

Visions of Doom and Hope

Weekly Contextual Bible Study in Ezekiel

By Dr. Joseph Greene © 2021 www.throughandto.com

Why Ezekiel?

The following Bible study was designed to lead Christians through the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. Despite its neglect in contemporary Christianity, Ezekiel addresses many relevant issues for Christian living and thought. Overwhelmingly, Ezekiel speaks to both the justice and grace of God; it shows how a holy God must judge even as He plans to restore. In addition, the book of Ezekiel introduces important concepts that help us understand the scriptures as a whole. Concepts like: the importance of the exile in understanding the biblical story line, idolatry, what is the nature of biblical prophecy and how do we understand it, false prophecy, end times prophecy, God’s glory presence, the role of leaders in the faith community, the Holy Spirit, God’s plan for renewal, and the sacrificial system.

Ezekiel presents challenges due to its length (48 chapters!), its sometimes bizarre and scandalous prophecies, and the disagreement about when and how those prophecies are fulfilled. Nevertheless, we deepen our faith and our understanding when we tackle the difficult passages and pay attention to the “whole counsel of scripture.” Too many Christians have a shallow understanding and faith because they have only encountered the “easy” and palatable scriptures-often taken out of context.

Method: This study encourages a contextual reading of Ezekiel. A contextual reading means the specific chapters and verses are read in light of the whole section in which they appear. The study guide constantly reviews previous material and relates each chapter to the larger context and section. Participants are expected to not only read the assigned chapters for that week beforehand, but re-read the whole section when possible. Even though I have tried to balance brevity and depth, averaging more than two chapters a week requires selectivity in what is covered. Even at this rapid, but responsible pace, the sad truth is that any study over 10 weeks requiring preparation probably will see half the initial participants drop out by the end. Such a tendency cannot prevent us from diving into the longer books of scripture. Otherwise, we will never mine the riches of many Old Testament books, and we will settle for a few out of context proof texts.

The study guide deals mostly with unpacking the text and its themes. When I actually led this study, I ended each session with how to apply the text to our lives. I have not included the application section to encourage each group to apply the text to their own situations. Because we are dealing with chapters at a time, there are usually several applications, and I would choose the one I felt most relevant to my group or to contemporary events. Whether your group leader decides to wax eloquent on an application or not, the discussion questions draw participants into application as well.

Ezekiel Study Outline

Specific Chapters and Theme Covered Each Week	Larger Section
Ezekiel 1:1-3 Intro and Background	Ezekiel’s Call, chs 1-3
Ezekiel 1 Ezekiel’s Call, Part 1	Ezekiel’s Call, chs 1-3
Ezekiel 2-3 Ezekiel’s Call, Part 2	Ezekiel’s Call, chs 1-3
Ezekiel 4-5 Ezekiel Acts out the Coming Judgment	Proclaiming Doom for Israel/Judah, chs 4-7
Ezekiel 6-7 The Day of Destruction is Coming	Proclaiming Doom for Israel/Judah, chs 4-7

Ezekiel 8-9 A Vision of the Leaders' Secret Idolatry in the Temple	Vision of God's Glory Departing chs 8-11
Ezekiel 10-11 God Departs from His Temple	Vision of God's Glory Departing chs 8-11
Ezekiel 12-13 Ezekiel's True Prophecy against the False Prophets	Prophecies against Israel, chs 12-24
Ezekiel 14-15 Comparative Righteousness and Personal Responsibility	Prophecies against Israel, chs 12-24
Ezekiel 16 -17 Two parables of Judgment and Hope	Prophecies against Israel, chs 12-24
Ezekiel 18-19 God's Justice and a Lament	Prophecies against Israel, chs 12-24
Ezekiel 20-22 A Long History of Disobedience Leads to the Present Destruction	Prophecies against Israel, chs 12-24
Ezekiel 23-24 The Shock of Sin and the Fall of Jerusalem	Prophecies against Israel, chs 12-24
Ezekiel 25-32 Part 1 – Turn to Hope	Prophecies against the nations. Chs 25-32
Ezekiel 25-32 Part 2 – Unfulfilled Prophecy?	Prophecies against the nations. Chs 25-32
Ezekiel 33-34 A Turning Point	Messages of hope for Israel, chs 33-39
Ezekiel 35-37 New Spirit & New Life	Messages of hope for Israel, chs 33-39
Ezekiel 38-39 Final Destruction of God's Enemies	Messages of hope for Israel, chs 33-39
Ezekiel 40-43:11 New Temple	A vision of a Restored Future. Chs 40-48
Ezekiel 43:12-46:24 New Law	A vision of a Restored Future. Chs 40-48
Ezekiel 47-48 New Land and New City	A vision of a Restored Future. Chs 40-48

Sources:

In this study, I extensively rely upon Daniel I. Block's 2 volume commentary: *The Book of Ezekiel* in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament Series. Eerdmans Pub., Grand Rapids, MI 1998.

NavPress's "Life Change" Bible Study Series (2014) has a volume on Ezekiel that inspired some of my thinking.

The Bible Project has produced some very helpful overview videos on various biblical books. The links I include in this study for Ezekiel are accurate at the time of sharing, but they also can be found quickly on YouTube with a search.

Free to use: You have my permission to copy and distribute this study for non-profit purposes. Please give proper attribution as you would using anyone work that is not your own.

Week 1: Introduction and background to Ezekiel.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapter 1 verses 1-3.

Preparation:

- 1) Read the Scripture.
- 2) Watch the Bible Project video: Overview of Ezekiel, part 1 : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-CIPu1nko8>
- 3) Read through and ponder the introduction and discussion questions.

Introduction to the lesson and Discussion questions:

Ezekiel 1:1-3 gives the setting of this book. The date is set as the “5th year of exile of King Jehoiachin.” The location is at the “Chebar canal in land of Chaldeans.” This information may not help if you aren’t familiar with ancient Jewish kings or geography. For expediency’s sake, let’s put that date and place in terms we can understand: 593 b.c. in the Babylonian empire.

Even this information is not that helpful unless one can situate it in the overall timeline of the Old Testament. Therefore, here is a short orientation to Old Testament history:

- The patriarch Abraham lived around 2100 b.c..
- Moses led the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land around 1400 b.c.
- King David reigned over a united Israel around 1000 b.c.
- Under David’s grandson, Rehoboam, Israel split into separate northern and southern kingdoms.
- In 722 b.c. the Assyrian Empire invaded the northern kingdom and exiled the inhabitants from their homeland.

The southern kingdom (Judah) survived the Assyrian invasion, but in Ezekiel’s day the Babylonians, a.k.a. Chaldeans, threatened to finally destroy Judah and exile its citizens.

Intro to the Historical Context of Ezekiel: As the scripture reading and the overview video explain, Ezekiel receives his visions while exiled in Babylon in 593 b.c. Four years prior, King Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian army attacked Jerusalem and took thousands of Jews captive, but let the nation survive under a new vassal king. On his 30th birthday, Ezekiel begins to have visions that prompt him to proclaim and act out a series of prophecies concerning Israel’s full destruction. Much like they do to the prophet Jeremiah (who ministered in Jerusalem about the same time as Ezekiel ministered to the exiles), the people reject Ezekiel and his message. Ezekiel’s prophecies are fulfilled in 586 b.c. when Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed and the remaining Jews are taken captive. While Ezekiel’s visions of doom prove accurate, Ezekiel also shares visions of hope for a restored Israel. In the next few months, we will discuss not only what these visions meant to the people of that day, but also how Ezekiel’s words can speak into our situation. We will learn a lot about who God is, and how to relate to Him. We will discuss God’s glory, justice, and promises, as well as false prophets, prophetic fulfillment, and spiritual complacency – to name just a few of the many challenging topics found in this Old Testament book.

Below is an overview of Ezekiel to get you familiar with the general content and flow of this long prophetic work.

Big Picture Outline/Preview of the Entire Book:

Chapters 1-3: Ezekiel’s call to be a prophet and inaugural vision of God’s glory.

Chapters 4-24: Ezekiel proclaims judgment on Israel for her disloyalty to God. God commands Ezekiel to not only speak, but act out the prophecies and visions.

Chapters 25-32: God also pronounces judgment on the nations near Israel.

Chapters 33-48: Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians as predicted, but God will not totally abandon Israel. Ezekiel now shares visions of restoration and hope, including an extended vision of a restored temple, law, and land.

Discussion questions

- 1) What areas are you hoping will be covered in this study?
- 2) Have you done much reading in the Old Testament prophets? Why or why not? What do you find most difficult about the prophetic writings?
- 3) What do you find challenging about going through such a long Old Testament book? What are some strategies for holding it all together and tracking the flow of the book?
- 4) Ezekiel was of a priestly family and when he turned 30, he would have started his service in the temple. Instead, he turns 30 in Babylon and is called to prophesy about the destruction of the temple. How does that information color how you read this book – if at all? How do you think this made Ezekiel feel?
- 5) How does verse 1's "I saw visions of God" and verse 3's "the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel" relate to each other?
- 6) Read the rest of chapter 1. We will talk about this vision of God's mobile, heavenly throne chariot next week. However, what are your initial impressions of this mind-blowing vision? Does this make you excited or apprehensive to go further into Ezekiel?

Week 2: Ezekiel's Call. Part 1

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 1-3, with a focus on chapter 1.

Preparation:

- 1) Read Ezekiel chapters 1-3 and then re-read chapter 1.
- 2) Watch the second part of the Bible Project video: Overview of Ezekiel, part 2:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDeCWW_Bnyw&t=1s
- 3) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Last week we examined the historical setting of the book. On his 30th birthday, Ezekiel begins to have visions from God while exiled in Babylon in 593 b.c. Four years prior King Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army attacked Jerusalem and took thousands of Jews captive, but let the nation survive under a new vassal king. Ezekiel proclaims prophecies concerning Israel's full destruction, which takes place in 586 b.c. After the nation's destruction (which is described in Ezekiel 33) Ezekiel begins to share visions of hope for a restored Israel.

Ezekiel 1-3. Today you will read about Ezekiel encountering God's glory as Ezekiel is called to be God's prophet. Although chapters 1-3 together form a section focused on Ezekiel's prophetic calling, we are focusing in on chapter 1 because it introduces the important theme of God's glory. Nevertheless, you should read all three chapters because they provide important context to understand each individual chapter. An important principle of interpretation is that context is the key to understanding a passage's meaning. Whenever possible, we should read the whole section before focusing in on a particular passage.

Intro: Ezekiel was from a priestly family, but being exiled in Babylon meant he was away from the Jerusalem temple. Nevertheless, God gave Ezekiel a vision of His glory and called Ezekiel to serve Him. In the Bible, God's presence and His glory go hand in hand. Sometimes, God's glory manifests in a radiant cloud.

Section Outline:

Chapter 1: Despite being in Babylon, God appears to Ezekiel. God's glory travels upon an incredible throne chariot that is carried by magnificent angelic creatures.

Chapter 2: God commissions Ezekiel to be His prophet and proclaim His message to a rebellious Israel.

Chapter 3: Despite the people's refusal to hear God's message, like a night watchman, Ezekiel must still warn them of the coming judgment.

This vision of the throne chariot carrying God's glory is one of many visions in Ezekiel. Here are some steps to interpreting visions in the Bible (from NavPress's Life change study in Ezekiel): 1) Think figuratively more than literally. Visions communicate in powerful mental pictures that often are difficult to communicate in words. While these visions are communicating truth, they are not doing so in literal, propositional language. For example Ezekiel 1:13 says, "*As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.*" Notice it says, "likeness . . . their appearance was like burning coals of fire". Does that mean their skin literally was burning wood? No, Ezekiel was trying to communicate the dynamic energy and power that radiate from these divine creatures. 2) Try to understand the main idea/impression that is being made. Don't get stuck on the details. 3) The vision often includes an explanation of what it means. If so, focus on this main meaning even if some of the details remain obscure. 4) Look for similar passages and images in the Bible. The

Biblical writers shared a stock of common symbols and images, sometimes purposefully referring to earlier biblical images to connect to the larger biblical pattern or theme. For instance, we should not be surprised that Ezekiel describes God's glory in v. 4 as "a great cloud with brightness all around it." This is the imagery for God's glory in Exodus, in 2 Chronicles 5 in the temple, and other places – so trying to determine if cloud is a water cloud or smoke cloud really misses the point. Rather this image is shared by other biblical passages and helps clarify what the author means: God's glorious presence has arrived!

