

Reverence to the Lord – A Study of Ezekiel

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We are pleased to share these lessons for your spiritual enrichment. As with the ACTS magazine, we would like to take a moment and remind our readers that the General Council Churches of God, (Seventh Day), is in a state of constant growth and we all have different backgrounds, it is possible that your views may differ somewhat from those presented in this study. We pray these lessons may be used as a point of entry for your own study.
“Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Introduction to Ezekiel

Why read Ezekiel? Only a very few would name the book as their favorite. Its strangeness and the difficulty to understand it are certainly primary reasons. Even Jewish rabbis have struggled with it, especially its beginning and ending. What does the vision of the wheel within the wheel mean? How can Ezekiel's temple vision at the end of the book be harmonized with the regulations prescribed by Moses in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible)? In fact, Ezekiel was stringently studied by Jewish scholars before it was even allowed recognition as God-inspired text (Canonical Scripture).

However, we shouldn't avoid this book merely because of its difficulties, since it is recognized as God-breathed text and is both comprehensible and of deep profit to those whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit. As with any of the Scriptures, our primary goal in studying should be to seek what the Holy Spirit would reveal to us, how we can be corrected, and how we will be developed in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

Ezekiel was by the Kebar River in Babylonia in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile when the prophetic visions began (Ezekiel 1:1-3). He was among the first group of exiles taken to Babylon. Judah was weakly intact, and Jerusalem was still standing. The exiled people were hoping for a quick end to their enforced captivity, so they could return to the Holy Land. Many false prophets had arisen to feed them false encouragement that their exile would soon end. Ezekiel tells them the ugly truth: Judah would be severely judged and Jerusalem destroyed.

The northern kingdom, Israel, had been conquered and taken into captivity by Assyria, whose policy was to split the peoples up and disperse them all over the empire. Breaking up old ties and reliances, it was their plan to keep the defeated peoples disorganized and disoriented. Eventually, they would lose their original ethnic identity and would just become "Assyrians." In this fashion, the northern kingdom was effectively destroyed.

When Judah was first overcome by Babylon, the exile policy was drastically different. All the conquered leaders, skilled workers, and affluent of society, were taken into the heart of Babylon and were treated quite well. They were allowed to settle in groups and to advance within the empire. While their strength added to that of Babylon's, it left the outer reaches of the empire impoverished, leaderless, unskilled, and hardly able to rebel. The treatment of the exiles however, allowed for the preservation of God's people, and for the possibility of a future return to the land of Judah—a return that did take place!

The first and overarching theme of Ezekiel is the sovereignty and holiness of God. Ezekiel's opening vision of God's glory comforts the readers that the Divine Presence had indeed accompanied them into exile. One reason for such an opening was to demonstrate that God was still God and had not abandoned His people. His love and presence were constant.

The people had failed to give appropriate reverence to the LORD, feeling distressed and deserted (Ezekiel 37:11). To them, the issues seemed to be (1) What use was God when He was unwilling or unable to protect His own land?... (2) How could He allow the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to be defiled?... (3) Why would God allow His chosen people to be taken into exile?... (4) Even if He intervened now for His land, how would that help the Jews taken into exile? These were the questions the prophet had to address. But the real answers were not to be found from the human perspective—God was God, and He always would be God, and man's responsibility was not to question Him, but to give the LORD the reverence He deserved.

Had God been ejected from His temple, or had He withdrawn His presence from Jerusalem by free will? Was He retreating from an inability to defend what was His, or was there a greater design in His plans than merely defending a piece of real estate? The answers might be simpler for us to see than it was for the exiled people, since they were the ones who had suffered immensely from the Babylonian invasion and the siege of Jerusalem. Perhaps if we could picture the most gruesome human suffering imaginable, then multiply that horror a hundredfold; if we could place ourselves into the very shoes of the people who'd witnessed the brutal slayings, the wretched starvation, the fiery destruction and desecration of a land and city always prized as the holiest in the world, and had themselves only just managed to survive the horrific onslaught, we would most likely be treating God with the same questioning defiance. Ezekiel was called by God to remind His ravaged people that He was indeed Sovereign and Holy, and that there was a divine design in all that had befallen Judah.

The second noted theme in Ezekiel contrasts bitterly with the first: the total sinfulness of men. To be aware of God's holy glory is to realize as well the awful gulf and depravity of sin. Sin can't be swept under the carpet; it can't be beautified, dismissed, or ignored. It is ugly, dirty, and offensive, and can't coexist with God's Holy Presence. This idea introduces the third theme: that judgment is inescapable. Yet, although it is difficult to understand when judgment has fallen, it is always God's intent that judgment leads to restoration. This leads to the fourth theme of Ezekiel: the return of the King to a new temple, and a full restoration of the Jews to the land of blessing and promise.

Lesson 1: From Priest to Prophet

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 1:1-3:27

Memory Verse: *“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me.”* Ezekiel 3:17

Introduction:

To accomplish His purpose among the exiles of Judah, God selected a man from the priesthood. Just as Jeremiah had been previously called from the priestly line, Ezekiel now responds to God’s beckoning. At the time he is called, he is 30 years old (Ezekiel 1:1), which was the appropriate age for a priest to begin his duties (Numbers 4:1-3, 23).

Switching roles from priest to prophet should be understood as a somber choice, if indeed Ezekiel had any choice in it. Priests were highly respected and valued by the Jews, while prophets were often despised, rejected, and persecuted. In those hard times it was quite dangerous to be a prophet. When a people feel they need encouragement, the last thing they desire is for a man to be openly declaring their faults and failures, and spewing declarations of judgment due to their sins.

When Ezekiel was born, Jeremiah had been prophesying in Jerusalem for four years. Surely Ezekiel had paid close attention to what Jeremiah had been saying and could hardly have missed the terrible way his prophetic predecessor had been scorned and mistreated. The office of a prophet was not one Ezekiel would likely have chosen for himself. When God points the finger and calls Aman, it is but for the man to respond and surrender his will to that of the Divine.

Ezekiel’s ministry was badly needed in Babylon, where false prophets abounded with the notion of giving the Jews false hopes of divine deliverance (usually through the assistance of Egypt, and not crediting the power of God directly). The true prophet’s labor would be a difficult one, since it involved changing people’s minds. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel would have to root up the deeply seated tendrils of false theology and selfish desire, and plant God’s Word. To prepare him, the prophet is led through three dramatic experiences: (1) beholding God’s glory (Ezekiel 1:1-28); (2) accepting God’s burden (Ezekiel 2:1-3:3); and (3) declaring God’s message (Ezekiel 3:4-27).

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. In what two specific ways was Ezekiel given authority among the people as God’s chosen mouthpiece? (Ezekiel 1:3)
2. How was the holy presence of God linked in Ezekiel’s first vision to the brutal Babylonian army that had ravaged Judah? (Ezekiel 1:4)
3. Discuss the significance of the cherubim seen in this vision. (Ezekiel 1:5-14)
4. Envision together the “*wheel in the middle of a wheel*” (Ezekiel 1:16), and the spirit of it that had authority over the cherubim and bound them together as one. (Ezekiel 1:15-24). Ezekiel 1:18 states that the rings of the wheels were so high that they were “*awesome*” (“*dreadful*” in KJV), meaning in the Hebrew, invoking exceeding fear, or demanding absolute reverence. Does this seem consistent with what Proverbs says is the beginning of all wisdom: the fear of the LORD?
5. Describe Ezekiel’s vision of God’s throne in Ezekiel 1:25-28 and compare it to Ezekiel 1:4. How did this vision effect Ezekiel? Compare this to the Apostle John’s vision and the effect it had on him in Revelation 1:10-17.
6. When Ezekiel is called to be a prophet, how does God instruct him? (Ezekiel 2:1-10)
7. What kind of spokesman did God enable Ezekiel to be? (Ezekiel 3:8-12)
8. What responsibility did Ezekiel have as a “watchman?” (Ezekiel 3:16-21)
9. What kind of impact do you think it made when Ezekiel shut himself up in his own house, and could only speak the utterances given him by the LORD? (Ezekiel 3:22-27)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 1

Sunday: The Storm and the Cherubim: Ezekiel 1:1-14

Ezekiel's authority as a prophet comes in two distinct ways: (1) by the word of God—divine authority and enlightening, and (2) by the hand of God—divine call and empowerment. The first two elements of Ezekiel's holy vision revealed a roiling storm and four identical beings. The whirlwind comes from the north and can be identified as the fiery judgment of God through the instrument of Babylon. Ezekiel identified the winged and four-faced creatures as cherubim in Ezekiel 10:15, 20. Their wings were arranged so that they did not have to turn; they could fly straight and change directions rapidly. Their four faces coincide with the four groups of living creatures included in God's covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:10): men, the fowls, domesticated beasts, and wild animals. God remembers His promises.

Monday: A Glimpse of True Glory: Ezekiel 1:15-28

Surrounded by the cherubim, moving quickly from place to place at God's direction, this vision develops into a vivid picture of the glory of the LORD God. Here are details of the wheels (Ezekiel 1:15-21), the firmament (Ezekiel 1:22-25), and God's throne (Ezekiel 1:26-28). The wheels symbolize the omnipresence of God, while the eyes on their rims suggest God's omniscience. The Holy One sees and knows all, and nothing is impossible for Him.

Tuesday: A Heart for the Work: Ezekiel 2:1-7

At Ezekiel's official call as God's prophet, he is given four important commandments to obey. Today's meditation covers the first three: stand and hear (Ezekiel 2:1-2), go and speak (Ezekiel 2:3-5), and be not afraid (Ezekiel 2:6-7). Performing God's tasks are never easy—they require courage, obedience, and determination. God is still looking for people He can use. Do you have a heart for the work?

Wednesday: Digesting the Word: Ezekiel 2:8-3:3

Before God's Word can be effectively shared, it must come from the messenger's heart. Job considered God's Word more essential than his "*necessary food*" (Job 23:12); Moses admonished Israel to live on God's Word (Deuteronomy 8:3); Jeremiah "ate" the Word of God (Jeremiah 15:16); the Apostle John also consumed the Word (Revelation 10:8-10). The Word is "sweet like honey" to Ezekiel, although later it becomes bitter (Ezekiel 3:14). Being a messenger of God is truly a bittersweet experience.

