

JUSTICE OVER REBELLION

Lesson 3

Ezekiel 12–24

RECAP

Take a moment to share about your experience with last week's "Spiritual Practice" and "On Mission" sections.

JUSTICE OVER REBELLION

"Israel's idolatry and violence had compelled God to leave His own temple. The only thing left for [the rebellious Israelites] (and the surrounding pagan nations) was divine judgment."¹ Because there was an "empty" temple full of covenant-breakers, Ezekiel continued to speak and act out messages of judgment. Proving that "God's goodness actually demands that he bring justice on this generation of Israel. The exile has become inevitable, as they've reached the point of no return."²

READING PLAN

We encourage you to read the entire section of Scripture using the following reading plan.

Day 1: Ezekiel 12–14

Day 2: Ezekiel 15–17

Day 3: Ezekiel 18–19

Day 4: Ezekiel 20–21

Day 5: Ezekiel 22–24

OVERVIEW

The questions in this lesson will focus on **Ezekiel 13–14; 20:1–26** and **22**.

Here is a brief summary of the chapters that will not be covered by questions in this lesson:

- **Chapter 12** shows Ezekiel acting out another message from the Lord. This time Ezekiel played the part of a fugitive

¹ "The 'Gospel' of Ezekiel." *BibleProject*, <https://bibleproject.com/blog/ezekiels-gospel/>

² Mackie, Timothy P. *Read Scripture: Illustrated Summaries of Biblical Books*. The Bible Project, 2017. 52

escaping a besieged city (12:1–16).³ However, even the leaders would not be spared as King Zedekiah would be captured and have his eyes gouged out. The people would live in terror (12:17–28).⁴

- **Chapters 15–17** contain “sermons filled with vivid and arresting vocabulary and intriguing imagery. In these three messages, Ezekiel spoke about a vine, an unfaithful wife, and three shoots from a tree, and each of these images conveyed God’s truth to those who really wanted to understand. These pictures and parables not only described the sins of the nation of Israel, but they also declared her terrible judgment.”⁵
- **Chapters 18–19** focus on the theme of responsibility for Israel’s rebellion. While the Jewish exiles in Babylon were blaming their ancestors for the judgment they were experiencing, Ezekiel explained that God judges people individually for their own sins. “He then pointed out that the Jewish leaders were responsible for the foolish decisions they had made ... By dealing with the subject of personal and national responsibility, Ezekiel was able to answer the frequent complaints of the people that the Lord was treating them unfairly.”⁶
- **Chapter 21** is a reminder to the Israelites that the Lord had a responsibility to be true to Himself and faithful to His covenant with the Jews. This is the reason God disciplined and punished His people when they broke their covenant with Him.⁷
- **Chapters 23–24** address the history of the nation of Israel and its abandonment of the one, true God. In **chapter 23**, Israel seeks protection from other nations. Both Israel and Judah look for help from Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt.

³ Wiersbe, Warren W., and Ken Baugh. *Be Reverent: Bowing before Our Awesome God: Ezekiel*. David C Cook, 2010. 71

⁴ “The Lord made it clear that Ezekiel’s words would be fulfilled very soon ... Six years later, the Babylonian army breached the walls of Jerusalem, and Ezekiel’s predictions came true.” Wiersbe, Warren W., and Ken Baugh. *Be Reverent: Bowing before Our Awesome God: Ezekiel*. David C Cook, 2010. 71

⁵ Ibid. 83

⁶ Ibid. 99

⁷ Ibid. 99

Chapter 24 “closes the section of the book that focuses on the destruction of Jerusalem (**chapters 4–24**) and it is divided into two parts: a parable about a boiling pot (**24:1–14**) and an ‘action sermon’ involving the sudden death of the prophet’s wife (**24:15–27**).”⁸

QUESTIONS

Day 1: Ezekiel 13–14

1. What are the sins Ezekiel points out in **13:1–12**?

a. What might have been the motivation for these false prophets?⁹

b. What does the Lord say is the consequence of false prophecy? (**13:8–16**)

⁸ Ibid. 127 & 132

⁹ “This warning was directed against false prophets, whose messages were not from God but were lies intended to win popularity by saying whatever made the people happy. False prophets did not care about the truth as Ezekiel did. They lulled the people into a false sense of security, making Ezekiel’s job even more difficult.” *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1322

- c. What are some of the lies, half-truths, or idealized beliefs that we tend to believe instead of facing the truth?¹⁰
- d. The messages from the false prophets were obviously not from God. Rather they were lies meant to gain popularity by saying anything that made the people happy and content.¹¹ However, “popularity is not a test of truth.”¹² How have you seen popularity influence opinions and culture (even within the church)?
- e. Pause here and ask God to continue to reveal truth to you.