Outline of chapter 1:

Ezekiel 1:1-3 Introduction of setting and person (covered last week).

1:4 *Introduction to the vision.*

1:5-14 *Description of the 4 living creatures* (4 creatures w/ 4 wings and 4 faces with human features, fire, bright, radiating movement and energy) ,

1:15-21 *Description of the wheels* (each creature had a wheel connected to it in Spirit and motion)

1:22-28a *Description of the platform, throne, and God* (these creatures and wheels held up a platform that carried a throne [so this whole thing is like a chariot] upon which sat a human like figure that was brilliant like gleaming metal and fire – this is a vision of God which the concluding sentence makes clear).

1:28b *Concluding statement and reaction.*

Discussion questions

- After reading through all three chapters, what is your overall impression?
- Chapter 1 spends a lot of time describing the 4 creatures. What function do these creatures have, and how do they contribute to the "big picture" of God's glory that Ezekiel sees?
- When a prophet was called, they often had an experience of God's presence/glory. Compare Isaiah 6:1-5. What are some similarities? Differences?
- How does this passage help you understand God's glory more? How should that understanding inform how you relate to Him today?
- Read John 17:1-5. What relationship does Jesus have with God's glory? How does Christ change how WE relate to God's glory?

Week 3: Ezekiel's Call. Part 2

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 2-3.

Preparation:

- 1) Read Ezekiel chapters 2-3.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: While exiled in Babylon, Ezekiel begins to have visions from God. Chapters 1-3 detail God's glory appearing to Ezekiel in order to call Ezekiel to prophetic ministry. This vision of God's glory riding on a heavenly throne chariot is described in chapter 1. As we move onto chapter 2-3, God reveals to Ezekiel that this calling will be difficult. Not only will Ezekiel prophesy Israel's full destruction, but the people will not listen to his warnings.

Section Summary Outline:

Chapters 1: Despite being in Babylon, God appears to Ezekiel. God's glory travels upon an incredible throne chariot that is carried by magnificent angelic creatures.

Chapters 2: God commissions Ezekiel to be His prophet and proclaim His message to a rebellious Israel.

Chapters 3: Despite the people's refusal to hear God's message, like a night watchman, Ezekiel must still warn them of the coming judgment.

Ezekiel 2-3. When Ezekiel encounters God's glory, he falls to the ground. God's Spirit enters Ezekiel so he can stand and receive his instructions. Chapter 2, verse 7 sums up Ezekiel's calling: "And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house." Despite resistance and a long history of not listening, Ezekiel must faithfully deliver God's messages. This calling is emphasized through a vision of a scroll that Ezekiel must eat. This initial encounter causes Ezekiel to sit in stunned silence for a week. When the word of the Lord again comes to Ezekiel, God explains that Ezekiel's role is like that of a watchman. He is to warn the people of the coming judgment for their sins. He is responsible to give the warning, and they are responsible for their response. God's glory appears once more to tell Ezekiel that he will be unable to speak or move unless God's explicitly allows it so that the people will pay attention, even if they don't heed the warning.

Discussion questions

- God warns Ezekiel not to be discouraged or afraid by the people's resistance. Do you think this warning suggests Ezekiel was reluctant? Why or why not?
- What impressions, emotions, and directions are communicated by the vision of the scroll and the command to eat the scroll?
- In these two chapters, how does God demonstrate His grace, even as He calls Ezekiel to this burdensome ministry?
- Ezekiel was called to preach God's word regardless of the people's response. How does this same concept apply to Christians and preachers today?
- What has God called you to do? Has He revealed hardships for you to expect? Has He revealed empowerments for you to expect?
- Have you encountered God's glory/presence in your life? How has that shaped and helped you understand your calling?

Week 4: Ezekiel Acts out the Coming Judgment.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 4-5.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 4-7) and the re-read our focus passage Ezekiel chapters 4-5.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: While exiled in Babylon, Ezekiel began to receive visions from God. Chapters 1-3 detailed God's glory appearing to Ezekiel in order to call Ezekiel to prophetic ministry. As we move onto chapter 4, we begin a new section (chapters 4-7) wherein Ezekiel proclaims and acts out messages of doom on Judah/Israel.

Section Summary Outline:

Chapters 4-5: Ezekiel performs two "sign-acts" that dramatically portray and predict the destruction of Jerusalem. This destruction is due to the people breaking their covenant with God despite centuries of God's grace and warnings.

Chapters 6-7: Destruction is coming to the mountain-top shrines Israel erected to false gods. The idolaters will be slain at the very places they are praying to their false gods. The day of judgment/destruction is fast approaching wherein the people will know that the LORD God is real and interacts with His people!

Ezekiel 4-5. Ezekiel's ministry kicks off with the prophet grabbing people's attention through two "sign-acts" that dramatically portray the destruction of Jerusalem. In the first performance, God instructs Ezekiel to build a model of Jerusalem out of a brick and add features that depict a siege. The prophet then must place an iron griddle between the brick model and himself – as he lies on his left side for 390 days! After 390 days, Ezekiel must then lie another 40 days on his right side. During this extended performance, Ezekiel is to prophesy against the model city and only eat a special diet cooked over dried dung.

What does this sign-act mean? Jerusalem will be under siege just as Ezekiel depicts. The iron griddle between Ezekiel and the city model probably represents the barrier between God and the people so that they don't hear God's message. Each day that Ezekiel lies on his side, he "bears" a year of "the punishment/sin" of Israel. The 390 years goes back to the building of the temple under King Solomon, which was quickly profaned by Israel's idolatry. The second part of the act involves a turning onto the right side for 40 years. The 40 years probably harken back to the punishment God gave Israel on their way to the Promised Land—they were to wander the desert for 40 years or until a generation had passed. Centuries of apostasy have brought on destruction for this next generation. The final part of the performance, cooking food over dried dung, predicts the degrading conditions Israel will endure during the exile.

In 5:1, God commands Ezekiel to perform another sign act: "And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword. Use it as a barber's razor and pass it over your head and your beard. Then take balances for weighing and divide the hair" (into three equal parts). The hair portrays three different fates of the people of Jerusalem described in verse 12 as: "A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in your midst; a third part shall fall by the sword all around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds and will unsheathe the sword after them." Chapter 5 further explains that God is giving Jerusalem over to the destruction that these sign-acts predicted because the people violated their covenant relationship with the Lord God. Ezekiel here refers to the covenant that God made with Israel when He brought them from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Yahweh was to be Israel's God and they would be His special people. Deuteronomy 28 lays out the blessings for keeping the covenant and the curses for breaking the covenant. Ezekiel 5's

references to pestilence, famine, sword, and “fathers eating their children” reflect the curses for breaking the covenant in Deuteronomy 28. After centuries of idolatry and covenant unfaithfulness, the promised destruction is coming. With prophetic performance and proclamation, Ezekiel announces the arrival of the day of the Lord’s reckoning. Israel will no longer wonder about God’s presence or activity as the prophetic words will take place just as God announced so that Israel will know that “the Lord has spoken” (5:13, 15, 17)

Discussion questions

- God commanded Ezekiel to act out His message. In what ways do you think the performance would enhance the message? How might it detract from it?
- When God commanded Ezekiel to cook his food over dried human dung, Ezekiel protested that this command went too far. Can you relate to Ezekiel or think of scenarios where you may protest God’s directions in your life? What does it say about God that He granted the request? What does it say about Ezekiel?
- Read Deuteronomy 28 and compare its language to Ezekiel 5. What are some similarities? How does Ezekiel referring to these covenant curses affect how you read Ezekiel 4-5?
- In this passage, God directs the coming siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Yet, the Babylonians are the ones who carry out the destruction. According to Ezekiel 5:13, 15, 17, this turn of events will provide proof that the Lord has spoken. How does this inform how we are to view God’s sovereignty? Are we to interpret bad events as God’s judgment, why or why not?
- How does the gospel of Jesus Christ affect how we read this passage?

Week 5: The Day of Destruction is Coming.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 6-7.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 4-7) and then re-read our focus passage Ezekiel chapters 6-7.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: While exiled in Babylon, Ezekiel received visions from God. Chapters 1-3 detailed God's glory appearing to Ezekiel in order to call Ezekiel to prophetic ministry. In the current section (chapters 4-7) Ezekiel proclaims and acts out messages of doom on Judah/Israel.

Section Summary Outline:

Chapters 4-5: Ezekiel performs two "sign-acts" that dramatically portray and predict the destruction of Jerusalem. This destruction is due to the people breaking their covenant with God despite centuries of God's grace and warnings.

Chapters 6-7: Destruction is coming to the mountain-top shrines Israel erected to false gods. The idolaters will be slain at the very places they are praying to their false gods. The day of judgment/destruction is fast approaching wherein the people will know that the LORD God is real and keeps His word!

Ezekiel 6-7. After grabbing people's attention through two "sign-acts" that dramatically portrayed the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel now takes on the more typical prophetic role of oral proclamation.

In Chapter 6 Ezekiel is given a new prophecy: ² "Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, ³ and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places." To this day, mountain tops are popular places for shrines.

Worshippers assume that the high places are closer to the abode of the gods in "the heavens," which make their prayers more likely to be heard (similar to going up a hill top to get a better cell or radio signal). However, the people of Israel were to worship no other gods beside Yahweh, and the Jerusalem temple was the place to worship Him. The first commandment of the covenant of Moses was "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Every hilltop shrine testified against Israel for breaking the covenant and was an affront to the God who had shown such grace in choosing Israel. The coming judgment and destruction will appropriately include these high places as 6:13 says: "And you shall know that I am the LORD, when their slain lie among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountaintops, under every green tree, and under every leafy oak, wherever they offered pleasing aroma to all their idols."

Chapter 7 emphasizes that the day of God's judgment will soon arrive. Notice how "the end" is mentioned 5 times in verses 1-6. After centuries of warnings, the righteous wrath of God will finally bring justice. Justice on its most basic level is people getting what they deserve. If you break a law, you deserve the consequences. Israel broke the covenant that began when the Lord saved them from slavery in Egypt. For their part, Israel was to follow the God who saved them, as the Lord said in Exodus 19:4-6: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Instead of being a "treasured possession" and a "kingdom of priests" that would point the world to the one true God, Israel forsook the Lord for false gods. The Lord withheld justice for a long time because he does not desire that any would perish, as Ezekiel 18:23 says, "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" However, the day of

reckoning had finally arrived. In this judgment, the Lord still revealed Himself as the phrase “you will know that I am the Lord” is used over 50 times in Ezekiel and repeated both in chapter 6 (verse 7, 10, 13, 14) and chapter 7 (verses 4, 9, and 27). By executing justice on His people, the Lord is fulfilling the word He spoke to them through Moses. As the Babylonians destroy the nation, the people will know that the Lord is just and keeps His promises. That same character quality of God will give the people hope in their eventual restoration (a theme in the later chapters of Ezekiel).

Discussion questions

- Have you ever felt closer to God because you were on a mountain or overlook? What was sinful about Israel’s high places, and how can we avoid the same mistake? How does **Psalm 19** give us guidance in this area?
- What “high places” and idolatry do you see in our world today? While worshiping false gods is to be expected in the world, how has it crept into the people of God?
- The just wrath of God is not a popular theme in contemporary Christianity. Why is this theme difficult for many people to accept? Why is God’s judgment crucial to “knowing that He is the Lord” – an important theme in Ezekiel?
- The “day of the Lord” that Ezekiel announced happened when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 b.c. Are there other “days of the Lord” in the Bible? **Read 2 Peter 3:9-13**. How can Ezekiel help us prepare for the future coming of the Lord?
- How was the cross of Christ also “a day of the Lord,” and how does it inform our understanding of God’s justice?

Week 6: A Vision of the Leaders' Secret Idolatry in the Temple.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 8-9.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 8-11) and then re-read our focus passage Ezekiel chapters 8-9.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: While exiled in Babylon, Ezekiel received visions from God. Chapters 1-3 detailed God's glory appearing to Ezekiel in order to call Ezekiel to prophetic ministry. In Chapters 4-7, Ezekiel proclaimed and acted out messages of doom on Israel.