Thursday: The Message — The Suffering: Ezekiel 3:4-15

Ezekiel 3:4-9 reveals three processes of God's Word: speaking it (Ezekiel 3:4), receiving it (Ezekiel 3:5-7), and obeying it (Ezekiel 3:7-9). The messenger shares the whole message, not altering it in any respect. God then holds the hearers accountable to receive and obey the Word! James 1:22 says, "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only.*" Obedience leads to blessing (James 1:25). Ezekiel is then brought to Tel Abib (Ezekiel 3:10-15) to sit with the captives and feel their disappointment and grief. God's servant must also have God's heart—weeping and rejoicing with His people.

Friday: The Watchman: Ezekiel 3:16-21

The prophet is called to be faithful to warn the people of God's judgment. Four ideas are presented: the wicked dying because the watchman was unfaithful (Ezekiel 3:18); the wicked refusing to heed the warning (Ezekiel 3:19); the faithful dying because they rebelled against God and the messenger didn't warn them (Ezekiel 3:20); and the righteous heeding the warning and escaping judgment because they heeded the prophet's cry (Ezekiel 3:21).

Saturday: The Sign: Ezekiel 3:22-27

Because the Jews reject God's Word, the prophet can now speak only God's Word—God's Word must be heeded!

Lesson 2: The Preaching Prophet

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 4:1-7:27

Memory Verse: *“Yet I will leave a remnant, so that you may have some who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered through the countries.”* Ezekiel 6:8

Introduction:

Ezekiel 1-3 gave details of Ezekiel’s call and commission as God’s prophet. But just how bad would the bad news be that he brought? Ezekiel’s first message to the exiles (Ezekiel 4-5) is composed of a series of strange symbolic actions and their explanations. The modern reader of Ezekiel might judge the prophet’s behavior as outlandish. We are uncomfortable with extreme commitments to religious beliefs, classifying them as “cultish.” If any of our own relatives or church fellow members were to start acting this way, we would probably seek to “deprogram” them.

It is always valuable to consider the Scriptures from the perspective that the direct audience witnessing the actions would have had. Although Ezekiel’s actions were undoubtedly odd to the exiled people, they were much more used to men who were consumed with God’s prophetic warnings. “Sign-acts” were a normal part of how prophets conducted themselves. The most important thing to remember is that the prophets not only received their messages directly from God, but also the manner in which those messages were to be delivered. God knows what to say, and how to say it, so that the warning or exhortation rings crystal clear. God wasn’t trying to merely dazzle the people’s eyes with visual aids but worked through His prophets to make the message sink into their hearts. Jehovah not only wanted the message to be heard, but to be felt deep inside the human heart.

Why did God’s message need to be given in such drastic ways? The answer lies in the condition of the people’s hearts! Hearts harder than granite require much more than a hard message. God is the only One who knows and understands the human heart, and how to shake that heart to its core. Ezekiel’s ministry was one in which God, in essence, had “taken off the gloves,” and was ready to deliver a roundhouse knockout punch to His rebellious, unseeing, hard-hearted people.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. What were the three action sermons given in Ezekiel 4, and what meaning did each of them have? (Ezekiel 4:1-17) How well do you think the exiled peoples received these pictorial object lessons?
2. What was Ezekiel trying to get across by shaving his head and beard in public with a sword, and the treatment of the cut hair in three separate parts? (Ezekiel 5:1-17)
3. What were the main points of Ezekiel’s first spoken sermon? (Ezekiel 6:1-14)
4. According to Ezekiel 7:1-9, how certain was God’s coming judgment upon the land of Judah?
5. Explain why each of the following pictures given in Ezekiel 7:10-21 is symbolic of Judah’s cataclysmic fall:
 - A) the budding rod (Ezekiel 7:10-11)
 - B) rightful land ownership dissolved (Ezekiel 7:12-13)
 - C) the futile warnings of the city watchmen (Ezekiel 7:14-15)
 - D) the frightened mourning doves (Ezekiel 7:16-18)
 - E) the throwing aside of gold and silver (Ezekiel 7:19-21)
6. Describe the chaotic judgment that Ezekiel prophesied would fall upon Judah. (Ezekiel 7:22-27) What did Ezekiel prophesy would happen to Judah’s leadership during this time? (Ezekiel 7:26-27)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 2

Sunday: The Siege of Jerusalem: Ezekiel 4:1-17

Ezekiel 4 contains three action sermons: the clay brick (Ezekiel 4:1-3); the suffering victim (Ezekiel 4:4-8); and a diet of the most terrible quality of bread baked over a defiling fire of human excrement (Ezekiel 4:9-17). In the first sermon, Ezekiel played the conqueror of Jerusalem, laying siege to the city and overcoming it. In the next, he was bound (symbolic of the exiles) and had to lay upon his side with his arm bared (God's arm bared in judgment)—on his left side for 390 days (the number of Judah's rebellious years), then on his right for 40 (the rebellious years spent in the wilderness). The poor bread was symbolic of the horrid famine and defilement during Jerusalem's siege.

Monday: The Destiny of the People: Ezekiel 5:1-17

Just as Isaiah compared the invasion of an enemy to the shaving of a man's head and beard (Isaiah 7:20), Ezekiel now uses shaving for his next action sermon. The public shaving was a sign of sorrow and humiliation—the sword used for the job symbolized the conquering army. The cut hair was split into three parts: burned on the siege brick (those killed by famine or pestilence); hacked to bits (those slain by Babylonian soldiers); and the hair thrown to the winds (Jews scattered among the Gentiles and the exiles taken into Babylon).

Tuesday: Judgment on the Land: Ezekiel 6:1-14

Ezekiel's first spoken message is in three parts: (1) God's judgment of the high places (Ezekiel 6:1-7); (2) God's grace to the Jewish remnant (Ezekiel 6:8-10); and (3) God's weapons of destruction (Ezekiel 6:11-14). The land had been defiled by Judah's idolatry, so Ezekiel is instructed to "set his face against it." Yet despite the destruction to come, God had always preserved a righteous remnant, and will bring His people back to Himself.

Wednesday: Announcing Disaster: Ezekiel 7:1-9

The land of Judah is personified in this passage as Ezekiel speaks to it and announces disaster. Judgment is certain, as the prophet proclaims, "It has come!" at least nine times in Ezekiel 7:1-12. In the KJV, notice the phrase in Ezekiel 7:7, "*morning is come.*" The NKJV and NIV translate this as "*doom has come.*" The word in the Hebrew means to "plait" or "braid." The idea is "that which comes around," such as braiding a garland of flowers for the head. "Morning" comes around day after day, and the doom of the Israelites had now "come around."

Thursday: Pictures of Disaster: Ezekiel 7:10-15

Three depictions of disaster are given here: (1) the budding rod of judgment in God's hand (Ezekiel 7:10-11); (2) economic despair as the land is conquered and removed from rightful ownership (Ezekiel 7:12-13); and (3) futility as watchmen on the wall blow their warning, but no army is there to help (Ezekiel 7:14-15).

Friday: More Pictures of Disaster: Ezekiel 7:16-21

Two more pictures are added to the first three: (1) the escaping Jewish fugitives compared to mourning doves, frightened and alone in the mountains (Ezekiel 7:16-18); and (2) the utter uselessness of gold and silver in a time of disaster (Ezekiel 7:19-21).

Saturday: Corruption and Chaos: Ezekiel 7:22-27

This passage reveals the chaos that erupts from the impact of God's judgment. No help would be found from the religious leaders, since they were the primary source of corruption (Ezekiel 7:26). The political system would also unravel (Ezekiel 7:27). The leadership in Judah failed miserably when the kings refused to listen to Jeremiah's plea to surrender to Babylon and save the city and temple. Judah's dependence on foreign alliances instead of the LORD God would be their total undoing.

Lesson 3: Departing Glory

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 8:1-11:25

Memory Verse: “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.” Ezekiel 11:19-20

Introduction:

Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel 8-11 is united as a whole unit under the theme of God’s departing glory. Ezekiel 8:1-3 is directly comparable to Ezekiel 11:24-25. Ezekiel 8 is a deeper explanation of Ezekiel 7:20, detailing the accusation of detestable idols and vile images. Ezekiel 9:9 mirrors the charge in Ezekiel 7:23, that the land is full of bloodshed and the city full of injustice.

However, Ezekiel 8-11 was intended for a particular group of people, “*the elders of Judah*,” (Ezekiel 8:1) who were gathered at Ezekiel’s home. Maybe they were there to seek God’s favor from the mouth of the prophet, perhaps to find an early end to their exile. Regardless of their intentions, encouragement isn’t what they received at the prophet’s house. Ezekiel gives a step-by-step denunciation of their sins and the combined sins of Judah. They were one of the primary targets of the vision God gave.

What is the heart of the matter? The Holy One of Israel couldn’t remain in the presence of human defilement, and Judah was rotten to the core with idolatry. For centuries they had abandoned the true God to run after every possible spiritual alternative, including hideously violent and sexually perverse false gods. Even God’s temple wasn’t maintained as sacred ground—Judah had brought their worship and sacrifices to false gods right onto the most hallowed real estate in the ancient world: the temple mount! Once this last bastion of true religion was defiled, there was no hope left but for fiery cleansing.

What was in the minds of the Jewish people? How could they have failed God so completely? Perhaps we should look within ourselves. Have we failed God? Do we continue to fail? YES! Yet by faith in Christ, we are the righteous of God, saved and cleansed by the precious blood of the lamb. Can we now treat this blessed grace of God with indifference? We may receive the gift freely, but the payment was anything but cheap.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. What was the significance of each part of the four-part vision of Judah’s idolatry within God’s temple was shown to Ezekiel? (Ezekiel 8:1-18)
2. Why is the scribe in Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel 9 sent through the city? (Ezekiel 9:1-4)
3. Who would be slain by the executioners in Ezekiel’s vision? (Ezekiel 9:5-10:7)
4. Just as the four-part exposure of Judah’s idolatry was seen, describe how the glory of the LORD departed in four stages. (Ezekiel 10:4; 10:18; 10:19; 11:23) Do you think the exposure of idolatry was directly linked to God’s departing glory?
5. Why did the evil sun-worshipping leaders in Jerusalem treat the people of the city as though they were the flesh in their cooking pot (cauldron)? (Ezekiel 11:1-13) What will be the end of their treachery?
6. List the blessed promises of hope that God gave to His remnant people. (Ezekiel 11:14-20)
7. What would happen to the proud and rebellious people? (Ezekiel 11:21; Proverbs 14:12; 16:5)
8. When God’s glory departed the temple, where did it go? (Ezekiel 11:22-23) What significance would it have had to those left in Jerusalem that God’s divine presence had departed from them? What difference would it make to us if God’s presence was taken away?