¹⁷ He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.

John 14:17

¹⁰ “Whitewashing in **verses 10–15**, תִּפְתֵּי (‘whitewash,’ v. 10), refers to plaster that dresses but does not strengthen a wall. It suggests a wall that may appear to be good but is in fact useless. The word נִיּוֹץ refers to a ‘flimsy wall’ of stacked stones that are not cemented together and are very weak unless fortified.” Cooper, Lamar Eugene. *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*. Vol. 17, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994.

¹¹ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1322

¹² Wiersbe, Warren W., and Ken Baugh. *Be Reverent: Bowing before Our Awesome God: Ezekiel*. David C Cook, 2010. 73

2. What is the sin pointed out in **Ezekiel 13:17–23**?¹³

Why might God have such disdain for these specific false prophets?

3. In **chapter 14**, some of the leaders of Israel visited Ezekiel. Ezekiel received a message from the Lord for those leaders. What two things did Ezekiel tell them? (from **14:3–4** and **6**)

How can repentance realign our hearts away from idols and back to God?

¹³ “In the Bible, the gift of prophecy was given to women as well as men. Miriam (**Exodus 15:20**), Deborah (**Judges 4:4**), and Huldah (**2 Kings 22:14**) were prophets. But the women mentioned here are more like the medium of **1 Samuel 28:7**, and they are condemned for discouraging the righteous (**13:22**.” *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1323

4. In **Ezekiel 14:12–23** the Lord describes the four judgments He will send on the people as a result of their own sin. “The responsibility of each person before God is a key subject in the book of Ezekiel ... God doesn’t punish people because of the sins of others, nor will God accept the righteousness of others to compensate for the wicked deeds of sinners.”¹⁴ Does this seem fair or just to you? Why or why not?

“The only time God abandoned this principle was when Jesus Christ His Son died on the cross, for He suffered for the sins of the whole world ... [And] we receive the gift of His righteousness and God accepts us because of His Son (**Romans 3:21–4:25; 2 Corinthians 5:19–21**).”¹⁵
What is your response to this gift?

Day 4: Ezekiel 20:1–26

5. Next, Ezekiel gave a “panoramic view of Israel’s history of rebellion. The emphasis is on God’s attempts to bring the nation back to himself and on God’s mercy for his constantly rebellious and disobedient people.”¹⁶ Note a few things that stand out to you in this recounting of Israel’s history in **Ezekiel 20:1–26**.

¹⁴ Wiersbe, Warren W., and Ken Baugh. *Be Reverent: Bowing before Our Awesome God: Ezekiel*. David C Cook, 2010. 77

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 77

¹⁶ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1331

- a. How do you define rebellion?¹⁷

- b. What are some of the consequences of the Israelites' rebellion? (**20:23–26**)

- c. Do these consequences seem just to you?¹⁸ Why or why not?

6. In **Ezekiel 20:10**, Ezekiel recounted the story of when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and led them into the wilderness. What things did God give to them? (**20:11–12**)

- a. What was the purpose and benefit of what God gave to them? How did the Israelites respond? (**20:11–13**)

¹⁷ Throughout **Ezekiel 20**, the word “rebelled” is used many times to describe the actions of the Israelites (**20:8, 13, 21**). “People sought to match the ‘enlightened attitudes’ of those around them” by engaging in idol worship and refusing to follow the decrees of the Lord. They were engaging in rebellion against the one true and living God. Duguid, Iain M. *Ezekiel: NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 1999. 267

¹⁸ At times it seems that judgment is about God withholding mercy and allowing the natural consequences of people’s actions to play out.

b. So often we rebel against rules and regulations thinking they are meant to trap or restrict us, but God states that the regulations He gave to the Israelites were meant to give life and to set them apart to be holy and in relationship with Him (**Ezekiel 20:11–13**). We are also invited into the practice of keeping the Sabbath.¹⁹ What does “keeping the Sabbath” mean to you?²⁰

i. What gifts could keeping the Sabbath bring to your life?

ii. In what ways is God inviting you to Sabbath with Him?

