord entered the temple" (43:4). Why is it important for Ezekiel to witness God's glory within the inner rooms? Is this the climax of the book? Explain.

4. Ezekiel explicitly links his vision of the glory of the Lord to his visions in both chapter 1 and chapters 8–11. Why is this important? How else does God assure his people that he has returned and will not leave them again (43:7–9)?

5. God says that "*if* they are ashamed of all that they have done," *then* Ezekiel is to "make known" these temple plans to the people, because the entire temple mount is to be "most holy" (43:11–12). What is being hinted at by the fact that the entire temple mount, and not just the inner sanctuary, is "most holy?" How do humility and repentance allow God's people to be in his presence?

6. A Renewed People (43:13–46:24). The next section of the vision focuses less on the temple structure itself and more on what takes place there. Ezekiel is given instruction for the renewed worship of God's people. The last time God's people were given such detailed instructions was in the wilderness as they prepared to enter the Promised Land (see Exodus 29; Leviticus 8). What does this fact say about Ezekiel's role in this passage? What does it suggest about the context for the fulfillment of this vision in the future?

7. According to 43:26–27, what are the purpose and the result of Israel's renewed worship? How does this statement answer the driving question of Ezekiel and the exiles?

8. In 44:1–14, various instructions are provided about the gates of the temple. The east gate of the sanctuary is shut and is never to be opened again (44:1–3). Why? What does this imply about God's presence going forward? Who is excluded from the temple, and who is included (44:4–9)? Why are the unfaithful Levites singled out for restricted service (44:10–14)?

9. In chapters 44–46, special instructions are given for the “prince.” Who is this figure (see 34:24; 37:25)? What special privileges and duties are accorded to this prince in worship (see 44:3; 45:13–25; 46:1–12)? What is the significance of the fact that the prince provides the sacrifice for the sin of the people (45:16–17)?

Week 17 The New Creation (Ezekiel 47:1-48:35)

The Place of the Passage

Ezekiel's vision does not end with the temple. In chapter 45, the prophet described the temple district, and now the camera zooms out even further. The city and the land are described, and it is nothing less than a vision of the new creation. In chapter 47, a river flows from the temple, starting small and growing into a rushing river that gives life to the dead land and turns the Dead Sea into a teeming, vibrant lake. The rest of chapters 47–48 describes the boundaries and division of the land. At the center, in the midst of the people, is the city of the Lord, with the new temple in the very center. The vision concludes with the animating promise of the entire book: the name of the city is not Jerusalem but "The Lord Is There."

The Big Picture

God's presence among his people makes all things new.

1. The Temple's River (47:1–12). Flowing from the threshold of the sanctuary itself is a stream (47:1–2). What is the significance of its source? Where else has water appeared in Ezekiel in the context of blessing (see 36:24–30)? Are these two appearances related?

2. What happens to the river as it flows (47:3–6)? What is the significance of its growth (compare Mark 4:30–32)? Why would this be especially important for the exiles to understand?

3. The sea that the river flows into is the Dead Sea (47:8). What effect does the water have on the sea and its environs (47:7–12)? Why does Ezekiel use the relatively rare verb "swarms" (47:9; compare Gen. 1:20–21)? What is the significance of the trees on either side of the river that bear fruit every month, and whose leaves are for healing (see Gen. 1:29; 2:9; Rev. 22:1–2)? Is Ezekiel merely describing the region of the Dead Sea, or is this a vision of something greater?

4. The Division of the Land (47:13–48:29). Having described the fruitful and abundant life of the new creation that flows from the temple, Ezekiel is informed of the boundaries and division of the "land for inheritance" that God "swore to give to your fathers" (47:13–14). Are the new boundaries the same as the historical boundaries (47:15–23)? What might it mean if the boundaries *did* match what was originally described in Numbers 34?

5. As the specific allotments are given to the 12 tribes, what is different from the historical tribal allotments (48:1–29; compare Joshua 15–19)? What suggests that these are idealized boundaries rather than literal ones? What is the point of the allotments being equal? How does this contribute to the idea that Ezekiel is describing the entire new creation rather than merely Palestine?

6. Where is "the city" in the allotments of the tribes (48:8–22)? Where is the temple in this city (vv. 8, 21)? How is the city allotted (vv. 10–22)? In addition to the priests and Levites, who works in the city (v. 19)? Why is the city unnamed? Taken together, what is the significance of these details concerning the city?