[Ezekiel’s vision shows the departing of God’s glory from the temple and the city of Jerusalem, but the Lord never fully turns His back on His people. His presence, according to divine promise, moves to abide with the remnant taken into captivity in Babylon. He becomes their “*little sanctuary*” (Ezekiel 11:16) of protection.]

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 3

Sunday: The Temple Defiled: Ezekiel 8:1-18

After a renewed vision of God's awesome glory (Ezekiel 8:1-2), Ezekiel is shown four panoramas of Judah's gross idolatry taking place within God's holy temple: (1) the "image of jealousy" (an idol), named such because idolatry provokes the Lord who is jealous over His people (Deuteronomy 32:21); (2) 70 elders burning incense to images of idols painted on the walls of a secret chamber; (3) women at the temple gate involved in a heathen ritual to Tammuz (a fertility god); (4) 25 men at the temple door, openly bowing down to the sun. In Ezekiel 8:17-18, divine judgment is pronounced; idolatry is a decayed stench in God's nostrils.

Monday: Sparing the Remnant: Ezekiel 9:1-4

In the vision, Ezekiel hears the Lord summon six men (likely angels), to prepare for a brutal slaughter in Jerusalem. A seventh "man," a scribe, is sent through the city to mark the holy remnant who grieve and lament the sins of Jerusalem. Notice how God's shekinah glory moves from the chariot throne to the threshold of the temple, removing His protective blessing and covering and preparing to depart.

Tuesday: The Execution: Ezekiel 9:5-10:7

The six executioners are now sent forth to complete their judgment work. No one was to be spared because of sex or age—anyone without the mark would be slain. Just as Peter had warned that judgment is *"to begin at the house of God"* (1 Peter 4:17), so the execution begins at God's sanctuary, where Ezekiel has seen defiling abominations. The temple would now be further defiled by the corpses of idolaters. God told Ezekiel that Judah was defiled by innocent blood—the time had come for the people to reap the crop of their violence and corruption.

Wednesday: God's Glory Revealed: Ezekiel 10:8-22

Here we again see the vision of God's glory that Ezekiel had seen on the day of his ministry calling (Ezekiel 10:15, 20-22). Notice that the living creatures were *"full of eyes"* (Ezekiel 10:12) even as the wheels were. This points to the "all-knowing" nature of the LORD God. He had seen the public displays of idolatry and all the things done in secret. Everything He does is "according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). The Holy One can't abide the stench of sin, so when Judah stopped magnifying God to worship idols, His presence withdrew. Do we live in such a way that God would desire to dwell among us? He sees and knows everything we do!

Thursday: The Cauldron: Jerusalem: Ezekiel 11:1-13

Ezekiel prophesied against the evil leaders at the eastern door of the temple, worshipping the sun (Ezekiel 8:15-18). They had given the king and other leaders wicked advice, hoping to personally benefit from the losses of their countrymen. For their treachery, they would be slain. One of them falls dead instantly!

Friday: God's Promises: Ezekiel 11:14-21

God now spoke words of hope to His righteous remnant. Some would apply to their return from captivity: (1) God would be their safe sanctuary (Ezekiel 11:16); (2) they would be gathered (Ezekiel 11:17a); and (3) they would again be given the land of Israel (Ezekiel 11:17b). Ezekiel 11:19-21 are promises that extend to the spiritual renewal that will occur at the end times—a time still in the future.

Saturday: God's Glory Departs: Ezekiel 11:22-25

The chariot-throne of God had lingered at the threshold of the east gate of the temple, with God's glory above it (Ezekiel 10:18-19). God's glory now departed, to rest over the Mount of Olives. God is amazingly long-suffering, but His patience is not eternal.

Lesson 4: Shining Light into Darkness

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 12:1-14:23

Memory Verse: *“For I am the LORD. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it,” says the Lord GOD.*
Ezekiel 12:25

Introduction:

The cohesive message of the last lesson, covering Ezekiel 8-11, could be summarized as: “Nothing escapes God’s notice.” He sees all, He hears all, and He knows all. Due to the abominations and idolatry, God would abandon Judah, leaving it to the whim of the Babylonian army. This was the message Ezekiel brought to the exiles.

Shouldn’t the message have a profound impact? Wouldn’t we expect a change in the hearts and minds of the people? But instead, we find the exiled ones are also rebellious. They stubbornly resist the message of God through Ezekiel.

In the Scriptures we focus on in this lesson, we find the people’s rebellion openly exposed for the folly it is. Ezekiel prophesies against four false aspects of their lives:

1. Their false confidence (Ezekiel 12:1-28)
2. Their false prophecy (Ezekiel 13:1-23)
3. Their false piety (Ezekiel 14:1-11)
4. Their false hope (Ezekiel 14:12-23)

These were the errors that brought Judah to ruin. The people could trust in illusions if they wanted. They believed that judgment would never come—that He somehow had removed Himself and couldn’t see their behavior, or that in some bizarre stretch of the imagination, that He was indifferent about it. Through the use of more “action sermons,” Ezekiel visually portrays God’s warning. What was the result of these messages? Repentance? Heartrending sorrow? No! The hearts of the survivors in Babylon were as hard and stubborn toward Ezekiel, as those still in Jerusalem were toward Jeremiah.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. What was Ezekiel teaching by his “sermon in a knapsack?” (Ezekiel 12:1-16)
2. What was Ezekiel trying to teach by his meager meal eaten with shaking and trembling? (Ezekiel 12:17-28)
3. Why does the prophet compare Judah’s false prophets to spoiling “foxes” and “untempered” (whitewashed) mortar? (Ezekiel 13:1-16)
4. Why were the false prophetesses of Jerusalem engaging in witchcraft and sorcery, and what would happen to them? (Ezekiel 13:17-23)
5. What does it mean to have “idols set up in the heart?” (Ezekiel 14:1-5) Is it really any different than bowing to physical idols of wood or stone?
6. Explain the difference between individual and corporate rebellion. Does God condemn a whole group for their collective behavior, or does He deal with each soul individually? (Ezekiel 14:6-11)
7. What kind of false hopes are dashed by Ezekiel’s message in Ezekiel 14:12-21? Will God be considered just or unjust in His dealings with Judah? (Ezekiel 14:22-23)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 4

Sunday: Sermon in a Knapsack: Ezekiel 12:1-16

The prophet is told to play the part of a fugitive escaping from a besieged city. He packs a knapsack and leaves it a distance from his house, to show that Jerusalem's leaders were planning an escape. Digging through the wall of his house symbolized the besieging army. Leaving through the hole in his house was a sign of the Jewish leaders trying to flee. But they would be caught. It would all happen just as Ezekiel portrayed!

Monday: A Meal of Fear: Ezekiel 12:17-28

Shaking and trembling as if in fear, Ezekiel eats a simple meal of bread and water before the people. He was illustrating the horrid condition of the people still in Jerusalem, beset with famine and fear. The theme of Ezekiel's message was the absolute certainty and nearness of God's judgment on Judah. He was to refute the proverb that *"the days are prolonged, and every vision fails"* (Ezekiel 12:22). Instead, the prophet proclaims a new proverb (Ezekiel 12:25), a clear message that the current generation would see the horrible calamity of God's judgment.

Tuesday: Prophetic Arrogance: Ezekiel 13:1-16

Four times in this passage, God declares that the false prophets saw vanity and proclaimed falsehoods. They spoke from their own imaginations—a "self-induced" inspiration. Ezekiel compares them to foxes, or jackals, who lived as desert scavengers. They were opportunists who preyed on the weakness and ignorance of the people who were desperate for hope and security. They were "workmen" who failed to build anything lasting—ignoring God's Word to substitute their own lies (untempered mortar = whitewash). They painted a bright picture of the future that would soon collapse in devastation.

Wednesday: The Fortunetellers of Jerusalem: Ezekiel 13:17-23

The Jewish women Ezekiel exposes are actually "sorceresses" practicing magical arts—activities prohibited from the Jews (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). They made magical charms so people could ward off evil. They told fortunes and enticed people to buy their services. Using the crisis for personal gain, they preyed on the others' fears. Instead of condemning the evil and rewarding the good, they embraced the evil and denied righteousness.

Thursday: False Piety: Ezekiel 14:1-5

God tells Ezekiel that the leaders were righteous outwardly, but inside they were idolaters. Anything that replaces God in our affections and our obedience is an idol. It can be wealth, notoriety, knowledge, immorality, substance abuse, or a host of other evils. The result is the same: hypocrisy!

Friday: Personal Repentance: Ezekiel 14:6-11

When people won't receive the truth that saves, God may send them *"strong delusion"* that they would believe a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11). The condition of a person's heart determines how they will respond to God's testing. A person isn't lost because of the sins of the group—God calls each "one" of us to personal repentance. We must turn to Him with our whole heart.

Saturday: False Hopes: Ezekiel 14:12-23

Four judgments are described in this passage: famine (Ezekiel 14:12-14); wild beasts (Ezekiel 14:15-16); the sword (Ezekiel 14:17-18); and pestilence (Ezekiel 14:19-20). Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job, were with them, (men who had all been tested and proved faithful), it wouldn't have saved them. There is no such thing as "borrowed faith." Another's testimony will not save us! In Ezekiel 14:21-23, God's judgments are finally understood to be deserved.

Lesson 5: Parables of Failure

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 15:1-17:24

Memory Verse: *“Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.”* Ezekiel 16:60

Introduction:

Why do bad things happen to nice people in this life? Jerusalem’s siege and destruction was a horrible deathtrap to its inhabitants. Were these people drastically different than us? Some people are forced to suffer pain and sorrow more than others. It seems unfair, and its purpose often eludes us as we end up asking, “Why?”

God uses trials and even calamities for a twofold purpose: both to purify and to destroy. One of the hardest tasks the prophets had was to make the people understand that God’s judgment did not need to be the end of life. God’s desire was to purify and reclaim His own. Judgment came primarily to cleanse and restore.

Yet, the absolute holiness of God demands an appropriate response. He hopes that all men will repent, turning back to Him with their whole hearts when they have failed. All of mankind, both ancient and modern, are spiritual failures. We all need the Savior to wash us and cleanse us from our sin. But what does God do if time after time the judgments fall upon those who are too stubborn to truly repent? Will He patiently endure sinfulness forever? No. There are times when the only answer is to render total destruction. Righteousness demands it. God would not be the Holy One He is without enforcing an end to sinfulness.