Section Summary Outline: In chapters 8-11 Ezekiel is brought back to Jerusalem in a visionary experience. God reveals to Ezekiel the secret idolatry that is going on in the temple courts. The house of God's glory has become a place where even the elders of the people are worshipping other gods! Ezekiel once again sees the angelic creatures carrying the throne chariot of God's glory. Now they are carrying God's glory away from the temple in preparation for its destruction. As Ezekiel mourns over God's glory leaving the temple and the destruction of Israel, the Lord reveals that His people will not come to a full end. He will show grace to them once again in the future.

Ezekiel 8-9:

Ezekiel 8: The book of Ezekiel often signals a new section or vision by giving the date. Ezekiel 8:1 reports the date and tells us that Ezekiel is meeting with the elders in his house in Babylon when he receives a new vision. Through a visionary experience, an angel of God transports Ezekiel to the temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel recognizes the same glory of the Lord from his previous vision with them there at the temple (8:4). The angel then brings Ezekiel on a tour of the various idolatries that are happening in the temple. Ezekiel 8:16 is one instance of that idolatry: "And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD. And behold, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east." What a shocking picture that in God's house, people are turning their back to God's glory to worship the sun that God created. This dreadful display follows other visions of Israel's elders burning incense to false gods (verses 11-12) and women praying to the false god Tammuz (verse 14). Much of the idolatry is depicted as being in secret; nevertheless it is happening in God's temple and by Israel's leaders.

Ezekiel 9: This idolatry in God's temple is the final provocation for the Lord's departure and the coming destruction. Ezekiel receives a vision of God summoning messengers to go through the city and destroy everything. Before this slaughter, one of the messengers is sent to put a mark on all the people who have remained faithful to the Lord. All those without the mark, beginning with the elders at the temple, will be struck down. The enormity of the destruction causes Ezekiel to cry out in 9:8: And while they were striking, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, "Ah, Lord GOD! Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?" " God responds that the idolatry of the people has become such a violation of the covenant that it is past time for judgment. The just God must move forward with their deserved consequence. Although only implied here, God will save some (those with the mark) and not totally destroy His people. That sliver of hope is developed in chapter 11 and later in the book.

Discussion questions

- Ezekiel is not physically in Jerusalem, but he has a visionary experience. Do you think the idolatry is going on just as depicted (as if on a Zoom meeting) or that the vision communicates in a less literal way? Does your view make a difference to the main point of the passage?
- In a similar way, Ezekiel 9 describes the vision of God's messengers destroying the people in the city. How would that vision actually play out in real time (put another way, how will those people actually be killed)? What does this say about the relationship between God's decrees and how those decrees take place in our time and place?
- Publically, the elders and people worshipped the Lord. However, in the secret, dark places of the temple, they are bowing down to false gods. What do you make of the saying, "True worship is what you offer when no one else is looking"? **Read Matthew 6:1-8**, how does this passage further inform our understanding on this subject?
- In the innermost places of your heart, what false gods are you tempted to bow down to? Some questions that reveal the heart are: What do you want most or what can't you live without? What do you fear losing the most?
- Those Israelites who grieved over the idolatry being committed (9:4) received a mark that would protect them in the coming judgment. Does this mean that only unrighteous people suffered under the hands of the Babylonians? Why or why not?
- Was idolatry the only sin Israel was committing? Why does worship of other things inevitably lead to sins in the broader community?
- Are we "marked" by grieving over sin? What does it look like to grieve over the sin that surrounds us? How are we desensitized?

Week 7: God Departs from His Temple.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 10-11.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 8-11) and then re-read our focus passage Ezekiel chapters 10-11.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: While exiled in Babylon, Ezekiel received visions from God. Chapters 1-3 detailed God's glory appearing to Ezekiel in order to call Ezekiel to prophetic ministry. In Chapters 4-7, Ezekiel proclaimed and acted out messages of doom on Israel.

Section Summary Outline: In chapters 8-11 Ezekiel is brought back to Jerusalem in a visionary experience. God reveals to Ezekiel the secret idolatry that is going on in the temple courts. The house of God's glory has become a place where even the elders of the people are worshipping other gods! Ezekiel once again sees the angelic creatures carrying the throne chariot of God's glory. Now they are carrying God's glory away from the temple in preparation for its destruction. As Ezekiel mourns over God's glory leaving the temple and the destruction of Israel, the Lord reveals that His people will not come to a full end. He will show grace to them once again in the future.

Ezekiel 10-11:

Chapter 10: The bulk of this chapter contains another description of the throne chariot with the fantastical cherubim carrying this throne of God's glory. Ezekiel intentionally links this vision of God's glory (10:15) to his vision in chapter 1. The filling of the temple with the "glory cloud" in verse 4: "and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD" recalls the filling of the tabernacle (1 Kings 8:11) and then Solomon's temple (Exodus 40:35). The glory cloud manifested God's presence to show that God dwelled there in a special way. Because of God's presence in the temple, sacrifice and worship occurred in the temple. In contrast to the joy of God filling the temple with His glory in Solomon's day, Ezekiel provides a more somber picture of God's glory mounting up on the chariot to leave the temple.

Chapter 11: Ezekiel is brought to the east gate of the temple and sees 25 men who are misguiding the people. They contend that the people would be protected in the city, but God has decreed that the people will be taken *from* the city in judgment (11:10-11).

In verse 14 the focus audience switches to the exiles and reassures them that God is their sanctuary, even when they are in exile or the temple is destroyed. This word will be comforting for the whole nation when the rest of the Israelites go into exile. God is not bound by the temple and he can be present with them even in exile, as Ezekiel 11:16 says, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.'. The sanctuary really is about God's presence, and God assures them that he can be present with them no matter where they are. This reassurance is followed with a promise that God would one day gather his people from the nations and transform their hearts. Ezekiel 11:19-20 says, "And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God." God himself will restore the covenant and provide the heart change necessary for his people to walk in obedience. With that promise of hope, Ezekiel sees one of the darkest days in Israel's history--God's glory departs from the temple in verse 32: "And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city." Despite God leaving the temple and the land, God's grace still gives hope. His promises of restoration cut through the despair of the temple's abandonment and destruction.

Discussion questions:

- What are some things you don't understand or want to know more about concerning God's glory presence and/or the temple?
- Ezekiel specifically links the vision of God's glory in chapter 10 to his vision of that same glory back in chapter 1. What are some possible reasons for Ezekiel making this connection?
- While Ezekiel's prophecies are largely aimed at the inhabitants of Jerusalem, 11:14-16 reassures the exiles with Ezekiel. What does God want the exiles to understand? What are some possible reasons why they needed to hear this reassurance, even though the Jerusalemites would be the ones suffering most?
- List the specific promises God makes in 11:17-20. How would these be a comfort to the people? Put another way, how do these promises address the specific situation that the people find themselves in?
- How do these promises find their greater fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant?
- Ezekiel's prophecies of destruction include a promise of restoration. This is a common pattern in the Old Testament prophets. What does it say about God that even in the announcements of doom, He promises hope and restoration to His people?

Week 8: Ezekiel's True Prophecy against the False Prophets

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 12-13.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 12-24) and then re-read our focus passage Ezekiel chapters 12-13.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: While exiled in Babylon, Ezekiel received visions from God. Chapters 1-3 detailed God's glory appearing to Ezekiel in order to call Ezekiel to prophetic ministry. In Chapters 4-7, Ezekiel proclaimed and acted out messages of doom on Israel. Chapters 8-11 describe the secret idolatry that is going on in the temple courts, which is one of the many reasons God's glory departs from the temple. Despite this divine departure, the Lord reveals He will show grace to His people once again in the future.

Section Summary Outline: Chapters 12-24 constitute a new section that collects various prophecies and sign acts against Israel, who consistently rejects and rebels against God's word.

Ezekiel 12-13:

Chapter 12: The Lord tells Ezekiel to act out 2 prophecies that emphasize the nearness of judgment. The first is contained in verses 1-16. The Lord tells Ezekiel to "pack his bags" as if he is going to exile. He then must dig through the wall and bring out the baggage on his shoulder to depict what would soon happen. While all Israel would experience this exile, this prophecy is especially directed against "the prince in Jerusalem," who was named Zedekiah. Ezekiel's actions reflect the not too distant future when:

¹² The prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder at dusk, and shall go out. They shall dig through the wall to bring him out through it. He shall cover his face, that he may not see the land with his eyes.

¹³ And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there (Ezek. 12:12-13). The accuracy of Ezekiel's prophecy is remarkable; 2 Kings 25:1-7 tells us that when the siege of Jerusalem was at its worst, Zedekiah broke through the city wall and tried to flee from the city. The Babylonians captured him, put out his eyes, and paraded him around Babylon as a trophy to their victory.

The second prophecy is contained in verses 17-20. The Lord tells Ezekiel to shake as he eats bread to mimic the anxiety and shaking that Israel will feel as the Babylonians draw closer for destruction.

The remaining verses (21-28) emphasize that these prophecies will be fulfilled very soon. The Israelites had been warned by the prophets for so long, that some didn't really believe that God's word would ever be fulfilled. But God's word will no longer be delayed as verse 25 says, "For I am the LORD; I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord GOD." True words from God will be fulfilled, even if God's timing is longer than ours.

Chapter 13: The Lord now tells Ezekiel to prophesy against the prophets: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, who are prophesying, and say to those who prophesy from their own hearts: 'Hear the word of the LORD!' ³ Thus says the Lord GOD, Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!" (Ezek. 13:2-3) Ezekiel was not the only person claiming to speak for the Lord. Other prophets in Jerusalem and among the exiles were telling the people that Jerusalem would not be destroyed. While these false prophets were giving a much more enjoyable message, it was not true, nor was it from the Lord. Instead, these false prophets were "those who prophesy from their own hearts". Real prophets are only supposed to speak when and what God tells them to speak. At the most basic level, prophets are God's messengers. In verses 10-16 Ezekiel compares the false prophets' words to building a whitewashed wall. No matter how it looks or what people think about the wall, that wall will collapse just

as the walls of Jerusalem will collapse. Then the people will know the Lord has truly spoken, not through the false prophets but through Ezekiel (and Jeremiah).

The final verses shift to speaking against female false prophets, who are also mixing in magic charms and witchcraft. Although their methods involve some sort of witchcraft that tries to control souls through a magic arm band, the same basic charge is that they “prophesy out of their own hearts (13:17).” Like all the false prophets, their error will be exposed when the true prophetic word of God is fulfilled.

Discussion questions:

- 1) Once again, the Lord commands Ezekiel to act out prophecy. Read 2 Kings 25:1-7. In what ways does Ezekiel’s “prophetic skit” accurately portray what would happen? Those seeing Ezekiel’s sign-act would not know how accurate it would be, but what message could they still understand?
- 2) Chapter 12 emphasizes that these prophecies of doom will no longer be delayed, even though the prophets had been warning the Israelites for hundreds of years. In a similar way, people often mock Christians who believe that Christ will one day return in judgment Read 2 Peter 3:1-9. In this passage, why do people doubt? What reasons are given for God delaying the fulfillment of his promises? How is 2 Peter 3 similar to Ezekiel 12?
- 3) False prophets and false teachers appear throughout scripture. What contributes to the consistent existence and appeal of false prophets? Why are false teachers and prophets condemned so harshly here and throughout scripture?
- 4) Read 2 Peter 1:16-21. What does Peter say concerning his message and prophecy? How can these ideas help us today as we encounter false prophets?
- 5) What are some examples of false prophets today? What are some motivations for false prophecy/teaching today? How is that similar or different than Ezekiel’s day? How can we discern truth from error?

Week 9: Comparative Righteousness and Personal Responsibility.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 14-15.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 12-24) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 14-15.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: While exiled in Babylon, Ezekiel received visions from God. Chapters 1-3 detailed God's glory appearing to Ezekiel in order to call Ezekiel to prophetic ministry. In Chapters 4-7, Ezekiel proclaimed and acted out messages of doom on Israel. Chapters 8-11 describe the secret idolatry that is going on in the temple courts, which is one of the many reasons God's glory departs from the temple. Despite this divine departure, the Lord reveals He will show grace to His people once again in the future.