¹⁹ **Hebrews 4:9–11**

²⁰ “The Sabbath, instituted by God at creation, was entrusted to Israel as a sign that God had created and redeemed them (**Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15**). This day of rest was a gift from a loving God, not a difficult obligation... It was meant to be a reminder that they were God’s special people. Today many Christians celebrate the Lord’s Day, Sunday, as their Sabbath. Whatever the day, we must be careful to fulfill God’s purpose for the Sabbath. He wants us to rest, to refocus, and to remember Him.” *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1331

Day 5: Ezekiel 22²¹

7. Ezekiel opens **chapter 22** by listing the sins of Jerusalem. The graphic content of **Ezekiel 22:6–12** points out the sins committed against vulnerable populations. What vulnerable groups of people are given special attention in **Ezekiel 22:7–12**?
- a. What does the way people treat one another reveal about the morals of that civilization?²²
- b. In what way(s) are you and your church seeking the welfare of vulnerable groups of people?

²¹ **Ezekiel 22:17–22** is a statement about the Lord's refining furnace: "Precious metals are refined with intense heat to remove the impurities or slag. When heated, the slag rises to the top of the molten metal and is skimmed off and thrown away. The purpose of the invasion of Jerusalem was to refine the people, but the refining process showed that the people, like worthless slag, had nothing good in them. *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1336

²² Wiersbe, Warren W., and Ken Baugh. *Be Reverent: Bowing before Our Awesome God: Ezekiel*. David C Cook, 2010. 137

8. What groups of people in authority are specifically addressed in **Ezekiel 22:25–28**?
- a. What is the final effect of all the leaders' sin and rebellion? (**22:29**)
 - b. Who does God search for but can't find? (**22:30**)
 - c. Therefore, what is God's response? (**22:31**)
9. It can be very difficult to wrap our minds around integrating God's love and God's wrath. However, it is clear that God is both kind and severe. "God's wrath [and therefore His justice over rebellion] is a mindful, objective, rational response. It is actually an act of love. God is not indecisive when it comes to evil. God is fiercely and forcefully opposed to the things that destroy his precious people..."²³ Does this statement help you understand God's justice and the consequences of the Israelites' sin and rebellion? Why or why not?

²³ Smith, James Bryan. *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling in Love with the God Jesus Knows*. IVP Books, 2009. 121

- a. How does God's love and justice relate to your sin and rebellion?
- b. If God did not care about our sin, how might that harm us?²⁴

²⁴ Smith, James Bryan. *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling in Love with the God Jesus Knows*. IVP Books, 2009. 126

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

God searched for someone to rebuild the wall of righteousness and stand in the gap in the wall, but no one was found; so God poured out His anger for the full penalty of their sins.²⁵ That was justice for their rebellion.

Many years later, Jesus came and took the fullness of humanity's sins on Himself, paying the price for us, standing in the gap so that we no longer experience the fury of God and are no longer under condemnation.²⁶

Take some time to thank God for His forgiveness and freedom. You may want to consider using **Psalm 95:1–7** as a prayer of thanksgiving throughout the week or take some time to write your own prayer of thanksgiving:

*Come, let us sing to the LORD!
Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come to him with thanksgiving.
Let us sing psalms of praise to him.
For the LORD is a great God,
a great King above all gods.
He holds in his hands the depths of the earth
and the mightiest mountains.
The sea belongs to him, for he made it.
His hands formed the dry land, too.
Come, let us worship and bow down.
Let us kneel before the LORD our maker,
for he is our God.
We are the people he watches over,
the flock under his care.*

²⁵ **Ezekiel 22:30–31**

²⁶ **Romans 8:1–4:** ¹So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ²And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. ³The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. ⁴He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

ON MISSION

God cares about the vulnerable. When people act in rebellion against God, other people get hurt. The effects of sin are relational, emotional, physical, etc.

God's call on us as His people is to bring justice as an expression of God's Kingdom and the character of God.²⁷ As you look back at your answer to question 7b, where is God calling you to participate with Him in justice work in your neighborhood or in the nations?

What is your next step in joining with Him?

TAKEAWAY SUMMARY

When you think about justice over rebellion, what is one key takeaway from this lesson?

Write a brief summary of your takeaway on page 106.

²⁷ Isaiah 1:17; Micah 6:8; James 1:27

PRAYER REQUESTS

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SERMON NOTES

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