As is often the case, however, men look angrily toward heaven and shake their fists to the clouds as though God is somehow unjust and hateful. He is pictured by many as nothing more than a sadistic “Punisher,” just ready and waiting for us to fail so He can smack us over the heads with harsh judgment. What we fail to account for is our own failure. We plod along, focusing our indignation upon God, forgetting that our failures are the real issue. We are so unwilling to account for our sins, using any excuse we can find to justify them, while God is cast in a hateful, negative light. It is time for all of us to rethink our positions on what is right and just. God is not the problem.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. Compare the parable of the useless vine wood in Ezekiel 15:1-8 with Jesus’ parable of salt and light in Matthew 5:13-16. What is essential for us to learn from these teachings?
2. List the tremendous benefits from Ezekiel 16:1-14 that the people of Jerusalem had experienced because of God’s great love.
3. What did the people of Jerusalem do with the precious gifts the Lord gave them? (Ezekiel 16:15-34) Why does it seem much easier in times of prosperity to forget about God?
4. God had destroyed both Sodom and the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria) for their abominations. How did the sins of Judah compare to their sins? (Ezekiel 16:46-52)
5. God promised restoration for Judah, but the covenant of their “youth” would be changed. How would it be different? (Ezekiel 16:60; Jeremiah 36:32-44; Hebrews 9:11-15)
6. Envision the riddle of the two eagles and the first two shoots. (Ezekiel 17:1-21) Why was it significant that God spoke to the exiled people in this form?
7. Explain the meaning of the “third shoot.” (Ezekiel 17:22-23)
8. Identify the “*high tree*,” the “*low tree*,” the “*green tree*,” and the “*dry tree*,” in Ezekiel 17:24.

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 5

Sunday: Worthless Vine: Ezekiel 15:1-8

During the reign of David and the early years of Solomon, Israel was a fragrant and fruitful vine. When Solomon introduced idolatry into their customs, the nation began to bear “*wild grapes*” (Isaiah 5:2). Ezekiel points out how worthless a vine is that has become unfruitful. Wood from a grapevine is worthless. Even as fuel for a fire its quality is poor. As the parable teaches, God’s people had become utterly worthless—a very difficult message to receive.

Monday: A Great Love: Ezekiel 16:1-14

Israel is depicted as a child, unwanted and unloved, who was abandoned and left to die. God rescues her, nurtures and raises her, and she later became His wife. No suitor wanted a daughter who was forsaken by her own parents. Even though they were then enslaved in Egypt and would have to be redeemed, God claimed her and delivered her. At Mt. Sinai, He entered into a “marriage covenant” with Israel (Deuteronomy 32:1-14). As long as Israel obeyed Him, she prospered abundantly.

Tuesday: A Great Sin: Ezekiel 16:15-34

Fame and prosperity often turn the hearts of men aside from God. So, it was with Israel. Using the generous gifts God has graced her with, she begins to commit idolatry, abandoning her covenantal “Husband” for false gods. This passage reveals that Israel went far beyond committing adultery but became a professional prostitute. Even worse, she paid her wicked lovers to sin with her! She gave her gold, garments, jewels, and even her children to the worshiping of idols. At this point, she also stopped trusting in the God of heaven, hiring the armies of other nations to protect her. Pride and ingratitude were her undoing.

Wednesday: A Great Discipline: Ezekiel 16:35-52

According to God’s law, prostitutes were to be burned (Leviticus 21:9), adulterers stoned (Leviticus 20:10), and idolaters slain by the sword and their possessions burned (Deuteronomy 13:12-18). God used the Babylonian army to inflict these exact judgments on the people of Israel. After announcing their crimes and sentence (Ezekiel 16:35-42), God defends the sentence (Ezekiel 16:43-52). Israel had forgotten what God had done for them (Ezekiel 16:43) and misunderstood how deep their sins really were (Ezekiel 16:44-52).

Thursday: A Great Restoration: Ezekiel 16:53-63

The term “bring back their captives” actually means to “restore their fortunes.” There was a partial restoration when Judah was brought back from exile, but the complete restoration is in the future. Israel will see and accept their true Messiah, weep over their sins, and enter into His kingdom (Zechariah 12:9-13:1). This work can only be done because of the atoning work of the Lamb.

Friday: Two Eagles — Two Shoots: Ezekiel 17:1-21

A parable is normally used to make a truth more clear. This parable is referred to more accurately as a riddle—a story whose main focus is to obscure the true meaning. Its purpose is to grip the minds of the hearers to ponder its secrets. The eagles refer to King Nebuchadnezzar and to the Pharaoh of Egypt at the time. The first two shoots (Ezekiel 17:12-13) refer to King Jehoiachin and King Zedekiah.

Saturday: The Third Shoot: Ezekiel 17:22-24

The third shoot, the tender shoot (Isaiah 53:2) that would grow up from lowliness and become the greatest of all, the one who will shade all the righteous inhabitants, is Jesus Christ. God will pull down the mighty and exalt His own. The “*dry tree*” (Ezekiel 17:24) will be made to flourish for the blessing of His people.

Lesson 6: The Justice of God

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 18:1-21:32

Memory Verse: *“But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.”* Ezekiel 18:21

Introduction:

Excuses. When bad things befall us, it seems we always want to put the blame for it on someone or something else. We hear things like, “If it wasn’t for my parents, I would have turned out better,” or “If it wasn’t for our government, we’d be able to prosper so much better,” or “If the school I attended had been better, I’d be able to get a higher-paying job.” Some of the worst we hear are, “I could be a better Christian, if it wasn’t for the people who attend my church,” or “If we had a better pastor and more capable elders, our church would be growing.”

While our excuses may have some seeds of truth in them, the real problem seems to be that we just don’t want to assume responsibility or be accountable for our situation in life. In fact, we so easily point the finger at anyone or anything else to justify our own poor choices, that we sometimes point the finger at God. “Why isn’t God blessing us?” “Why isn’t God answering our prayers?” “Why doesn’t the Lord reward us better for our good actions?” Yes, rather than take personal responsibility, we will often blame even the Lord. He’s able to do anything, right? So why doesn’t He do something to bless us?

Ezekiel 18-21 focuses upon the perfect justice of God. He knows and sees all—He knows the complete truth. He judges each individual on the basis of their own thoughts and actions. The righteous man is rewarded for his rightness, and the wicked for their failures. The Apostle Paul wrote this truth concerning God’s absolute justice in Galatians 6:7-9: *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”*

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. What was Ezekiel trying to explain in telling the story of the three men in the same family? (Ezekiel 18:5-18)
2. Describe Ezekiel’s response to the accusation that God was being unfair and unjust to His people. (Ezekiel 18:19-32)
3. What illustrations did Ezekiel use to depict Judah’s horrible leadership failures? (Ezekiel 19:1-14)
4. How did Israel conduct themselves toward God in Egypt, at Mt. Sinai, and in the wilderness? (Ezekiel 20:1-26)
5. How did Israel conduct themselves toward God after they entered the promised land? (Ezekiel 20:27-30)
6. How were the exiles conducting themselves in Babylon? (Ezekiel 20:31-32)
7. What does Ezekiel reveal about Israel’s future through God’s “I will” statements? (Ezekiel 20:33-44)
8. What is the terrible news that Ezekiel conveys to the exiles by groaning like a man in pain, and by smiting his thigh and clapping his hands? (Ezekiel 21:1-17)
9. What is the one word of hope that Ezekiel shares in this doom message? (Ezekiel 21:27)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 6

Sunday: Three Men: Ezekiel 18:1-18

Ezekiel refutes the erroneous proverb that God would punish children for the sins of their fathers (Ezekiel 18:1-4). The truth is illustrated by imagining three men in the same family. It begins with a righteous father: a man who keeps God's law and would not die because of sin (Ezekiel 18:4-9). He avoids sinful offenses and models godly virtues. His unrighteous son (Ezekiel 18:10-13) models sinful behavior and wickedness and will die for it. The third man (Ezekiel 18:14-18) is the son of the second man. He follows after his grandfather's righteous living. He isn't condemned because of his father's life but is granted life for his own righteous virtue. The real point was: A man can't blame his ancestors—God punishes him for his own wickedness.

Monday: Who is to Blame?: Ezekiel 18:19-32

Ezekiel shows that if a wicked man will repent, He will live (Ezekiel 18:19-23), and if a righteous man returns to sinning, he will die (Ezekiel 18:24). A person's destiny is determined by their own choices. Some of the exiles were actually bold enough to blame God, believing Him to be "unfair." But again, they were in error. When they obeyed the Lord, they wanted Him to keep the terms of the covenant promising blessing, but when they disobeyed, they didn't want to accept the negative consequences.

Tuesday: Leadership Failures: Ezekiel 19:1-14

Referring to the terrible failures of Judah's leaders, Ezekiel used two images: the lioness (Ezekiel 19:1-9), and the vine (Ezekiel 19:10-14). The style of wording is a ridiculing funeral dirge for Israel's "princes" (purposefully avoiding their "kingly" titles in sarcasm). Israel is seen as a short-lived "lioness" torn down in her prime, and a once fruitful vine that now lies barren in waste.

Wednesday: From Bondage to Exile: Ezekiel 20:1-32

God compels Ezekiel to give his Jewish audience a history lesson concerning God's goodness and Israel's defiance. The lesson began with Israel in Egypt (Ezekiel 20:5-8), to the exodus (Ezekiel 20:9-10), and then to their camping for two years at Mt. Sinai where God showed His glory and gave them His laws. Divine provision was also made for them in the desert wilderness. Despite God's care, they remained stubborn and ungrateful!

Thursday: I Will!: Ezekiel 20:33-44

The powerful "I will" statements of God in this reading apply to Israel as a future righteous kingdom. They reveal both God's mercy and power. Take note of each powerful "I will" statement: (1) rule over you (Ezekiel 20:33); (2) bring you out (Ezekiel 20:34); (3) bring you into the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:35-36, to deal with their sin and cleanse them); (4) bring you into the bond of the covenant (Ezekiel 20:37); purge out the rebels (Ezekiel 20:38); and (5) accept you (Ezekiel 20:41).

Friday: The Sword Readied: Ezekiel 20:45-21:17

True to His character and covenant, God punishes His people for rebellion. Ezekiel "sets his face" toward the "south," meaning Judah and Jerusalem. The fire is the judgment to come upon them. God then draws the sword (Ezekiel 21:1-7), and then sharpens it (Ezekiel 21:8-17). Ezekiel conveys God's message by (1) groaning like a man in pain and grief, and (2) by smiting his thigh and clapping his hands together. Judgment was imminent.

Saturday: The Task Completed: Ezekiel 21:18-32

In these grim verses, God directs the Babylonian army in making their attack. The great and mighty would now be humbled, and the humble would be exalted. Again, God looks toward restoration, as the Messiah is again promised (Ezekiel 21:27).