7. The City of God (48:30–35). Having described the allotments for the tribes, Ezekiel ends with one last look at the city. What is described in 48:30–34? What is the significance of gates in general? What is the theological point of the 12 gates?

8. Gates have been prominent in Ezekiel's two temple visions (chs. 8–11; 40–46). God left by the east gate in 10:19, and he returned by the same gate in 43:2. That gate was shut permanently (44:2). Now the vision ends with a focus on the gates for the people of God. This same image is used in Revelation 21:12–13. In Revelation 21:25, John tells us

that the gates of the new city will never be shut. How does this vision give hope and endurance to God's people as they wait for its fulfillment?

9. What is the name of the city (48:35)? Why is it not called Jerusalem? How does this verse address the central issue of the book of Ezekiel? Why is it a fitting conclusion?

Week 18 Summary and Conclusion

The Big Picture of Ezekiel

While enigmatic to many and shocking to most, we have seen that the book of Ezekiel has not only a clear structure but also a compelling message, both to his original audience in exile and to God's people today, who are "elect exiles" in this world (1 Pet. 1:1).

Ezekiel is captured by a vision of the glory of God (chs. 1–3). And with that vision controlling him, he confronts people who have to face the unthinkable—the loss of their identity and seeming abandonment by God—but are unwilling to do so (chs. 4–24). Again and again, through visions, prophecy, parable, and even street theater, Ezekiel calls God's people to face up to the truth of the bad news. Their sinful treachery against God by taking idols into their hearts and forsaking God's covenant has finally brought upon them the judgment that such rebellion deserves. While, politically, they are caught up in the tangled international affairs of competing empires, ultimately the army of Babylon is merely the sword in God's hand, executing his covenant curses. No amount of protestations of innocence or injustice, no appeals to history or heritage, can change that outcome. God has withdrawn his glory from the temple and his people, and they have no one to blame but themselves.

It takes time for news of the fall of Jerusalem to reach the exiles in Babylon. As the fugitive bearing the news makes his way, the narrative camera, as it were, pans out over the surrounding nations (chs. 25–32). It would be easy to conclude that in Jerusalem's defeat, the gods of Babylon have vanquished the God of Israel. But these chapters paint a different story. God has disciplined his people, but now he will turn and defeat their enemies, near and far, small and great. God fights for his people, and not just against their political enemies. Ultimately, God will defeat the prince of evil himself, the Satanic figure animating all opposition to God's people (28:1–19).

When news of Jerusalem's fall finally reaches the exiles (ch. 33), Ezekiel's message turns to visions of hope and restoration (chs. 34–48). Having been betrayed and failed by their leaders, they hear God declare that he will be their Shepherd and will provide a messianic Shepherd-King. And he will not simply renew the old covenant, offering them a second chance. He will make a new covenant of peace with his people and will actually change them from the inside out by his Spirit so that they can keep the covenant he makes with them. Though to all appearances they are a dead nation, God will make them alive. And the day will come when he will finally and forever defeat their greatest enemy and reestablish his presence in their midst in a new temple with renewed worship in the new creation itself.

Through both judgment and salvation, God is committed to vindicating his glory and the holiness of his name. And so his call to repentance and faith throughout Ezekiel is matched by his gift of the Spirit and the new life that makes such faith possible. In the context of the bitter defeat of exile and the despairing question, "Where is God?," Ezekiel provides the answer: God is with his people, a sanctuary for them in exile in the present age, the source of life in the midst of death, and, in the age to come, the temple in which God will dwell with his people forever.

1. What is the mot significant personal discovery you have made from this study?

2. What surprised you most about the book of Ezekiel? What, if anything, troubled you?

3. Do you want to be more intentional in celebrating God's greatness or holiness? Be specific. Go back through Ezekiel 38-48 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

4. In what ways do you see God's greatness in your life? Where does God' power intersect with your daily life? Why is it important to know and respect God's greatness? How can trusting God's power help you grow your faith.

5. What does holiness mean to you? How do you honor God's holiness in your life? What about God's holiness inspires you? Challenges you? How can you learn to be more reverent in your worship?

A Blessing of Encouragement

Studying the Bible is one of the best ways to learn how to be more like Christ. Thanks for taking this step. In closing, let this blessing precede you and follow you into next week while you continue to marinate in God's Word:

May God light your path to greater understanding as you review the truths found in the book of Ezekiel and consider how they can help you grow closer to Christ.