Section Summary Outline: Chapters 12-24 constitute a collection of various prophecies and sign acts against Israel, who consistently rejects and rebels against God's word.

Ezekiel 14-15:

Chapter 14: Some elders come to consult Ezekiel, which prompts a word from the Lord. While consulting Ezekiel makes it seem like these elders are trying to follow God, they actually "have taken idols into their heart." These elders may feel righteous compared to the leaders in Jerusalem who listen to false prophets and whose idolatry is more explicit, but God sees even to the deepest part of the heart. The Lord makes it clear that half-hearted religious activity is no substitute for genuine repentance. The judgment of exile would not be avoided by exchanging some of their idolatry for a little more attention to the Lord. God's ultimate goal for the exile is to fully cleanse and restore His people from the inside out, as 14:11 states, "that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord GOD."

Verses 12-23 describe four "disastrous acts of judgment" that God will bring upon the Israelites for "acting faithlessly." Each act of judgment (sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence) is followed by the refrain "18 though these three men (Noah, Daniel, Job) were in it, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered." Israel can no longer rely on a righteous remnant to keep it from judgment. The nation and its leaders themselves need repentance.

The few "sons and daughters" who do survive and join the exiles in Babylon will show by their continued faithlessness the reason for the nation's destruction.

Chapter 15: Ezekiel borrows the familiar biblical image of Israel as a vine chosen and cultivated by Yahweh and repurposes that image. Israel is not a fruit producing vine, rather it is a worthless vine that doesn't even give useful wood to build anything. It cannot even be used to make a firm peg to hang stuff on; its only use is for burning. Likewise, Jerusalem has been given up for burning (judgment) because "they have acted faithlessly" (15:8).

Discussion questions:

- 1) Although Ezekiel 14:1-11 does not specify the specific actions or attitudes of "taking idols into their hearts," what do you think are some possibilities?
- 2) Read Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees in **Matthew 15:7-20**. Jesus points out the importance of not simply right actions, but a right heart behind the actions. How do Jesus' words relate to this passage in Ezekiel? The Pharisees of Jesus' day were zealous against worship of any other gods.

Yet, Jesus addresses them in a similar way that Ezekiel addresses the elders. What does this say about the nature of idolatry and the difficulty of having a right heart before God?

- 3) In previous chapters, Ezekiel preaches against those remaining in Jerusalem –especially the leaders. The elders who consult Ezekiel here are a part of Ezekiel’s exilic community. With Ezekiel’s preaching in mind, perhaps these elders felt comparatively more righteous. Ezekiel quickly dispels this type of thinking. Why is comparative righteousness so easy to fall into? What examples have you seen?
- 4) Why do you think God emphasizes (through repetition) that even Noah, Daniel, and Job’s righteousness would not deliver others in Israel – only they themselves would be spared? How do we sometimes rely on other people’s faith?
- 5) Ezekiel may have borrowed the vine imagery from the earlier prophet Isaiah. **Read Isaiah 5:1-7.** How are Isaiah and Ezekiel’s oracles similar? How are they different? What does this vine imagery teach us about God? What does it teach us about His people?
- 6) * Difficult bonus question* How are comparative righteousness and personal responsibility related?

Week 10: Two Parables of Judgment and Hope.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 16-17.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 12-24) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 16-17.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 b.c. a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. Chapters 1-3 described Ezekiel seeing God's glory as Ezekiel was called to be a prophet. In Chapters 4-7, Ezekiel proclaimed and acted out messages of doom on Israel. Chapters 8-11 describe the idolatry in the temple courts, which is one of the many reasons God's glory departs from the temple. Despite this divine departure, the Lord reveals He will show grace to His people once again in the future.

Section Summary Outline: Chapters 12-24 constitute a collection of various prophecies and sign acts against Israel, who consistently rejects and rebels against God's word.

Ezekiel 16-17: These chapters contain two parables. The first is a very long comparison between Jerusalem and an abandoned child who grows up to be a prostitute. This comparison highlights the egregious faithlessness of God's people. The second parable uses a tree and an eagle to foretell the fate of Jerusalem and her leaders. Both parables introduce judgment, but close with hope in God's grace.

Ezekiel 16: This very long chapter uses the life story of a fictitious woman to illustrate Jerusalem's unfaithfulness to God. In 16:4-6 God says Jerusalem was like an abandoned newborn child in the field, which He saved and took care of. As the child grew into a woman, the Lord continued to protect and provide for her. He even says, "I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine (16:8)." Being in a marriage covenant with the Lord, Jerusalem receives blessing and prosperity beyond measure, as verse 13 summarizes: "Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty." In response to the Lord's generosity and grace, Jerusalem the wife soon becomes unfaithful. In graphic detail, Jerusalem's idolatry is compared to prostitution. Worshiping the false gods of nearby nations exemplify Jerusalem "playing the whore." God rightly assesses His people's spiritual condition in 16:30: "How sick is your heart, declares the Lord GOD, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute."

The second half of chapter 16 escalates the scandal by pointing out that whereas most prostitutes receive pay for their services, Jerusalem actually paid her customers (16:33)! The blessings that God gave her for being His wife she spent on adultery, including "the blood of her children." This probably refers to the Israelites practicing child-sacrifice to idols like some of the surrounding pagan peoples. In so doing Jerusalem has become worse than her sister cities of Samaria and Sodom, which were destroyed by God for their abominations (16:44-57).

This tragic picture of betrayal and lewdness gives ample reason for the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. Nevertheless, God will not totally abandon His beloved. God Himself will re-establish a new covenant in the future after dealing with Jerusalem according to her deeds, as 16:59-60 point out: "For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant."

Ezekiel 17: This chapter's imagery is harder to follow than chapter 16, but it also concludes with a message of hope. Understanding this chapter is difficult because it is put forward as a "riddle" or "parable" that requires explanation to understand. The riddle/parable is set up in verses 1-10. The interpretation of the riddle is given in verses 11-21. The various elements of the riddle correspond to

historical events that will take place between Israel, Babylon, and Egypt. By comparing these sections, we see that the “great eagle” of 17:3 corresponds to the King of Babylon (17:12) who plucked the top of a cedar and planted it in a new land (17:4-5) where it prospered and became a flourishing vine (17:6). The top of the cedar is a member of the royal line of Jerusalem (17:13) who swore an oath to the king of Babylon. Despite the provision and cultivation that was given to this flourishing vine, the vine rejects that kindness and seals its fate. From a historical perspective, the king of Babylon did appoint the current king of Jerusalem and expected that king to follow his oath of loyalty. The flourishing vine (king of Jerusalem) ends up turning its roots and branches toward another eagle (17:7), which represents Egypt (17:13). This alliance with Egypt will fail and Babylon will punish Israel for breaking her oath (17:17-23). The Lord is behind these events (17:19-21); the Babylonians and the situation are tools in God’s hands to discipline Israel for her breaking her covenant with the Lord.

The chapter closes with a return to the imagery of the riddle (17:22-24), but this time the Lord will replant Israel/a new sprig of cedar so that she flourishes, introducing hope to a prophetic riddle of judgment.

Discussion questions:

- 1) Make two columns on a sheet of paper. In one column, review 16:3-14 and list all the things that God does. In a column next to it, list all the things that the woman does in 16:15-34. What is your initial reaction? Putting yourself in God’s place, how would you feel?
- 2) How shocked were you when reading such graphic imagery? What particular verses surprised you the most? Why do you think Ezekiel uses such shocking terminology and imagery?
- 3) What does God promise in 16:59-63 and what is the stated purpose behind this promise?
- 4) In what ways does the woman in chapter 16 represent not just Jerusalem, but every person before God? In what ways does this chapter find fulfillment in Christ?
- 5) What does this chapter tell us about the character of God?
- 6) Did you find the “riddle” of chapter 17 difficult to understand? The explanation above lays out how the riddle of 17:1-10 finds its explanation in 17:11-21. Try to match up these verses yourself. Can you follow the explanation? What makes it difficult? Does knowing the context from previous chapters help you fill in some questions and understand?
- 7) What does this chapter tell us about the character of God?
- 8) Like chapter 16, chapter 17 ends on a message of hope. Although these chapters contain very different images, what do their hopeful endings have in common?
- 9) How can lessons from these chapters can you apply to your life?

Week 11: God's Justice and a Lament.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 18-19.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 12-24) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 18-19.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 b.c. a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. Chapters 1-3 described Ezekiel seeing God's glory as Ezekiel was called to be a prophet. In Chapters 4-7, Ezekiel proclaimed and acted out messages of doom on Israel. Chapters 8-11 described the idolatry in the temple courts, which was one of the many reasons God's glory departed from the temple. Despite this divine departure, the Lord revealed He will show grace to His people once again in the future.

Section Summary Outline: Chapters 12-24 constitute a collection of various prophecies and sign acts against Israel, who consistently rejects and rebels against God's word.

Ezekiel 18-19: These chapters are quite different from one another in content and genre but contribute to the section's focus on the just and inevitable judgment upon Jerusalem. Chapter 18 responds to accusations that God is acting unfairly in His judgment on Israel. Chapter 19 returns to the fate of the Davidic rulers—a subject presented in parable form in chapter 17. This poetic lament pronounces the end of Israel's leaders.

Ezekiel 18: The purpose of this chapter is to refute a popular saying circulating in Israel: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (18:2). The Israelites believe they are the children reaping judgment because of the sins of their fathers. To counter this false notion, God gives an example (verses 4-9) of a person who acts righteously, and proclaims that person will live. If that righteous person has a child who acts wickedly (verses 10-13), then that child "shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself (18:13)." The example is extended onto a further generation (verses 14-17), wherein a son does not follow the wickedness of the father, but acts righteously like his grandfather. This son "shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live" (verse 17), but the father "shall die for his iniquity" (verse 18).

The Israelites may blame their ancestors for God's judgment upon them, but the certainty of the coming judgment is not evidence that God's judgment isn't fair; it is evidence that they haven't repented of their wickedness. God states His standard in verse 20: "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."

God doesn't visit justice upon people out of capriciousness or anger; He ultimately wants everyone to repent and find life in Him as 18:23 says, "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?"

Not only does God judge people for their own past sin, but He judges them based on their current life. A righteous person must continue to walk in righteousness, and a wicked person can repent and walk in a new relationship. God allows U-turns, so it is not how you start but how you finish as 18:26-27 point out: "When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. Although we take these standards of judgment for granted, we do so because of the influence of Christianity. In the ancient world most considered it "right" to judge a whole family for the sins of one generation and to "set" a judgment that could not change in either direction. But God's judgments are the standard, and the Israelites contention that God was being unjust actually was evidence of their own inability to see their own sin. God's verdict and invitation close the

chapter: "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. (18:30)"

Ezekiel 19: This chapter returns to the fate of the Davidic rulers of Israel—a subject presented in parable form back in chapter 17. While chapter 19 contains parable-like imagery, it presents itself as “a lamentation for the princes of Israel” (19:1). Laments were a common form of expression in the Bible. A lamentation was a passionate expression of grief, loss, and/or sorrow that acknowledges something terrible has or will happen. When directed towards God, laments can be a powerful expression of trust in God despite the sorrow, doubt, and confusion. Chapter 19 is a poetic lament that mourns over the fall of Israel’s monarchy. In this lament poem the princes are compared to young lions begotten by Israel (the lioness). The nations hear about the young lion, capture him and bring him captive to Egypt (19:4). The lioness then brings forth another young lion, and the same thing happens, but this one is brought captive to Babylon (19:9). Although this lament is poetry, it matches the historical situation. An Israelite prince (King Jehohaz; see 2 Chronicles 36:1-4) was taken captive to Egypt, and the monarchy will end with the current prince (King Jehoiachin; see 2 Chronicles 36:5-7) being taken captive to Babylon as Jerusalem is destroyed. The metaphors then shift and compare mother Israel to a vine which was strong and produced strong stems for ruling, but the vine was plucked up and cast into the wilderness where it withered (Ezekiel 19:10-14). Whether Israel’s rulers are compared to young lions or stems of a vine, these rulers will be no more. The writer calls us to lament over the end of Israel’s rulers and any semblance of self rule. The nation and its princes are going into the wilderness of exile.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) In what ways have you heard people say God’s judgments are unfair?
- 2) What principles of moral responsibility do you see in Chapter 18?
- 3) In their contention with God, the Israelites may have been thinking about Exodus 20:5 “You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.” Go read this passage in context. How can you reconcile this passage in Exodus with Ezekiel 18?
- 4) Ezekiel 18:26-28 emphasizes the importance of how one finishes, not how one starts. How does this encourage you? How is this also a sober warning?
- 5) If you were an Israelite of that day, why might the lament poem of Ezekiel 19 seem like an appropriate expression of your feelings?
- 6) Christians in the western world don’t seem to understand or practice biblical lamentation. Why do you think this is the case? What aspects of lament would you find most difficult? How might lamentation be helpful?