Lesson 7: Behold the Abominations!

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 22:1-24:27

Memory Verse: *“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.”* Ezekiel 22:30

Introduction:

Judah has committed social sins (injustice and violence against humanity), and sins directly against God. The sins against their fellow man have resulted in their “guilt,” and for this they are deserving of punishment. For their sins directly against God have resulted in their “defilement,” meaning they were unfit to appear in God’s presence. The combination of both signals the “doom” Judah has brought on itself. They had “come to the end of [their] years” (Ezekiel 22:4). The time for judgment was come.

The charges are levelled directly at the “princes of Israel,” which was often applied to the former kings of Judah. A continuing history of sin on the part of Judah’s leadership was a primary reason for the judgment to come. The kings were ultimately responsible to establish justice in the land, especially to protect the poor and weak (Psalm 72:1-4).

Most of the sins listed are from breaking the Holiness Code of Leviticus 18-20; 25. Sadly, they had “forgotten” the LORD. Deuteronomy 8:19 made the penalty for this clear: *“Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish.”*

The ensuing judgment of God would be seen in opposite ways: judgment by scattering the exiles among the nations, and judgment by gathering Israel into Jerusalem for painful and complete destruction.

In this section, Ezekiel focuses on four final events: (1) the end of the city (Ezekiel 22, discussed above); (2) the end of the kingdom (Ezekiel 23); (3) the end of a delusion (Ezekiel 24:1-14); and (4) the end of a marriage (Ezekiel 24:15-27). The section is sadly climaxed by the death of Ezekiel’s own wife, which God used as yet another sign to His chosen people.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. How did God feel about the violent social injustices in Jerusalem? (Ezekiel 22:1-12)
2. How was Judah worshiping God hypocritically? (Ezekiel 22:8)
3. Explain how God’s people were debased, deceitful, and disappointing. (Ezekiel 22:23-31)
4. What was the visual message that “Oholah’s” sins and judgment should have conveyed to her sister, “Oholibah?” (Ezekiel 23:1-13)
5. How did “Oholibah” turn out spiritually? (Ezekiel 23:14-21)
6. What four judgment oracles against Judah did Ezekiel share with the exiles? (Ezekiel 23:22-35)
7. What delusion embraced by Judah (and the exiles) was exposed and dashed by the action sermon of the “boiling pot?” (Ezekiel 24:1-14)
8. Explain how God used the death of Ezekiel’s own wife as an action message to the Jewish peoples? (Ezekiel 24:15-27)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 7

Sunday: Guilty, Defiled, and Doomed: Ezekiel 22:1-22

In Ezekiel 22:1-12, three grievous sins are named: the shedding of innocent blood, the worship of false gods, and the profaning of that which was sacred (the holy things and the Sabbath). Officials in Jerusalem were accepting bribes, condemning innocent people to death so others could gain their properties. They defiled the temple with false idols, and by worshipping God hypocritically. In Ezekiel 22:9-11, Ezekiel then exposed their immorality. In Ezekiel 22:13-22, God strikes His hands angrily, pronouncing judgment.

Monday: Debased-Deceitful-Disappointing: Ezekiel 22:23-31

All of Judah's society is shown guilty as the prophet points at the princes (Ezekiel 22:25, 27), the priests (Ezekiel 22:26), the false prophets (Ezekiel 22:28), and the people (Ezekiel 22:29). Why are they guilty? First, they were debased (Ezekiel 22:23-27): sin lowers people to act like beasts (Proverbs 7:21-23). They were also deceitful (Ezekiel 22:28): rather than exposing sin, the religious and political leadership whitewashed it! Third, they were disappointing (Ezekiel 22:30-31): the city would be spared for just one righteous man. There were none.

Tuesday: A Warning Ignored: Ezekiel 23:1-13

For trusting in other nations for their salvation and security, God speaks of two sisters: Oholah (the northern kingdom), and Oholah (the southern kingdom, Judah). Oholah entered into gross sins, and her rejection and ensuing judgment by God stood as testimony to her sister, but Judah ignored the sins of Israel. "Oholah" means "her tent"—the northern kingdom had their own sanctuary and priesthood, and their idols and shrines throughout the land. "Oholibah" means "My tent is in her"—God's glory still present in the temple in Jerusalem at that time.

Wednesday: More Sin than Samaria: Ezekiel 23:14-21

When "Oholibah" (Judah) witnessed the sins and judgment of "Oholah" (Israel), she should have quickly and fully repented of her terrible sins. What did she do? She sinned even more terribly than her sister! As Israel admired the Assyrian armies that would become their final undoing, so Judah begins to admire and fraternize with the Babylonians (see Hezekiah's terrible mistake in Isaiah 39). Jehoiakim asked Babylon to help him break Egypt's power (Ezekiel 23:35-24:7), making Judah a vassal state of Babylon. We must always beware thinking that we will somehow escape deserved judgment.

Thursday: Wrath to Come: Ezekiel 23:22-35

If God has punished the northern kingdom, Israel, for her sins, then Judah must be punished for her even deeper sins. Four oracles are given: (1) God would bring the Babylonians to punish Judah, just as He brought Assyria to punish Israel (Ezekiel 23:22-27); (2) the people were reminded that God's judgment was just (Ezekiel 23:28-31); (3) the deep cup filled with God's wrath (Ezekiel 23:32-34); (4) forgetting God (Ezekiel 23:35), leaving Him out of their lives.

Friday: Ending a Delusion: Ezekiel 24:1-14

There would be no relief for Judah. Ezekiel shows the best cuts of meat (Judah) being boiled in a pot (the siege of Jerusalem) with the bones until entirely consumed. The burned mess would be poured out, and then the pot itself burned!

Saturday: Ending a Marriage: Ezekiel 24:15-27

In order to preach this action message, Ezekiel had to see his wife die suddenly, and he was not allowed to show grief over it! He could only groan quietly. This was symbolic of God taking the holy city from the Jews—the loss would be severe.

Lesson 8: Judgment Beyond Judah

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 25:1-28:26

Memory Verse: *“And there shall no longer be a pricking brier or a painful thorn for the house of Israel from among all who are around them, who despise them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord God.”* Ezekiel 28:24

Introduction:

The prophecies of Ezekiel move into a new section: oracles against the nation’s surrounding Judah. Six oracles are contained in Ezekiel 25-29, with a huge seventh oracle against Egypt in Ezekiel 30-32. It’s rather interesting that the prophecies against the nations surrounding Judah are arranged in clockwise fashion: Ammon, in the Transjordan to the northeast, then moving south to Moab and Edom, then west to Philistia in the southern coastal plain, and then north to the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon.

When we recall that Ezekiel was primarily addressing the exiles from Judah, we might wonder what is contained in these oracles for the Judean audience. First, the oracles give assurance that God doesn’t have a double standard, judging only Israel’s sins while other nations are left alone to behave as they desire. While judgment begins at the House of God, it certainly doesn’t end there. All nations, kindreds, and tribes are held to strict accountability. All of them must come to *“know that I am the Lord,”* accepting Him as the only true God. Romans 14:11-12 states clearly: *“For it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”*

Secondly, despite the outpouring of God’s wrath on His people, they still remain His people. They are eternally precious to Him. The charges declared to each of the foreign nations in Ezekiel 25 are because they have persecuted and/or insulted God’s chosen people, and thereby have insulted God Himself.

Thirdly, the Judean hearers are reminded that God has His own consistent designs behind all the events of history: most importantly, to bring glory to Himself through all peoples.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. What reason did God give for the judgment of the Ammonites? (Ezekiel 25:3, 6)
2. What reason did God give for His judgment on the people of Moab? (Ezekiel 25:8)
3. For what reasons was Edom brought to judgment? (Ezekiel 25:12)
4. Why did God pronounce judgment upon the Philistines? (Ezekiel 25:15)
5. What was Tyre’s offense against the LORD God? (Ezekiel 26:2)
[Editorial comment: The total destruction of the city of Tyre is actually accomplished as is written in Scripture, but there is a gap of time between Ezekiel 26:11 and Ezekiel 26:12 of 240 years. The Babylonian army began the smiting judgment when the city of Tyre was destroyed on the mainland in around 573 B.C., after a siege of 13 years. The city was rebuilt by the Phoenicians on an island, but it was also destroyed in 332 B.C. by the Grecian Army led by Alexander the Great. The Greeks actually laid the stones and timber of the city in the water (Ezekiel 26:12b) to build a causeway across the sea to allow conquest of the island city. Catching the sand carried by the ocean tides, the causeway that was constructed allowed the water level to rise, and even today fishermen spread their nets over what were once the city’s beaches!]
6. How was Tyre’s power and wealth characterized by Ezekiel? (Ezekiel 27:1-25) What exactly would happen to Tyre’s “unshakable” economic stability and military might? (Ezekiel 27:26-36)
7. Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the “prince” and the “king” of Tyre. (Ezekiel 28:1-19)
8. What would be the important result of God’s destruction of Sidon? (Ezekiel 28:22-23)
9. At the end of these judgment oracles, what positive Message does Ezekiel share with the exiles? (Ezekiel 28:24-26)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 8

Sunday: Ammon & Moab: Ezekiel 25:1-11

The Ammonites and Moabites were related to Israel through Lot, Abraham's nephew. Ammon and Moab were born out of incestuous relations between Lot and his two daughters (Genesis 19:29-38). Despite their relationship to Israel, these nations had a deep-seated hatred against them. In many of these judgment oracles, God gave the "because" reason, and then the "therefore" of judgment. Ammon had joined with Moab in attacking Judah, although they were soundly defeated (2 Chronicles 20). They rejoiced when Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed by Babylon, but it would be the Babylonians that God would use to eventually destroy them! Moab was a proud nation who believed themselves to be geographically impregnable, being located in the high mountains east of the Dead Sea. Still, God used the Assyrians to totally obliterate them from the earth.

Monday: Edom & Philistia: Ezekiel 25:12-17

Edom was also related to Israel—descendants of Jacob's twin brother, Esau (Genesis 25:30). Sustaining their hatred of Israel through their generations, they also rejoiced over Judah's fall to Babylon. Obadiah wrote that God would destroy Edom for their treatment of the Jews (Obadiah 1:10-14). Their hatred would lead to their destruction. The Philistines had been Israel's bitter enemies since Israel entered Canaan. God would send Babylon to overwhelm them and deport their peoples.

Tuesday: Judgment on Tyre: Ezekiel 26:1-21

Four key elements are shown in God's judgment on the Phoenicians (Tyre and Sidon): (1) destruction's announcement (Ezekiel 26:1-6); (2) destruction accomplished (Ezekiel 26:7-14); (3) destruction lamented (Ezekiel 26:15-18); and (4) destruction everlasting (Ezekiel 26:19-21).