Week 12: A Long History of Disobedience Leads to the Present Destruction .

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 20-22.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 12-24) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 20-22.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. That doom manifested itself in history when the Babylonians destroyed the Jewish homeland in 586 BC. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. Despite these prophecies of destruction and doom, the Lord revealed He will show grace to His people once again in the future.

Section Summary Outline: Chapters 12-24 constitute a collection of various prophecies and sign acts against Israel, who consistently rejects and rebels against God's word.

Ezekiel 20-22: Ezekiel recounts Israel's rebellious history, which continues to this day in Israel's idolatry and injustice. The Exile is necessary to purge the evil from the land and wake people up to repentance. Ezekiel once again is called to act out the coming Babylonian invasion and to lay out Israel's many grievous sins that have brought about God's judgment.

Ezekiel 20: Much like Ezekiel 8:1 & 14:1, the elders come to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord. Since God's word already given through Ezekiel has not been received well, God rejects their inquiry. Ezekiel then recounts the repeated history of Israel's rebellion from the time God rescued them from slavery in Egypt (20:6). The refrain in this chapter goes like this: God commanded their fathers to put away their idols, the people refused, God warned that he would pour out His wrath upon them, but "for the sake of His name" God showed grace to His people. This refrain of rebellion culminates in the Lord confronting the current generation and elders for continuing the evil of their forefathers: "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things? (Ezekiel 20:30).

Chapter 20 verses 33-44 turn from judgment to focus on the purpose of the exile. Through this destruction, God is disciplining His people so that they will know that the Lord is truly God (20:28) and realize their evil and repent (20:43). This change of heart will happen because God, in His grace, will gather the people back to the land (20:34, 41-42).

Ezekiel 21: Once again, God tells Ezekiel to act out a prophecy concerning the coming war (the sword) upon Jerusalem: "And all flesh shall know that I am the LORD. I have drawn my sword from its sheath; it shall not be sheathed again" (Ezekiel 21:5). While "the sword" belongs to the Lord, the Babylonians are the unknowing agents of God's judgment. God commands Ezekiel to groan loudly (21:6) to act out the dread of the coming invasion. Secondly Ezekiel is to clap his hands down to mimic the sword that will strike Israel's inhabitants (21:14). Thirdly, Ezekiel is to make a signpost as if directing the king of Babylon toward Jerusalem and the Ammonite city of Rabbah (21:19-20). The sword falling upon these cities is the just consequence of their sins.

Ezekiel 22: In light of the destruction spoken about in chapter 21, this chapter lays out the grievous sins that have brought about God's judgment. The blood that will be spilt by the Babylonian invasion is poetic justice because Jerusalem is a "bloody city" and its leaders are "bent on shedding blood" (22:6). Ezekiel then details that "shedding blood" includes injustice that leads to killing (22:6, 9,13), but also includes all sinful acts like adultery, incest (22:10-12), and oppression of the foreigner and widow (22:7). Both

political and religious leaders contribute to the injustice and idolatry (22:25-29). In fact God searched for someone to help lead people in righteousness and intercede for them, but there wasn't anyone (22:30). Therefore, God's just judgment will act like a smelter's furnace, burning off the dross of sin to purify His people like silver (22:18-22).

Discussion Questions

1. Reading Ezekiel 20:4-31, what are Israel's most common attitudes and responses to God? Do you see similar responses in God's people today?
2. Despite the history of rebellion, God continued to show grace "for the sake of His name." What do you think that means?
3. The "sword" is the primary image of chapter 21. What are some of the ways this image is developed in the chapter? What about this image do you find appropriate and/or disturbing? How does it inform your view of God?
4. Which of the "bloody" abominations of Chapter 22 surprised you the most? Why might Ezekiel refer to even non-violent sins as "shedding blood"?
5. A recurring theme in these chapters is that the coming destruction will discipline or refine Israel so that they will no longer practice unrighteousness. How would suffering push Israel towards holiness? Does that same principle work under the new covenant? Have you seen suffering "discipline" someone closer to God?
6. These types of judgment oracles are common in the OT, but not often revered by Christians. How does this passage apply to your life? How can it help your walk with God? How do we read these passages in light of Christ and the New Covenant?
7. Throughout the book of Ezekiel we see frequent use of the "recognition formula," which means people will recognize, or know, that "I am the Lord" or that "I the Lord have done this." Note all the instances of this recognition formula in these chapters. What different things will happen so that Israel will know that the Lord is God? How do these varied things inform your walk?

Week 13: The Shock of Sin and the Fall of Jerusalem.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 23-24.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 12-24) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 23-24.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. That doom manifested itself in history when the Babylonians destroyed the Jewish homeland in 586 BC. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. Despite these prophecies of destruction and doom, the Lord revealed He will show grace to His people once again in the future.

Section Summary Outline: Chapters 12-24 constitute a collection of various prophecies and sign acts against Israel, who consistently rejects and rebels against God's word. Chapter 24 closes out the section with an announcement that the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem has begun—Ezekiel's prophecies of doom are being fulfilled.

Ezekiel 23-24:

Ezekiel 23: The same shocking imagery used in Ezekiel chapter 16 returns here in chapter 23. Israel is compared to two sisters who give themselves over to prostitution. Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, which was destroyed by the Assyrian empire 130 years prior, is named Oholah. Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah, is named Oholibah. The significance of the names is highly debated, but the nations they represent are clearly stated, as is the fact that in this allegory they belong (are married) to God. Ever since God saved these twin sisters in Egypt, they have chased after other nations and their gods (23:21). Verses 5-10 describe Samaria/Oholah "lusting after the Assyrians," which refers not only to political alliances, but the idolatry that often accompanied those alliances. The Assyrians rejected Samaria as a lover and destroyed her.

Most residents of Jerusalem/Judah recognized Samaria/Northern Israel as a sibling people, but as traitors and idolaters to the family. They would have thought the Assyrian destruction of Samaria was deserved. However, they did not see how much they resembled their sister in action. Ezekiel points out this kinship by saying, "Her sister Oholibah saw this, and she became more corrupt than her sister in her lust and in her whoring, which was worse than that of her sister. (23:11)" For this reason, Jerusalem/Judah would suffer the same destruction and exile as her sister—her lover Babylon would turn on her and destroy her (23:14-34).

God then tells Ezekiel to lay out how Judah has followed Samaria's abominations (23:36-49). Not only do they both lust after foreign powers, but they follow foreign pagan practices. The most abominable practice being child sacrifice, as 23:39 mentions: "For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it. And behold, this is what they did in my house." Both sisters are guilty of chasing after other nations and gods. The shocking and lewd imagery is meant to awaken the people to their grotesque departure from the Lord in both faith and practice (child sacrifice?!). The behavior of the two sisters would have caused disgust in any society as well as a sense that any punishment would be well deserved. Ezekiel wants to create that same reaction in his hearers so that they realize their own sin and that the coming judgment is deserved.

Ezekiel 24: Verse 2 signals the fulfillment of what Ezekiel had been prophesying about: “Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.” All the spoken and acted out prophecies of the last 20 chapters pointed to this day, and now it has arrived. Ezekiel then speaks a parable, comparing the besieged city to boiling pot cooking its contents down to nothing (24:3-14).

After the Lord reveals that the siege has begun, He tells Ezekiel to be ready to perform another sign-act: “Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down (24:16).” In verse 18, Ezekiel’s wife, “the delight of his eyes,” dies. In that culture mourning rituals were required, but God told Ezekiel not to show any display of mourning upon his wife’s death. When the bewildered people ask what Ezekiel’s strange actions mean, he explains that soon they will follow what he is doing. As the Jerusalem sanctuary is destroyed and the rest of Judah is taken away captive, they will not be able to mourn publically. They are under Babylonian rule and must accept their victory--no matter the heartache and loss. Additionally when a fugitive comes to announce the news of Jerusalem finally falling, Ezekiel will be able to speak freely as a new day has begun. For as difficult as the destruction and exile had been, it was necessary to break Israel’s presumption and idolatry. With the temple destroyed, “the delight” and pride of the people’s eyes has been taken away. No longer can they presume upon God’s presence in the temple to protect them no matter how much they reject Him. In place of a building of hypocritical worship, God will establish a new covenant as He brings His people into a new era.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) As you read through chapter 23, how are the sisters similar?
- 2) We haven’t really discussed the division of Israel into Northern and Southern kingdoms after Solomon’s death (900s BC), nor the Assyrian captivity of the Northern kingdom in 722 BC. Write down any questions you have about this time period.
- 3) How does Ezekiel’s shocking and lewd imagery advance his message?
- 4) The Lord tells his people in 23:35, “Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, you yourself must bear the consequences of your lewdness and whoring.” When are God’s people most tempted to “forget” God? What does forgetting God actually look like? Although God is forgiving, in what ways must we still bear the consequences of our sin?
- 5) The fall of Jerusalem concludes this section of the book. Ezekiel’s prophecies have been looking forward to this event the whole book. How do you imagine Ezekiel felt at this news? How did the other exiles feel? How about all the people who didn’t believe Ezekiel?
- 6) Despite the gut wrenching order to not mourn over his wife’s death, Ezekiel obeyed God’s directives. What does this reveal about Ezekiel?
- 7) As we conclude the first half of Ezekiel, what unanswered questions do you still have?

Week 14: A Turn towards Hope through Judgment on the Nations.

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 25-32.

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through this whole new section. We are treating the whole section in 2 parts. First, we will look at the content of these prophecies and how they actually begin the book's turn towards hope for Israel's restoration. Secondly, we will focus on the prophecies against Tyre, which seem to be unfulfilled. Skeptics use these passages as a refutation of the Bible.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. That doom manifested itself in history when the Babylonians destroyed the Jewish homeland in 586 BC. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. These prophecies of destruction were fulfilled in chapter 24 as the siege of Jerusalem began. Despite this judgment, the Lord also revealed He will show grace to His people once again in the future.

Section Summary Outline: Ezekiel 25-32 contains prophecies against the surrounding nations. Each prophecy begins, "The word of the Lord came to me . . ." stressing that God is not only sovereign over Israel, but all the nations. These prophecies actually begin the book's turn towards hope for Israel's restoration. The map below reflects the political boundaries before the Northern Kingdom was destroyed, but it is still helpful in showing the nations Ezekiel refers to in this section.



Ezekiel 25: Prophecies against Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia. These surrounding nations often fought against the Jewish people, but sometimes they were political allies. Whenever Israel was weak, these nations would try to take advantage of the situation. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, these nations rejoiced. Ezekiel warns that the same destruction that overcame Jerusalem will overcome these nations because they are just as deserving of judgment.

Ezekiel 26-28:19: Prophecy and Lament against Tyre and its King. These three chapters present the same basic message (Tyre and its king will "come to an end" 26:21; 27:36; 28:19) three different ways. Tyre was a rich sea faring city built on an island, which made it resistant to sieges. In these prophecies and laments, Ezekiel highlights Tyre's rich trading exploits and prosperity to then show how far it will fall. Chapter 28 focuses on the prince of Tyre's pride as a reason for judgment.