Wednesday: The Ship of Tyre: Ezekiel 27:1-25

A funeral dirge is used by Ezekiel to ridicule the pride and self-confidence of Tyre's power and wealth, built and maintained on the strength of its vast sea trade. Tyre's "ship" was useful and beautiful (Ezekiel 27:1-7), and its crew was "international" (Ezekiel 27:8-11). Tyre tied the nations of the Mediterranean together trade-wise, profiting richly from them all (Ezekiel 27:12-25).

Thursday: Sinking the Ship: Ezekiel 27:26-36

There was never a ship built that couldn't be sunk, although some have made the claim—such as the great battleships Bismarck and Yamato in WW II (both sunk during the war), and the luxury liner Titanic (sunk on her maiden voyage by colliding with an iceberg). The mocking admiration of Ezekiel 27:1-25 turns to desolation in Ezekiel 27:26-36, as Tyre's powerful trade "ship" is shattered and lost in the heart of the sea.

Friday: Tyre's Ruler(s): Ezekiel 28:1-19

It seems that two different persons are addressed: Tyre's prince (Ezekiel 28:1-10), and Tyre's king (Ezekiel 28:11-19). The prince (called a man, Ezekiel 28:2), would be destroyed by foreign invaders (Ezekiel 28:7-10), while its king (called the "anointed cherub," Ezekiel 28:14) would be punished directly by God (Ezekiel 28:16-19). The prince's demise is from pride in his wisdom and wealth (Ezekiel 28:3-5). The king is identified as a "cherub" (Ezekiel 28:4, 16), and what is written about him has led many to apply these scriptures to the fallen angel, Lucifer (Satan), whose downfall was also from pride (see Isaiah 14:14).

Saturday: Sidon, and Promises to Israel: Ezekiel 28:20-26

For their conflicts with Israel, Sidon would now be judged (Ezekiel 28:20-23). Having dealt with Israel's immediate neighbors, God promises Judah's peace and regathering (Ezekiel 28:24-26).

Lesson 9: Pharaoh and All His Army

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 29:1-32:32

Memory Verse: *“In that day I will cause the horn of the house of Israel to spring forth, and I will open your mouth to speak in their midst. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.”* Ezekiel 29:21

Introduction:

The seventh and final judgment oracle is pronounced upon Egypt. It actually contains seven sub-oracles in itself, and threatens judgment on both the land of Egypt and its ruler, Pharaoh Hophra, who ruled Egypt from 589 to 570 B.C. Each part was introduced by “the word of the Lord came,” or a similar statement denoted each part. Each message painted a descriptive picture of God’s coming judgment of Egypt.

Egypt had been a major player in world events throughout Israel’s history. In Egyptian bondage, God’s chosen people had suffered greatly as working slaves. After the division of the Jewish kingdom, Judah found Egypt to be a constant thorn in the flesh, and an undependable ally. Yet, whenever facing a crisis, Judah looked to Egypt for assistance. They seemed to forget the hardships their forefathers had experienced under the demanding hands of the Egyptians, and were prone to idealize their experiences there.

King Solomon married an Egyptian princess and went on to conduct a lot of business with Egypt. After the king died, those strong bonds began to fail. Isaiah had warned: *“Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the LORD! Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; And their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out His hand, both he who helps will fall, and he who is helped will fall down; they all will perish together.”* (Isaiah 31:1, 3)

What would the oracles to Egypt mean to the exiles? Hopefully, that Judah would never again look to them for political or military assistance. They were to rely entirely on God.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. Why was Egypt’s pharaoh compared to a sea monster? (Ezekiel 29:3) What kind of future would Egypt have after their regathering? (Ezekiel 29:13-16)
2. Why did God demand wages from Egypt in the second judgment oracle against them? (Ezekiel 29:17-21)
3. Identify the four parts of the storm oracle in Ezekiel 30:1-19.
4. Explain the significance of the breaking of Egypt’s arms. (Ezekiel 30:20-26)
5. How would Ezekiel’s fifth oracle against Egypt have shaken their self-confidence? (Ezekiel 31:1-18)
6. What kind of statement would Egypt’s entrapment be to the other nations of the world, according to Ezekiel’s sixth oracle to Egypt? (Ezekiel 32:10) How would the nations react to Egypt’s punishment? (Ezekiel 32:16)
7. Describe the scene envisioned in Ezekiel’s seventh oracle against Egypt. (Ezekiel 32:17-32) Is there any kind of social or political hierarchy alluded to in the grave?
8. Contrast what is revealed about Egypt in these oracles with the people who God selects and utilizes. (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 9

Sunday: Killing the Monster, Oracle I: Ezekiel 29:1-16

The Nile was essential to Egypt's livelihood—so much so the river was treated like a god. Hophra is compared to a ferocious crocodile who guarded the waters of the land, attacking any who challenged his claims. His pride (Ezekiel 29:1-5), and his disloyalty to Israel (Ezekiel 29:6-7) would be his downfall. God would bring the Babylonians to destroy them (Ezekiel 29:8-12). After 40 yrs., God would regather Egypt's exiles and allow them to reestablish their kingdom, but it would always remain diminished (Ezekiel 29:13-16).

Monday: Wages Demanded, Oracle II: Ezekiel 29:17-21

Babylon's extensive, prolonged siege against the city of Tyre had been a huge expense to Nebuchadnezzar's regime. Most of Tyre's wealth had been transported away from the city by their naval fleet prior to the city's collapse, and Egypt had actually helped the Phoenicians to accomplish the transfer. God would allow Nebuchadnezzar's expenses to be compensated by Egypt's wealth! The oracle is capped by a promise of restored strength (the horn) to the nation of Judah (Ezekiel 29:21).

Tuesday: A Storm Announced, Oracle III: Ezekiel 30:1-19

The oracle of the storm has four distinct parts: (1) the announcement that the storm is coming (Ezekiel 30:1-5), that would bring calamity upon Egypt and her allies, including Ethiopia (Cush), Put (an African nation), Lud (Lydia), the Arabian nations, Cub (Libya), and "the people of the covenant" who were likely Jews serving as Egyptian mercenaries; (2) Egypt's desolation (Ezekiel 30:6-9); (3) God's use of Babylon to punish Egypt (Ezekiel 30:10-12); and (4) the impossibility of escaping God's wrath (Ezekiel 30:13-19). Why is it the nations never understand that God loves and protects Israel?

Wednesday: Breaking the Bones, Oracle IV: Ezekiel 30:20-26

Egypt would be helpless when God broke both of their arms (Egypt's military might). No splints would be applied, nor would any bandages cover their wounds. The Egyptians were first broken at Carchemish in 605 b.c., when Babylon defeated Pharaoh Necho (2 Kings 24:7). Pharaoh Hophra was defeated trying to help Judah when Jerusalem was attacked (Ezekiel 37:5).

Thursday: Felling the Tree, Oracle V: Ezekiel 31:1-18

Egypt was indeed great but was overshadowed by the might of Assyria. The argument Ezekiel promotes in this oracle is that if Assyria was conquered by Babylon, then Babylon was also strong enough to conquer Egypt. He compared Egypt to Assyria's greatness (Ezekiel 31:1-9), then graphically described Assyria's fall like the cutting down of a mighty tree (Ezekiel 31:10-14). The imagery is capped by describing Assyria's burial (Ezekiel 31:15-18).

Friday: Trapping the Monster, Oracle VI: Ezekiel 32:1-16

No matter how mighty and powerful Egypt's ruler (as a young lion, or a large whale—or dragon of the sea), God would bring an overwhelming force against him and capture him with a great net, then allow the surrounding nations to feast on his flesh (wealth and might). Egypt's downfall and destruction will be so complete that the nations of the world will be in awe (Ezekiel 32:10) and will sorely lament her passing (Ezekiel 32:16).

Saturday: Burying the Corpse, Oracle VII: Ezekiel 32:17-32

The downfall of Egypt is so dramatic that Ezekiel is told to wail for her vast multitude, who will descend into sheol—the realm of the dead. The scene is macabre, with other godless peoples also in sheol, all taunting the Egyptians as they enter. In the grave, all pride and beauty is stripped away forever.

Lesson 10: Spiritual Watchman

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 33:1-35:15

Memory Verse: *“Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’”* Ezekiel 33:11

Introduction:

Up until this point in the proclamations of Ezekiel, the news was mostly bad. Finally, the prophet declares positive words of hope with the exiles. After the exiles receive the news of Jerusalem’s fall, so they can fully appreciate the truth of judgment that the prophet has proclaimed to them, the future forecast turns bright.

Ezekiel 33-36 speak of the Promised Land and the holy city, Jerusalem, being restored. After this, the divided kingdom of Judah and Israel would be reunited under God’s divine protection (Ezekiel 37-39). Ezekiel then shared an incredible vision of a brand-new temple, a new sanctuary that the glory of God would inhabit to dwell among His people (Ezekiel 40-48).

Ezekiel 33-35 contain warning and promises from the “watchman.” Prophetic hindsight (the pronouncement against past failures and God’s ensuing judgment, and prophetic foresight (announcing future promises and blessings for obedience), were both important facets of a prophet’s ministry. However, the most valuable element these watchmen provided were in the realm of “insight.” Insight assists in understanding ourselves, especially our weaknesses and shortcomings. It also helps us to understand how to become better, more obedient people. Ezekiel will utilize hindsight, foresight, and insight through these three chapters to expose sin, analyze the situation, and instill hope for the future.

The people seemed to think that their main problem was that God was actually unjust, that He has overreacted to Judah’s failures. The prophet is directed to open their eyes, not only to the perfect justice and equity of God, but to help them better understand the depths and ugliness of their sins. The acknowledgement of our awful sinfulness, and the need we have of God’s forgiveness and salvation is the first step to the positive change that needs to be made in our lives.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. What is God’s true desire for every soul? (Ezekiel 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9)
2. What does Ezekiel reveal about those left to tend the land in Judah after Jerusalem’s fall? (Ezekiel 33:25-29)
3. How will the exiles’ opinion of Ezekiel drastically change with news of Jerusalem’s fall? (Ezekiel 33:30-33)
4. Describe what had happened to God’s flock (the nation of Judah) because of the ravages of their leaders’ failures. (Ezekiel 34:1-10)
5. What is God’s special future plan for His scattered flock? (Ezekiel 34:11-22)
6. After all the centuries of struggle, wars, tumults, and painful experiences, what do you think Ezekiel’s prophecy about their future restoration to dwell in the land of promise in prosperity and safety meant to God’s people? (Ezekiel 34:23-31)
7. What had the Edomites done against Israel, and what would be God’s responsive judgment against them? (Ezekiel 35:5-15)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 10

Sunday: A Whole Nation in Peril: Ezekiel 33:1-20

Faithful watchmen don't always cry out what people want to hear, but they cry out the truth in spite of public opinion. Not one of God's people was left out of divine scrutiny. Every life was examined and the truth blatantly told: without individual true repentance they would perish. Repentance requires more than regret (just being "sorry") or remorse (being sorry and feeling woe for our actions). True repentance also involves an act of the will, abhorring what we've done, renouncing our sin, and submitting to God for a lasting and thorough change of our ways.