Ezekiel 28:20-26: Prophecy against Sidon, and hope for Israel. Along with Tyre, Sidon was a prominent city in Phoenicia. This short prophecy against Sidon moves into a contrast between the dead-

end destinies of these enemy nations and the hopeful destiny of the people Israel. Although Jerusalem was being destroyed, God was not finished with his people. He would gather His people back after exile, whereas the surrounding nations would no longer be around to harass them: “*And they shall dwell securely in it, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards. They shall dwell securely, when I execute judgments upon all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God. (28:26)*” The judgment on Israel’s enemies shows that Israel’s God is still in control. Whereas God is bringing those nations to an end, He will bring Israel back one day.

Ezekiel 29-32: Prophecy and Lament against Egypt and its Pharaoh. Like the extended prophecy against Tyre, these chapters express the same basic message of destruction upon Egypt in different ways. Egypt had long been involved in Israel’s history. Egypt enslaved Israel at the time of Moses, but in Ezekiel’s day it encouraged Israel to rebel against Babylon only to be a weak ally. Israel’s trust in Egypt as an ally proved to be fatal for both nations as God gave Egypt over to Nebuchadnezzar (29:19), who also took many Egyptians into exile (29:12; 30:23).

Beginning in chapter 31, Ezekiel compares the power and pride of Egypt to the Assyrian empire. Only a few decades prior, the mighty Assyrian empire was brought to an end by the Babylonians. Likewise, the once mighty Egyptian empire will come to an end by the Babylonians. As God brings Egypt down to the grave (Sheol), Assyria will be but one of many destroyed nations who will meet her there (32:18-32).

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How do all these prophecies against the surrounding nations show that the Lord is the one true God? What in the text leads you to think that God wanted to show this fact?
- 2) Where else in the Bible have you heard about these surrounding nations? What was their relationship to Israel/Judah in those passages?
- 3) We will deal more in depth about the prophecies against Tyre next week, but Tyre’s pride (ch 28) is singled out as a reason for God’s judgment. How is that pride described? What are ways that modern day nations display a similar pride? What are we prone to be prideful of in our personal lives?
- 4) Ezekiel 28:24-26 is a small section that refocuses on Israel. In what ways does this section show the difference between the judgment Israel is suffering and the judgment on the surrounding nations? How and why is this relationship different?
- 5) What are some of the main features of the prophecies against Egypt? What aspects most stood out to you?
- 6) From this section what do you learn about God? What do you learn about people? What lessons can you apply to your life today?

Week 15: Prophecies Against Tyre Unfulfilled?

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 25-32, with a focus on Ezekiel 26-28:19; 29:18-19.

Preparation:

- 1) We are treating the whole section in 2 parts. Last time, we looked at the content of these prophecies and how they began the book's turn towards hope for Israel's restoration. Today, we focus on the prophecies against Tyre, which seem to be unfulfilled. Skeptics use these passages to refute the Bible.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. That doom manifested itself in history when the Babylonians destroyed the Jewish homeland in 586 BC. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. These prophecies of destruction were fulfilled in chapter 24 as the siege of Jerusalem began. Despite this judgment, the Lord also revealed He will show grace to His people once again in the future.

Section Summary Outline: Ezekiel 25-32 contains prophecies against the surrounding nations. Each prophecy begins, "The word of the Lord came to me . . ." stressing that God is not only sovereign over Israel, but all the nations. These prophecies actually begin the book's turn towards hope for Israel's restoration. The Lord of all the earth is not only bringing justice to Israel, He is also bringing justice to Israel's enemies, especially those around her who have mocked or attacked her. Whereas God is bringing those nations to an end, He will gather Israel back to the Promised Land one day.

Unfulfilled Prophecies against Tyre? Ezekiel 25-32 contains prophecies of judgment upon several nations around Israel: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Egypt, and two cities (Tyre and Sidon) that are a part of Phoenicia. Tyre was the primary city of Phoenicia and the fortress city was built on an island, which made it very resistant to siege warfare and capture. The prophecies against Tyre and its prince take up Ezekiel 26:1-28:19 and present the same basic message repeated in different ways: Tyre and its king will "come to an end" (26:21; 27:36; 28:19). In these prophecies and laments, Ezekiel highlights Tyre's rich trading exploits and prosperity to then show how far it will fall after the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar destroys it.

The crux of this prophecy can be found in Ezekiel 26:7-12: ⁷ "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, and with horsemen and a host of many soldiers. ⁸ He will kill with the sword your daughters on the mainland. He will set up a siege wall against you and throw up a mound against you, and raise a roof of shields against you. ⁹ He will direct the shock of his battering rams against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. ¹⁰ His horses will be so many that their dust will cover you. Your walls will shake at the noise of the horsemen and wagons and chariots, when he enters your gates as men enter a city that has been breached. ¹¹ With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will kill your people with the sword, and your mighty pillars will fall to the ground. ¹² They will plunder your riches and loot your merchandise. They will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses. Your stones and timber and soil they will cast into the midst of the waters.

Other parts of Ezekiel 26-28 further expound on the permanent destruction and humiliation of the city.

What many skeptics and atheists gleefully point out is that after a 13 year siege, Nebuchadnezzar never captured Tyre. How do we deal with this historical fact that suggests Ezekiel gave an incorrect prophecy? Fulfilled prophecy constitutes a proof of a prophet's and the Bible's divine inspiration (Deuteronomy 18:21-22), so what do we make of this and a couple other places where a prophecy seems to be unfulfilled?

Some Christians attempt to move the fulfillment of Tyre's destruction to the time of Alexander the Great (330 BC), who actually leveled and pillaged the city. However, this tactic does not do justice to the plain meaning of the text: Ezekiel specifically points to Nebuchadnezzar. A better approach takes into

account that biblical prophecy was not primarily a before-the-fact historical description of events. Biblical prophecy primarily functioned to call people to God's purposes and standards. For this reason, prophecy often contains poetic and extreme language in order to move people emotionally and volitionally toward change. The prophets seem to operate with the assumption that their prophecies are often conditional or contingent. If people repent or if the conditions God lays out are met, then the prophecy may not come to pass, may be delayed or changed. Ezekiel himself expresses this concept in chapter 18, saying in verses 31-32: "Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! 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." Likewise, Jonah preached destruction on Nineveh, but that destruction was delayed because the city repented in sackcloth (Jonah 3). While prophetic immutable decrees do exist (Ezekiel 24:14), the Bible does not seem to assume this for every prophecy. God and His purposes do not change, but in His grace He accommodates creatures' free choices in how those purposes are fulfilled.

While we have no evidence that Tyre repented, the primary complaint against Tyre and its king was pride. The city was not destroyed, but evidence exists that it submitted to Babylonian authority and paid tribute, which humbled Tyre and aligned them (perhaps unwittingly) with God's instrument of judgment (Babylon). With conditions changed, the sovereign God is free to move in a different direction. The prophets are mouthpieces of God; their words don't bind God as a magic spell.

God's complete sovereignty over His plan and word is reflected in Ezekiel 29:18-19, which acknowledged that the prophecies against Tyre went unfulfilled: ¹⁸ "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre. Every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare, yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor that he had performed against her. ¹⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall carry off its wealth and despoil it and plunder it; and it shall be the wages for his army. Instead of Tyre, God will give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar as a repayment for all the labor at Tyre. This open acknowledgment of an unfulfilled prophecy shows: 1) Ezekiel didn't change his prophecy after the fact to match the historical situation. Skeptics often say that fulfilled prophecy is really people later filling in events after they happen, and yet Ezekiel does not do that here. They can't have it both ways. 2) God reveals His word and plan to people, and it contains whatever spoken or unspoken conditions that God establishes. Although God knows all things, He may not reveal all the variables and contingencies of His plan, so we should expect prophecies not just to confirm, but to challenge our expectations.

Although we could further discuss the Bible's comfort with an "essential" fulfillment versus an "exact" fulfillment of a given prophecy, suffice it to say that both Christians and skeptics often place certain assumptions on prophecy that the prophets themselves may not have held. We can't put God in a box. God often reveals things beforehand so that when they happen people recognize Yahweh as the true God (this recognition theme is common in Ezekiel). But the function of these prophecies is not fortune or fate telling, but revealing the divine will so that created beings will align themselves to it.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Can you think of any other passages in the Bible where God seems to "change His mind" or modify a prophecy based on human response?
- 2) How do we reconcile today's lesson with Deuteronomy 18:21-22: And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'-- when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him."
- 3) What did you find most challenging about Ezekiel's "unfulfilled" prophecy against Tyre? What other explanations have you heard or thought of?
- 4) Despite this difficult prophecy (and others), can we still say that fulfilled prophecy supports the divine inspiration of the Bible? What obstacles do you still need to overcome for yourself or to defend the faith?
- 5) How might this difficult subject strengthen your faith? What concepts can you apply in your relationship to God?

Week 16: A Turning Point

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 33-34

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 33-39) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 33-34.
- 2) Watch Part 2 of the Bible Projects video overview on Ezekiel:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDeCWW_Bnyw&t=1s
- 3) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. That doom manifested itself in history when the Babylonians destroyed the Jewish homeland in 586 BC. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. These prophecies of destruction reach their full and final fulfillment in chapter 33 with the report that Jerusalem has fallen. Now that Ezekiel's judgment oracles are fulfilled, the Lord shows Ezekiel visions of future hope and restoration for His people.

Section Summary Outline: Chapter 33 marks a turning point in the book of Ezekiel. All the prophecies of judgment on Jerusalem come to fulfillment with the report that the city has fallen. While chapter 24 announced the beginning of the siege on Jerusalem, chapter 33 reports the city's final capture. Ezekiel has stayed true to his role as "watchman" for Israel, and he will continue to warn Israel to repent. In contrast to Ezekiel's faithfulness, Israel's leaders (shepherds) have not cared for the people. They will be swept away in this judgment as God, the Great Shepherd, intervenes and promises to send a righteous shepherd one day.

Chapter 33: In chapter 18, Ezekiel was called to be a "watchman" who warns Israel of coming disaster. Chapter 33 repeats this calling, but in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem, which is announced in 33:21: "*In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, 'The city has been struck down.'*" Ezekiel has fulfilled his calling and his prophecies are coming to fruition. Earlier calls for Israel to repent are repeated (33:10-20) to emphasize that even as the city is destroyed, the people can repent and get on board with God's plan. Instead of simply listening to God's words through Ezekiel, they can, and should, respond with actions (33:30-33). If the people respond, they will not be swept up in the destruction, but be ushered into the coming restoration.

Chapter 34: As the Lord sweeps away the unrepentant in Jerusalem, He especially calls out Israel's leaders. Instead of being "shepherds" who cared for God's sheep, these leaders have used the sheep to benefit themselves: "*Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep* (34:2-3)." These leaders are falling under judgment and destruction for abusing God's flock, but God will one day raise up a new shepherd from the lineage of King David: "*And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken*" (34:23-24). This shepherd will lead God's people

into a renewal of the covenant and restoration. The destruction of Jerusalem and its corrupt leaders is not the end. God has plans to bless and restore so that out of destruction will come renewal.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is a “watchman” responsible for according to 33:1-6? In what ways has Ezekiel faithfully carried out the watchman’s tasks?
- 2) Ezekiel 33:7-9 parallels 3:17-19 and 33:10-20 parallels 18:19-29. The Lord repeats things to emphasize their importance. What messages are being emphasized?
- 3) According to 33:30-33, what is the issue with the people who have been hearing Ezekiel’s prophecies?
- 4) In chapter 34, why is God “against the shepherds” of Israel? What did they do?
- 5) What does chapter 34 reveal about God’s character? What does it reveal about His people and His plan?
- 6) How does Jesus fulfill God’s promises to set up “one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them” (33:24-25)?

Week 17: New Spirit and New Life

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 35-37

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 33-39) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 35-37.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. That doom manifested itself in history when the Babylonians destroyed the Jewish homeland in 586 BC. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. These prophecies of destruction reach their fulfillment in chapter 33 with the report that Jerusalem has fallen. Now that Ezekiel's judgment oracles are fulfilled, the Lord shows Ezekiel visions of future hope and restoration for His people.

Section Summary Outline: Chapter 33 marked a turning point in the book of Ezekiel. All the prophecies of judgment on Jerusalem came to fulfillment with the report that the city was captured. Ezekiel has stayed true to his role as "watchman" for Israel, and he will continue to warn Israel to repent even as his tone shifts to one of encouragement. God will bring His people back to the land and give them new life when he ushers in the age of restoration.

Chapter 35-36:15: This chapter and a half seems out of place since it contains a prophecy against "Mount Seir," which is another name for the nearby nation of Edom. However, the future for this mountain of Edom is contrasted to the future for the "mountains of Israel." Much like chapters 25-32 contained prophecies against the surrounding nations, this prophecy against Edom reflects the truth that for Israel to be restored, the surrounding nations that threaten Israel will need to be dealt with. Edom represents all nations who come against God's people, and Edom in particular tried to take Israelite land after Jerusalem's destruction. Chapter 36:5 suggests this understanding: "Surely I have spoken in my hot jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave my land to themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, that they might make its pasturelands a prey." The current situation of Edom having free reign in Israelite territory will be reversed one day.

Chapter 36:16-38 : The remainder of chapter 36 focuses on the restoration of Israel. This restoration will not happen because Israel whole-heartedly repented during the exile, but rather so the Lord's "holy name" would not be profaned among the nations (36:16-23). The nations will recognize God's holy concern for the people of His name when He gathers them back again and does an internal work among them. He will cleanse His people from sin and give them a new heart and a new spirit so that they will want to obey God's laws: ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (36:26-27). This promise is similar to Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant. As God provides the needed inner transformation to His people, He will also restore abundance and restoration to the land. When God brings the people back to the land, it will be like "the garden of Eden" (36:35). This restoration will testify to God's holiness and character.

Chapter 37: Perhaps one of the most famous chapters in Ezekiel, this chapter contains Ezekiel's vision of a valley full of dried bones. In this vision God interacts with Ezekiel and calls him to prophesy over the bones until they receive flesh and the breath of life. The lesson is made clear in 37:11-14: ¹¹ Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will

open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.” Although the exile made Israel feel hopelessly dead, God will raise the nation up and cause it to live again. In fact, God will even join together the divided people of Israel and Judah (this is the meaning of the two sticks becoming one in verses 15-23) so that they will be under one shepherd – a prince of the line of King David (37:25). This restoration will include a renewal of the covenant so that “My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (37:27). The promise of restoration shines brightly in chapters 36-37. From the rubble of a broken temple, nation, and covenant the Lord Himself will resurrect and restore it all.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Compare Ezekiel 6’s prophecies against the “mountains of Israel” to Ezekiel 35-36’s words to the mountains of Israel. What are the similarities and differences? What clues do you detect that a turn towards hope has occurred in chapter 35?
- 2) The destruction of Israel’s enemies (represented by Edom) and the establishment of the nation under one Davidic shepherd does not guarantee a full restoration. What is the primary hindrance to Israel’s restoration and what else needs to happen for the covenant to be restored?
- 3) Compare Ezekiel 36:24-28 with Jeremiah 31:31-34. These prophets ministered at the same time. In what ways do their messages agree? When do you think these prophecies were fulfilled?
- 4) How in your life do you see the need for a “new heart and new Spirit”?
- 5) Knowing the historical situation, how would the vision of dry bones particularly encourage a destroyed and exiled people? How is the image of resurrection used here?
- 6) What do chapters 36-37 tell us about God’s character? What do they tell us about his purposes for His people? How can you apply these truths to your faith walk today?

Week 18: Final Destruction of God's Enemies

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 38-39

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 33-39) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 38-39.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. These prophecies of destruction reached their fulfillment in chapter 33 with the report that Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians. Now that Ezekiel's judgment oracles are fulfilled, the Lord shows Ezekiel visions of future hope and restoration for His people.

Section Summary Outline: Chapter 33 marked a turning point in the book of Ezekiel. All the prophecies of judgment on Jerusalem came to fulfillment with the report that the city was captured. Ezekiel has stayed true to his role as "watchman" for Israel, and he will continue to warn Israel to repent even as his tone shifts to one of encouragement. God will bring His people back to the land and give them new life when He ushers in the age of restoration. All enemies of God's people will be vanquished, but Israel will be restored.

Chapter 38: Previous chapters focused on the future restoration of Israel, but chapter 38 turns towards an obscure king named "Gog, of the land of Magog." Since there is no other reference in the Old Testament to "Gog," the identity of this king is a mystery. The mention of "Meshech and Tubal" (38:2) puts Magog in the area of modern day Turkey. Most likely, Gog of Magog represents a figure of evil that will lead hostile nations from the whole world against Israel (note verses 5-6 refer to nations from the farthest areas known to the Jewish people of the time: Persia in the distant east, Cush and Put in the distant south/southwest, Gomer and Beth-togarmah in the "utter-most parts of the north"). The date of this battle is not specified--sometime in the future "latter years" (38:8). Although Gog will muster a great army that will "cover the land like a cloud," the Lord God is the one directing these future events. God has gathered all enemies of God's people to fully and finally vanquish His foes and prove to the world that He alone is God. Verses 21-23 describe how God himself will defeat these hordes: "21 I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Lord GOD. Every man's sword will be against his brother. 22 With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him, and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples who are with him torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur. 23 So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

Some form of the recognition formula (they will know that I am the LORD) occurs several times in these two chapters. This cataclysmic battle will "vindicate God's holiness" and display His power, grace, and purposes for His people.

Chapter 39: In typical Ezekiel style, verses 1-8 echo chapter 38, and then develop the scene further in verses 9-20. With hyperbole Ezekiel paints a picture of utter ruin for Gog and His forces. The weapons of the slain hordes will be fuel for fire that last 7 years! The burial of the dead enemies will so cover the valley that it will take 7 months to bury them all (Note: the number 7 usually represents completion/fullness in the Bible, so these numbers further symbolize the enormity of the battle and victory). This characterized scene climaxes with Ezekiel calling out to the birds of the air to gather for a feast of mighty warriors in verse 19-20: "And you shall eat fat till you are filled, and drink blood till you are

drunk, at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you. ²⁰ And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors,' declares the Lord GOD." The scale and finality of this future battle would have reassured Israel that in the final restoration God will stop Israel's cycle of apostasy followed by foreign oppression. This cycle culminated in the Babylonian exile that the Jewish nation was experiencing at that moment, but it had a well documented past in the Book of Judges.

The purpose of this final judgment on the armies of Gog is to show the world who God is and to fully and finally restore God's people. Ezekiel states this purpose in 25-29: "²⁵ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name. ²⁶ They shall forget their shame and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid, ²⁷ when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have vindicated my holiness in the sight of many nations. ²⁸ Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore. ²⁹ And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD." From the wreckage of a destroyed Jerusalem and exile, God promises a return and restoration that forever changes Israel's relationship to God as well as the world's relationship to God.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How does Ezekiel describe Gog and the hordes with him in 38:4-6? What are the armies summoned to do in 38:8-12?
- 2) In 39:1-6, what does the Lord promise will happen to Gog and his forces?
- 3) Go through chapters 38-39 and underline as many forms of the "recognition formula" (i.e. "so that you know that I am the Lord God") as you can find. How many did you find? Why might there be so many mentions of this recognition formula?
- 4) Revelation 20:8 is the only other scripture that mentions Gog and Magog. Read Revelation 20. When does Revelation place this great battle with Gog and Magog? What other elements does Revelation add to Ezekiel's prophecy?
- 5) How can you relate the battle of Ezekiel 38-39 to the spiritual warfare we engage in?
- 6) What does Ezekiel 38-39 communicate about God's character and plan?

Week 19: A Vision of a Restored Future-The Temple

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 40-43:11

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 40-48) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 40-43:11.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. These prophecies of destruction reached their fulfillment in chapter 33 with the report that Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians. Now that Ezekiel's judgment oracles are fulfilled, the Lord shows Ezekiel visions of future hope and restoration for His people.

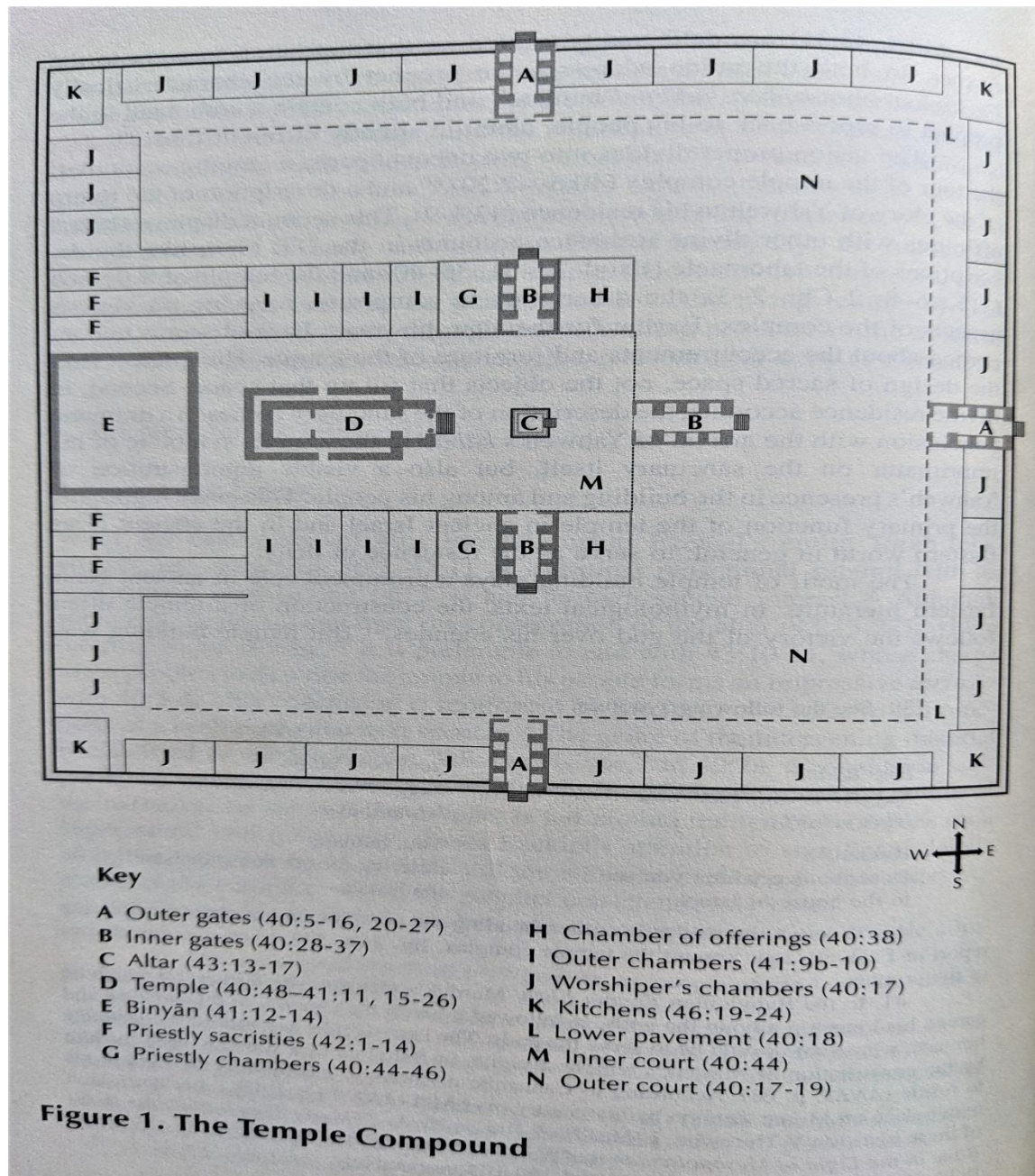
Section Summary Outline: The book of Ezekiel concludes with a glorious vision of God dwelling in the midst of a restored Israel. This vision occupies eight full chapters, which contain lengthy measurements and details that seem tedious to modern readers. However, these details echo the original instructions about the temple, the law, and the Promised Land. Using concrete images from Israel's faith history and practice, Ezekiel shows a comprehensive renewal to the pillars of the Jewish faith. A restoration without a new and improved temple, Torah, holy city and land would be unthinkable, so Ezekiel paints a picture of the future with these elements. It is important to keep the big picture in mind as you read through paragraph after paragraph of measurements and procedures of the restored nation.