Monday: People of the Land: Ezekiel 33:21-29

The few Jews left in the land of Judah to tend it for their captors felt they were somehow special in being awarded such an assignment. But Ezekiel exposes their abominations in specific terms: (1) eating meat with the blood still in it; (2) worshiping idols; (3) murder; (4) relying on violence; (5) and other sins, such as adultery. For their sins, they would die by sword, by beasts, or by pestilence. The land of Judah would be left barren.

Tuesday: Exiles in Babylon: Ezekiel 33:30-33

The night before the exiles in Babylon receive the news of Jerusalem's collapse and the temple's destruction, God loosed Ezekiel's lips so that he could speak normally. Other than the prophetic message, he had been mute among the people for about seven and a half years! But something special was about to happen, so that the prophet's mouth would be needed to do a pastoral work in addition to the prophetic message. When the exiles received the news about Jerusalem, they realized that a true prophet had been among them. Their opinion of him was raised far above that of a religious "entertainer."

Wednesday: The Sheep Exploited: Ezekiel 34:1-10

Kings and officers in Judah were often referred to as "shepherds." It was their responsibility to give the people proper care, protect them, and provide for them. Most of these leaders had been extremely selfish, abusing and exploiting the people for their own profit. A neglected flock becomes a scattered flock. A scattered flock becomes an easy target for predators. God's heart of love intervenes to expose the leadership failures.

Thursday: Rescuing the Flock: Ezekiel 34:11-22

What hope was there for God's abused and scattered flock? The hope of the omnipotent God, Himself! Speaking even beyond the scope of restoring the exiles back to the land of promise, Ezekiel prophesies of an end time that the Lord will gather His flock "...from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day" (Ezekiel 34:12). There will one day be a literal regathering and precious uniting of Israel.

Friday: Protection for the Flock: Ezekiel 34:23-31

Pointing toward a future time when God's people will enjoy "*showers of blessing*" and have the perfect ruler/shepherd caring for them (their Messiah-King), the people are given reassurance of dwelling in protected safety. In the future kingdom, God will smile upon His people, and dwell in their midst!

Saturday: The Sins of Edom: Ezekiel 35:1-15

The Lord revisits His judgments upon Edom (descendants of Esau) and adds some details. Because the Edomites had carried on a perpetual hatred against Israel, so God would make the land of the Edomites a perpetual desolation. Greedy for the lands of Judah and Samaria, they had joined with the Babylonians in attacking Jerusalem. God would not forget!

Lesson 11: Restoration and Reunion

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 36:1-37:28

Memory Verse: *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”* Ezekiel 36:26-27

Introduction:

In his previous messages, Ezekiel had looked back in time at the history of Judah’s sins. Now comes a radical change, as the prophet looks to the future, and brings an encouraging message for their future. Going far beyond the end of their Babylonian captivity, the prophet shares how the land will be cleansed and restored to its former prosperity. God’s people will be given a new temple, and the presence of God’s glory will be returned into their midst. Restoration, regeneration, resurrection, and reunion are all descriptive of the Lord’s plans for them. Why was God planning such a tremendous blessing for such a rebellious people?

We would do well to remember that Israel was not chosen because they were better than other nations. God hadn’t chosen Jacob because he was greater than Esau—neither had He chosen Israel because they were better than Edom. The choice was simply God’s own good pleasure and purpose.

Understanding this is important. God is not suddenly acting favorably toward Israel because they were spiritually deserving. His promises to them are based on the honor of His own name. Despite their failure and stubborn rebellion toward God, He would remain true to the covenant promises made to Abraham—a promise that was never contingent on their faithfulness, but upon His own.

Such is the surety of God’s unfathomable love. It is based not upon our being deserving, but entirely upon His mercy and grace. His love is certain because He is. He cares for His people because He is God. He will restore them, reunite them, revive and resurrect them, and abide among them—He is God. His promises are based entirely on the integrity of His name. He is immovable, immeasurable, beyond incredible, and entirely, infinitely, beyond human comprehension. He—is—God!

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. How does Ezekiel describe the healing of the land of Israel? (Ezekiel 36:1-15)
2. Why was an indictment proclaimed against the Jews? (Ezekiel 36:16-23).
3. Discuss the incredible benefits that will be realized when God transforms Israel. (Ezekiel 36:24-38).
4. What was the scene of shameful humiliation that God’s Spirit showed Ezekiel in the valley? (Ezekiel 37:1-3)
5. What is the first step the prophet is to take in restoring the dry bones? (Ezekiel 37:4-8)
6. What important second step is Ezekiel directed to take with the dry bone army? (Ezekiel 37:9-14)
7. Explain the beautiful significance of Ezekiel’s last action sermon. (Ezekiel 37:15-28)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 11

Sunday: Restoration: Ezekiel 36:1-15

The fire of God's jealous love would burn against Israel's enemies (Ezekiel 36:4-6), and they would be put to shame. A future day is described when the land would be healed and would produce an abundance (Ezekiel 36:8-9), and be safe and secure (Ezekiel 36:10-12). The mountains of Israel are accused of depriving the Jews of children—pagan shrines where they had offered their children to false gods. Now, only the true God would be worshiped.

Monday: An Indictment: Ezekiel 36:16-23

God brings an indictment against Israel for two great sins. First, they had polluted God's land (Ezekiel 36:16-19). Disobeying God's law and behaving like the heathen nations around them, they had defiled the land and broken the covenant through their idolatry and by violence toward the weak and defenseless (even toward their own children). Their second sin was by profaning God's name before the world. Rather than being witnesses to the true God, they brought shame to His name (Ezekiel 36:20-23).

Tuesday: The Transformation: Ezekiel 36:24-38

Only a transformed people can enjoy a transformed land. Spiritual transformation is the very work God will do within His people. They will be cleansed from their sins (Ezekiel 36:25, 29). They will also be given a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26; Jeremiah 24:7; and read Deuteronomy 5:29). The refreshing Holy Spirit will also be given them within (Ezekiel 36:27). Fourth, the Lord will claim them again as His people, reestablishing His covenant (Ezekiel 36:28). Fifth, God will make the land to flourish (Ezekiel 36:29-30, 33-35). Sixth, Israel will finally abhor their sins (Ezekiel 36:31-32). The seventh blessing is fellowship with the Lord (Ezekiel 36:37). Eighth, will be the multiplying of their offspring (Ezekiel 36:37-38a). The ninth blessing is that God will be glorified (Ezekiel 36:38b)!

Wednesday: Dry, Dry Bones: Ezekiel 37:1-3

The Spirit of God brings Ezekiel by vision to a valley filled with very dry bones, slain soldiers scattered on the ground, the leftovers from corpses long past. It was shameful to a Jew that a body be left unwashed, unwrapped, and unburied. Sin brings this kind of shame. Ezekiel walks around among the bones, seeing their vast number and their utter dryness.

Thursday: A Dead Army: Ezekiel 37:4-8

Faith. The writer of Hebrews reveals that “...*faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). When Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy to the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:4), he was to exercise faith that what was spoken would come to be (Ezekiel 37:5-6). What the prophet believed took place within the vision. The bones came together, then the flesh and skin came upon them—now a lifeless, sleeping army.

Friday: A Dead Army Lives!: Ezekiel 37:9-14

Ezekiel speaks to the dry bones, and they live! At this point, the LORD gives His servant an explanation of the vision's meaning. The dead, dry bones are symbolic of the entire Jewish nation. One day, they will be called from all the nations where they've been scattered. New life will be infused into them as the breath of the Living God infuses into their being. We should all desire this quickening of life into our own lives.

Saturday: The Kingdom Reunited: Ezekiel 37:15-28

Ezekiel's last action sermon is contained in this passage. Taking two sticks, one representing “Judah,” and the other “Joseph,” Ezekiel announces that the two sticks will become one as he rubs them together—and they did! Israel would be reunited eternally: no more competing with each other, harmoniously unified under one Messiah-King, living in a blessed land.

Lesson 12: Gog, Ruler of Magog

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 38:1-39:29

Memory Verse: *“I will set My glory among the nations; all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day forward.”* Ezekiel 39:21-22

Introduction:

“Gog” is the focus of this week’s study. Ezekiel 38:1-23 addresses Gog’s defeat, while Ezekiel 39:1-29 tells of Gog’s disposal. Both of these depict the absolute defeat of the “ultimate enemy” to strike out against Israel. While Israel lies exposed and vulnerable, God decisively intervenes to divinely protect and deliver them from the threat of all threats!

Some might question that this is an encouraging portion of Scripture, but if viewed the proper way, it is. If the ultimate enemy (Gog) can’t defeat God’s people and keep them from the blessed future God has promised them, then neither can any lesser evil.

Just “who” is Gog? This question has been bandied about by theologians for centuries. Some believe Gog to be completely symbolic of an evil world system, while others have searched for Gog’s identity from the list of enemies in Israel’s past history. From the wording used in Ezekiel 38 and 39, whoever Gog actually is, he is far more treacherous and powerful than what the Assyrians or Babylonians were. Since these nations were actually called and used by God as tools of judgment against His people, they certainly fail to fit Gog’s identity.

Gog and his united, seven-nation force, and the treachery they symbolize, transcend anything seen before on planet earth. Gog is a fear-inducing figure of cosmic proportions—commander-in-chief of a coalition of forces gathered from the ends of the earth. He is from the land of Magog, and rules over Meshech-Tubal. He is allied with Persia, Cush, and Put (Ezekiel 38:5), as well as Gomer and Beth Togarmah (Ezekiel 38:6).

The clash of battle this time leaves dramatically different results, as God’s zeal and fiery wrath are now directed at Gog (Ezekiel 38:18-19). God unleashes an earthquake, torrential rain, hail, burning sulfur, the sword, and cataclysmic bloodshed against the enemy coalition, revealing His power and holiness to all.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. What is the seven-nation coalition united under Gog’s banner? (Ezekiel 38:2, 6)
2. Why does Gog desire the conquest of Israel? (Ezekiel 38:8-13)
3. What sudden calamities will befall Gog’s coalition? (Ezekiel 38:21-22) What will be the result of his defeat? (Ezekiel 38:23)
4. What effect will Gog’s annihilation have upon the nations of the world? (Ezekiel 39:1-8)
5. Describe the cleansing of the land after Gog’s defeat. (Ezekiel 39:9-16)
6. What celebration feast will occur after Gog’s defeat? (Ezekiel 39:17-20)
7. What new blessings will take place as God fully restores Israel to Himself? (Ezekiel 39:21-29)

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 12

Sunday: Gog Summoned: Ezekiel 38:1-7

Despite the power represented by the united coalition of Gog's forces, and although they completely surround Israel, still it is God who has "...put hooks into your jaws" (Ezekiel 38:4). It is actually God who is "pulling the strings." Gog is but a puppet through which the Almighty One will show the world His own majesty and His love for Israel. He recommends to Gog that he "prepare" himself, but Gog's best won't be good enough!

Monday: Gog's Self-Confidence: Ezekiel 38:8-13

The reestablished, reunited nation of Israel looks like easy pickings. They are wealthy, are established on prime real estate, and are in possession of some of the highest regarded holy places on earth. The scent of their wealth and their supposed weakness to defend themselves are perhaps the very hook God uses to draw this mighty army forth against His people. It would appear to Gog that his overwhelming force will find Israel an easy slaughter. This confidence will be his undoing.

Tuesday: Gog Challenged: Ezekiel 38:14-23

God unleashes His fury against Gog as the powerful army enters the land of Israel. A seven-fold coalition, who thought their task easier than an afternoon stroll, will be faced with a seven-fold catastrophe: (1) a mighty earthquake (Ezekiel 38:20); (2) the sword (Ezekiel 38:21); (3) pestilence (Ezekiel 38:22); (4) bloodshed (Ezekiel 38:22); (5) a deluge of rain (Ezekiel 38:22); (6) great hailstones (Ezekiel 38:22); and (7) with fire and brimstone (Ezekiel 38:22). The result of Gog's defeat is primarily two-fold. Despite the power of their enemies, God will keep His promise to Israel in protecting them. The ultimate purpose will be that God will be glorified to the nations—the Great I Am, the Omnipotent, Omniscient, Holy One of Israel!

Wednesday: Gog Shattered: Ezekiel 39:1-8

Gog invades Israel with all gusto, only to be thoroughly routed. In fact, over 83% (5/6 of the enemy coalition) are annihilated! Only the sixth part of Gog's forces are left to run home. This isn't any mere "win" or marginal victory. Perhaps the most devastating military alliance known to mankind will come against Israel only to be completely shattered.

Thursday: The Land Cleansed: Ezekiel 39:9-16

The huge annihilation of Gog's forces will leave a massive mess of corpses and debris. Israel will be faced with the mopping up process, which will take considerable time to complete. The heaps of ruined military equipment will take seven years to deal with, while burial of the corpses will take a full seven months. The world will know God's power and majesty.

Friday: Feasts for Beasts: Ezekiel 39:17-20

Carrion-eating birds and beasts will enjoy a feast at God's invitation, as there will be so many corpses piled up it will be impossible to bury them all quickly. Any bones left behind will be buried. The defeat is so humiliating, that the Lord refers to Gog and his allies as rams, lambs, goats, and bullocks.

Saturday: Divine Compassion: Ezekiel 39:21-29

Israel will learn a valuable lesson from God's incredible protection of them: God is sovereign! He had demonstrated His sovereignty by judging His people and sending them into exile. But a new period in Israel's history has begun as God's compassion embraces them in divine unfathomable love. This will cause them to "...have borne their shame" (Ezekiel 39:26), as they are shamed for their past sinful actions. Now, restored to God by the new covenant, the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon them.

Lesson 13: A New Temple

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 40:1-48:35

Memory Verse: *“And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.”* Ezekiel 43:2

Introduction:

The ultimate symbol of restoration to Israel is the holy temple. Ezekiel has spoken of the return from exile, the cleansing of the nation, and the beautiful restoration of the land to productivity and security—but the picture is not complete without the beloved temple and the restoration of God’s presence in their midst.

The final vision of Ezekiel, a description of the dimensions of a new temple and the regulations for what kinds of sacrifices the prince can offer may seem rather boring. However, this portion of Ezekiel is actually the pinnacle climax of the entire book. The prophet is “taken up” to a high mountain in the land of Israel (Ezekiel 40:2). Here he will be shown a heavenly sanctuary and receive instructions concerning the requirements for its worship. Ezekiel surveys the promise God gives, just as Moses did without entering Canaan, though he himself will never enter it.

On the mountaintop, Ezekiel is met by an angel who will act as a tour guide around the temple. In Ezekiel 8, the prophet had taken a similar guided tour through the defiled temple—but this vision will be capped by a return of God’s presence!

Since this temple has not yet been built, devout Bible students have struggled for centuries to interpret the vision of the temple described in these chapters. By no means have they reached any agreement. Four primary views have been taken from these studies: 1) Ezekiel was describing “ideal worship” for God’s people; 2) Ezekiel gave the plans for the post-captivity temple; 3) Ezekiel’s vision anticipated John’s vision in Revelation 21; 4) Ezekiel described a temple to be used during the millennial reign of Christ.

Unfortunately, there is insufficient space provided in this study book to give fair treatment to the historical or spiritual interpretation of these views, nor to promote one view over another. We encourage you to do a deeper personal study.

Studying the Word

Lesson Study

1. Why is it significant that the outer court has no separating wall between Jews and Gentiles, and there is no separate court for the women? (Ezekiel 40:5-27; Mark 11:17; Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11)
2. Why is it significant that there is no separating veil, altar of incense, or golden lampstand in the new temple’s sanctuary? (skim and review Ezekiel 41:1-43:12)
3. What sacrifices will be offered in Ezekiel’s temple, and why would they be offered if Christ has already died once and for all? (review Ezekiel 43:13-27, and 45:13-46:24)
4. List the ordinances of God concerning the priests in the new temple. (Ezekiel 44:1-31)
5. Why are special parcels of land set aside for the Lord and the prince? (review Ezekiel 45-46)
6. What would indicate that the prince is not the Messiah? (Ezekiel 46:16-18; 44:3 and 45:22)
7. Discuss the beautiful, life-giving aspects of the river flowing through the city of God? (Ezekiel 47:1-12)
8. What will be different about the land allotments for each tribe? (Ezekiel 47:13-48:35)

[Writer’s note: There are many details written about Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple, and all are in some way important, even if not openly realized. But there are also major messages in the overall subject of the new temple. These include: (1) separation from sin—a responsibility of the priests to teach the people the difference between the holy and unholy, and the clean and unclean (Ezekiel 44:23); (2) Worship—although the temple is a place for worship, the heart of the worshiper is much more important than the gifts he brings; (3) Fulfillment—God will fulfill His promises to His people completely, as their sins are far removed from them, as the entire region is restored to an Eden-like garden condition; (4) God’s glory and name—all will know God’s glory, and bow reverently to His name; and (5) the sovereign rule of God—the primary subject that permeates the entire Bible!]

Reading the Word

Daily Devotional - Lesson 13

Sunday: The Outer and Inner Courts: Ezekiel 40:1-49

After Ezekiel introduces us to the situation and setting of this magnificent vision (Ezekiel 40:1-4), his “tour” of the new temple begins with the outer and inner courts in Ezekiel 40. The outer court will comprise nearly 400,000 sq. feet! It will have no “court of the Gentiles” with a separating wall (Ephesians 2:14), nor will there be a separate court for the women. God will fulfill the vision that His house would be a house of prayer for men and women of all nations! The altar in the inner court is much larger than in the tabernacle or temple—about 20 ft. tall, with four tapering tiers!

Monday: The Sanctuary: Ezekiel 41:1-43:12

Because Messiah is present with His people there’s no need for a veil between the holy place and the holy of holies. His glory will be revealed to everyone. Nothing is written about the Ark of the Covenant or the Mercy Seat where the High Priest sprinkled the sacrificial blood. Since the Lord is present continuously, there is no need for the Altar of Incense symbolizing the people’s prayers, nor for the Lampstand symbolizing God’s glory.

Tuesday: The Sacrifices: Ezekiel 43:13-27; 45:13-46:24

Many have been perplexed about the need for sacrifices if this temple is built after the return of Christ. Wasn’t He sacrificed once and for all time? All of the offerings mentioned by Ezekiel pointed to Christ and His own sacrifice for our sins. We must remember that the sacrifices themselves never removed sin, but God’s forgiveness was realized only if the sacrifices were made by faith and trust in the Lord. The use of animal sacrifices in this temple no more minimizes or negates the finished work of Christ than they did before Jesus died. They’ll be offered in a memorial sense, a celebration of what God has done!

Wednesday: The Priests: Ezekiel 44:1-31

God will be particular about the way the sanctuary is used (Ezekiel 44:5-9). The priests must teach the people the difference between clean and unclean (Ezekiel 44:23). Outsiders are not permitted into the temple. (Other regulations are found in Ezekiel 44:10-3) God will also be exact about what they wear (Ezekiel 44:17-19), grooming themselves (Ezekiel 44:20), and many others (Ezekiel 44:21-31).

Thursday: Land for the LORD and Prince: Ezekiel 45:1-46:24

Between the areas assigned to Judah and Benjamin, there will be a section of land reserved for the Lord and prince. The Lord’s portion is divided into three parts: a sacred area for the temple and priests; a portion for the Levites; and a portion for the city of God. The prince will be a married man who has sons (Ezekiel 46:16-18). His land will be on either side of the central sacred area. His duties are also discussed in these chapters.

Friday: The River of Life: Ezekiel 47:1-12

Jerusalem was the only great city of the ancient world that wasn’t located on a river. In the east, a dependable water supply is essential. In the new temple age, Jerusalem will have a river such as no other nation ever had! This river is an extension of the lifegiving work of God.

Saturday: New Apportionments: Ezekiel 47:13-48:35

The allotments of land for each tribe will cut straight across the holy land. All of the tribes will have access to the Mediterranean Sea except Zebulun and Gad. The royal tribe, Judah, will be adjacent to the temple area from where Jesus will reign. The amount of land each tribe has isn’t mentioned, only the order. A portion for the city is also set aside. The most important aspect of the entire vision is that God will be ever present!