Section's big question: When/how will this vision be fulfilled? Christian scholars and readers have pondered this question for millennia without any consensus. Ezekiel describes a temple much larger than the one the Babylonians destroyed, but also much bigger than even the largest expansion of the second temple in Jesus' day (which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD). Ezekiel must be describing a future fulfillment, and the two main options for that fulfillment are: 1) Literal fulfillment. This vision will be fulfilled in the 1000 year reign of Christ and His people described in Revelation 20:1-6. Before the last Day of Judgment, the tribes of Israel will return to the land, build the temple, and offer sacrifices as described by Ezekiel. 2) Symbolic fulfillment. Ezekiel's other visions contain lots of symbolism and this last vision depicts the final restoration using symbols that Ezekiel's contemporaries expected—the Jewish pillars of faith that were taken away during the exile. The presence of God in the temple, the holiness and obedience of the people, and a place for every tribe in the holy land will be essentially fulfilled in the new heavens and earth as described in Revelation 21-22.

Chapter 40:1-5. These verses introduce a new visionary experience for Ezekiel that occurs 14 years after the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is brought to a high mountain where "a man whose appearance was like bronze" (probably an angel) will show him a new temple and land. Ezekiel must declare to Israel what he is shown. The revelation on a mountain echoes when God revealed the law to Moses. Ezekiel is like a new Moses relating God's instruction for a new worship place and practices (compare Exodus 36-40) when they return to the Promised Land.

Chapter 40:6-42:20. Ezekiel is brought on a tour of this new massive temple starting from an outside view and then proceeding to the inner temple and the priestly chambers. Most people have trouble following the description, so I have included Daniel Block's helpful diagram below to guide your reading. The main take away from this description is the design of the temple communicates an increased holiness as one

goes to the most holy place of God’s presence. The degrees of separation between the sacred and the common emphasize God’s utter holiness and the people’s reverence for that holiness. In the new age, the people will no longer profane God’s holiness. They will respect it and enjoy it.



(Diagram taken from Daniel Block’s *The Book of Ezekiel*, NECOT, volume 2, page 508)

Chapter 43:1-11. Just as Ezekiel saw God’s glory departing from the temple in chapter 11, he now sees God’s glory returning to this new temple. God’s judgment on Israel will be reversed in the new age, and His favor is marked by His glory-presence. In the past, God’s glory filled the tabernacle Moses built and then the temple Solomon built, and now the Lord fills this new temple. God says, “Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoring and by the dead bodies of their kings at their high places”(Ezekiel 43:7). The structure of this temple not only

communicates God's holy presence, but that His holiness will be maintained—unlike Israel's prior history.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) When do you think Ezekiel's temple vision will be fulfilled? What issues do you see with each of the theories described above?
- 2) In the long description of the temple tour, what stood out to you the most?
- 3) In what way is Jesus the temple for God's new covenant people (see John 2:19-22; Revelation 21:22)? In what way are God's people a temple (see 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:19-22)?
- 4) God's glory often appeared at turning points in Israel's history and when God made new promises to His people. What might this pattern reveal and why would it be important for the pattern to be followed here?
- 5) What does this section of Ezekiel communicate about God's character and plan? How can you apply it to your life?

Week 20: A Vision of a Restored Future-A New Law

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 43:12-46:24

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 40-48) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 43:12-46:24.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. These prophecies of destruction reached their fulfillment in chapter 33 with the report that Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians. Now that Ezekiel's judgment oracles are fulfilled, the Lord shows Ezekiel visions of future hope and restoration for His people.

Section Summary Outline: The book of Ezekiel concludes with a glorious vision of God dwelling in the midst of a restored Israel. This vision occupies eight full chapters, which contain lengthy measurements and details that seem tedious to modern readers. However, these details echo the original instructions about the temple, the law, and the Promised Land. Using concrete images from Israel's faith history and practice, Ezekiel shows a comprehensive renewal to the pillars of the Jewish faith. A restoration without a new and improved temple, Torah, holy city and land would be unthinkable, so Ezekiel paints a picture of the future with these elements. Christians disagree on when and how this vision will be fulfilled. See last week's discussion for the most common theories.

Chapter 43:12-44:31. Immediately following the description of God's glory entering the new temple, Ezekiel describes the altar of sacrifice. Much like the law (torah) given to Moses contained regulations for sacrifice and observance of holy days, this vision contains similar regulations. This new altar is larger than the altar described in Exodus 27, but not quite as large as the altar of Solomon's temple. This altar needs to be consecrated so that it is holy enough to present sacrifices to the Holy God (43:18-27).

In Ezekiel 44:4-8, the Lord manifests His glory to emphasize that these laws of temple and sacrifice are necessary for the future restoration because of Israel's unfaithful past. The Lord says, "'Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I shall tell you concerning all the statutes of the temple of the LORD and all its laws . . . And say to the rebellious house, to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: O house of Israel, enough of all your abominations (44:5-6)'. The past unfaithfulness was both in the people and in the priests. In this section, a portion of the Levites are told that their past sins have rendered them unfit for priestly service. The most they can do is serve in the temple area, as 44:13 declares, 'They shall not come near to me, to serve me as priest, nor come near any of my holy things and the things that are most holy, but they shall bear their shame and the abominations that they have committed (44:13)'. In the new temple, only the priestly clan known as the 'sons of Zadok' can minister at the altar of sacrifice because when Israel went astray, the Zadokites stayed more faithful to God. Like priests under the Law of Moses, the Zadokite priests must conform to extra holiness rules (44:17-31).

Chapter 45:1-8. These verses describe the holy district that will be set apart for the temple compound and for the priests. Nearby land will be set apart for the Levites who minister at the temple, and next to their land a portion will be set apart for 'the prince.' This land allotment will be further described in chapter 48, but here it complements the idea of increased holiness the closer one gets to God's presence in the temple's most holy place. While God will dwell among His people, the proximity to God's dwelling depends on a person's access to holy places. The priests live surrounding the temple, with the Levites nearby. The prince is an important ruler, but has less access and proximity to the temple than the priests.

Chapter 45:9-46:24. The role of the prince is interwoven in this section with the prince's responsibility to provide sacrifices for various offerings and festivals. As leader of the people, the prince is responsible for regular and special sacrifices. No longer will the leader of Israel "oppress my people" (or be a "faithless shepherd" as described back in Ezekiel 34). In fact, 45:9 gives a warning that seems to move outside the vision and is directed to all princes of Israel: "Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and execute justice and righteousness. Cease your evictions of my people, declares the Lord GOD." Ezekiel's vision for the prince lacks the grandeur of other OT passages associated with the Messiah. For this reason, most scholars think this prince does not represent the Messiah. The prince leads the people in religious practice, but as a lay leader and not a priest or someone with unparalleled access to God (as was expected of the Messiah).

This section also contains detailed regulations for the regular and festival sacrifices. These prescriptions differ from the law of Moses in the number of animals and their frequency. Did Ezekiel imagine that these regulations would supersede the Mosaic law? This seems unlikely because in the first half of the book, Ezekiel constantly condemns Israel for violating the covenant of Moses. These new sacrificial regulations most likely represent the continuing orderly system for a Holy God to be among His people. The sacrificial system provides an avenue where people know they can access God's grace on a regular basis, despite His utter holiness being strictly maintained.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What questions do you have about the sacrificial system – whether in the Law of Moses or this section of Ezekiel? Why does the altar need to be "consecrated"?
- 2) What extra rules do priests have to follow in 44:17-31? What is the purpose for these extra stipulations?
- 3) What are some responsibilities and privileges of "the prince" in Ezekiel's vision? Which did you find most surprising?
- 4) The holiness of God informs this whole section from the sacrificial system to the layout of the temple and land. Why is God's holiness such an important theme here and in the Bible?
- 5) Last week we discussed different approaches to how the vision of chapters 40-48 would be fulfilled. As Christians, what difficulties arise from today's passage if we expect a future literal fulfillment?
- 6) How can you apply this passage to your life today?

Week 21: A Vision of a Restored Future-A Renewed Land

Scripture: Ezekiel chapters 47-48

Preparation:

- 1) If possible, read through the whole new section (Chapters 40-48) and then re-read our focus passage: Ezekiel chapters 47-48.
- 2) Read through and ponder the introduction to the lesson and discussion questions.

Introduction to the Lesson and Discussion Questions:

Review: Around 590 BC a Jewish priest named Ezekiel received visions from God while exiled in Babylon. God called Ezekiel to be a prophet and to proclaim and act out messages of doom for Israel. Ezekiel described the idolatry and injustice that caused God to judge His people with this destruction. These prophecies of destruction reached their fulfillment in chapter 33 with the report that Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians. Now that Ezekiel's judgment oracles are fulfilled, the Lord shows Ezekiel visions of future hope and restoration for His people.

Section Summary Outline: The book of Ezekiel concludes with a glorious vision of God dwelling in the midst of a restored Israel. This vision occupies eight full chapters, which contain lengthy measurements and details that seem tedious to modern readers. However, these details echo the original instructions about the temple, the law, and the Promised Land. Using concrete images from Israel's faith history and practice, Ezekiel shows a comprehensive renewal to the pillars of the Jewish faith. A restoration without a new and improved temple, Torah, holy city and land would be unthinkable, so Ezekiel paints a picture of the future with these elements. Christians disagree on when and how this vision will be fulfilled (See week 19 discussion for the most common theories).

Chapter 47:1-12 Ezekiel is brought to the outside of the temple where he observes a small stream of water flowing from the threshold of the temple. As Ezekiel and his heavenly guide move away from the temple complex, the stream grows progressively wider and deeper until it is too deep to stand in. The miraculous expansion of the water also has a renewing effect on the whole land, even bringing life to the Dead Sea! Verses 9 and 12 describe the renewing effects of this water: ⁹ And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. . . . And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing." Whereas the previous five chapters detailed the temple and the land allotment separating God's holiness from the common, this section depicts God's blessings bursting out to renew the whole land. The renewing of the land to a Garden of Eden like abundance is spoken of in other prophets as well (Isaiah 30:23-26; 44:3; Joel 3:18; Revelation 22:1-5).

Chapter 47:13-48:29 This section describes the new national boundaries for a renewed Israel's land, as well as the divisions of that land for each of the 12 tribes within Israel. Even though the tribes of the Northern Kingdom had been in exile for over 150 years and had been separated from Judah for even longer, this vision sees a restoration that includes all the tribes in one unified nation. The tribal designations match those that existed under Moses when they entered the Promised Land, but the particular locations for each tribe are somewhat different. Although Ezekiel's vision has been mostly concerned about Israel as a particular people, 47:22 notes that foreigners will have a place: ²² You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who reside among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.

Chapter 48:30-35 This vision of restoration and the whole book of Ezekiel concludes by describing the main city of the nation. This city has twelve gates for each of the tribes, symbolizing the open access to this place. Although the temple serves as the center of gravity for this land, it is not located in the city—perhaps emphasizing again that the Lord’s holiness will be protected and separated from the common in this new age. Nevertheless, the Lord’s presence still permeates the land not only by the streams from the temple, but the name of the city shall be “The Lord is There.” The promise of the Lord’s restored presence provides an appropriate ending to this book that has described the departure of God’s presence from Israel and ultimately the people’s deportation from the land. As Israel languishes in exile, they can hope for a future return so that they, and the Lord, will be there together in a restored and renewed land.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Compare the rivers of water from the temple to the garden of Eden and the picture given in Genesis 2:8-10 and Revelation 22:1-5. What similarities do you see? What are the differences?
- 2) What aspects of the streams and their effect on the land are miraculous/incredible? Does this make you more inclined to see this vision as a poetic representation of the end time blessings as opposed to a literal prediction? Why or why not?
- 3) The whole vision of chapters 40-48 strictly centers this future restoration on Israel. However, 47:22-23 leave room for foreigners to have a place. How does this depiction both complement and differ from the New Testament’s vision of the final restoration?
- 4) Using the fall of Jerusalem in chapter 33 as a turning point, try to summarize chapters 1-32 in a few sentences. Do the same for chapters 33-48.
- 5) Using those two summaries, now write down how each half of Ezekiel: A) Has informed your view of God. B) Affects how you will live your faith.