

HOPE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Lesson 5

Ezekiel 33–37

RECAP

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

HOPE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE¹

"Up to this point, Ezekiel has pronounced judgment upon Judah² and the surrounding evil nations³ for their sins. After Jerusalem fell, he turned from messages of doom and judgment to messages of comfort, hope and future restoration for God's people.⁴ God previously appointed Ezekiel to be a watchman, warning the nation of coming judgment.⁵ Here God appointed him to be a watchman again, but this time he was to preach a message of hope."⁶

This hope was not realized in its entirety in the time of the exiles, and the hope also hasn't been completely realized in our time. Like with all books of prophecy, the book of Ezekiel is written to specific people at a specific time (the Israelites in exile in Babylon). However, we need to remember that the message is also for us today.

READING PLAN

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

Day 1: Ezekiel 33

Day 2: Ezekiel 34

Day 3: Ezekiel 35

¹ The final chapters of Ezekiel (33–48) cover a 16-year period after the fall of Jerusalem which happened in 586 BC. In these chapters, "[God] promises to restore, in turn, the Davidic kingship, the land, [God's] honor (by way of the new covenant), his people, his sovereignty over the nations, and finally his presence among the people in the land." Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*. Zondervan, 2014. Bible Gateway Plus

² Ezekiel 1–24

³ Ezekiel 25–32

⁴ Ezekiel 33–48

⁵ Ezekiel 3:17–21

⁶ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1353

Day 4: Ezekiel 36

Day 5: Ezekiel 37

OVERVIEW

The questions in this lesson will focus on **Ezekiel 34, 36, and 37**.

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

- **Chapter 33** opens with Ezekiel commissioned again as a watchman. This time Ezekiel was responsible for the public proclamation of the people's responsibility for their own fate and the possibility of both repentance and return to God.⁷ While the people worried that they were trapped in their own wrongdoing, God reassured them that He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone, even the wicked.⁸ A messenger then brought Ezekiel word that Jerusalem had fallen and the Lord told Ezekiel that regardless of their ruin, the people had not changed their ways. While Ezekiel's messages were being heard, the people were not willing to put his warnings into practice.
- **Chapter 35** is a prophecy against Edom.⁹ "Since Edom had not refrained from bloodshed in her hatred of Israel, the Lord would bring unbridled bloodshed on Edom."¹⁰ As a

⁷ Duguid, Iain M. *Ezekiel: NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 1999. 383

⁸ *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. InterVarsity Press, 1994. Bible Gateway Plus

⁹ "Mount Seir was located in Edom. Edom was most likely chosen as a representative of those nations that had sought to occupy Israel's land and exert dominion over her. Edom, perhaps more than any other nation, had continually detested and resented Israel. It started with the conflict between Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) (**Genesis 25:22–34; 27; 36:1**). Edom had sought to block Israel's first entrance into the Promised Land (**Numbers 20:14–21; 24:15–19**). There were conflicts during the times of Saul (**1 Samuel 14:47**), Solomon (**1 Kings 11:14–22**), Jehoshaphat (**2 Chronicles 20:1–23**), Jehoram (**2 Kings 8:21**), and Ahaz (**2 Chronicles 28:17**). The prophets regularly made reference to Edom's antagonism toward Israel and the resulting judgment they would receive (**Isaiah 11:11–16; Daniel 11:41; Amos 2:1**). Malachi demonstrated that the hatred between these nations was still common in his day (**Malachi 1:2–5**). Therefore, it was fitting that Ezekiel used Edom as the epitome of nations that sought to overrun and acquire Israel's land for themselves." Barker, Kenneth L., et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Old Testament*. Zondervan, 2004. Bible Gateway Plus

¹⁰ Barker, Kenneth L., et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Old Testament*. Zondervan, 2004. Bible Gateway Plus

result of the judgment, Edom would know that the God of Israel is the only true God.

QUESTIONS

Day 2: Ezekiel 34

1. What sins did Ezekiel accuse the shepherds, the leaders of Israel, of in **Ezekiel 34:1–6**?
 - a. Just as shepherds were supposed to care for the sheep, the leaders of Israel were supposed to care for the people. In light of the leaders' sins, what do you think that broken trust felt like to the people of Israel?
 - b. What can it look like when a leader abandons their people today?
 - c. What judgment is pronounced upon these shepherds in **34:10**?

2. What do you think are the most important responsibilities of leadership?

3. What does God promise to do for the flock¹¹ in **Ezekiel 34:11–16**?

a. How do you think the Israelites felt when they heard this prophecy?

b. What parallels do you see between the promises of **Ezekiel 34:11–16** and **Psalm 23** below?

¹ *The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need.*

² *He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside*

¹¹ “When the Lord spoke about ‘the flock,’ He was referring to the nation of Israel (**34:31**). ‘We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture’ (**Psalm 100:3; 77:20; 78:52; 80:1**). Moses saw Israel as a flock (**Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17**) and so did Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 13:17**) and Zechariah (**Zechariah 10:3**). Jesus spoke of ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (**Matthew 10:6; 15:24**). Because Jesus called Himself ‘the Good Shepherd’ and ‘the door of the sheep’ (**John 10:7, 11**), the image of the flock carried over into the church (**Acts 20:28–29; 1 Peter 5:2–3**).” Wiersbe, Warren W., and Ken Baugh. *Be Reverent: Bowing before Our Awesome God: Ezekiel*. David C Cook, 2010. 178-179.

peaceful streams.

³ *He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.*

⁴ *Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.*

⁵ *You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.*

⁶ *Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.*

- c. Jesus states He is the Good Shepherd¹² in **John 10:11–15**.

¹¹ *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. ¹² A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep. ¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, ¹⁵ just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.”*

¹² “Jesus [is] the fulfillment of **Ezekiel 34**. He is himself the One of whom **Ezekiel 34** speaks. He is the One in whom all the covenants of the Old Testament find their fulfillment. He is the ultimate Shepherd-King, who fulfills the Davidic covenant, as the crowds recognized during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (**Matthew 21:9**).” Duguid, Iain M. *Ezekiel: NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 1999. 401

How do these promises give you hope today?¹³

4. In **Ezekiel 34:17–24**, who is rebuked and why?¹⁴

5. What is promised in **Ezekiel 34:25–31**?¹⁵

As you have read through Ezekiel thus far, you have seen God's blessings and consequences include not only the people but also the land. Why do you think that was true?

¹³ "All of these blessings have both a 'now' and a 'not yet' aspect to them. We see them in part now, but we do not yet see them in all their fullness. Creation still groans with anticipation as it awaits the revelation of the new heavens and the new earth and of ourselves as sons and daughters of God (**Romans 8:19–23**)." Duguid, Iain M. *Ezekiel: NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 1999. 401

¹⁴ This is not the same New Testament pattern of separation between sheep and goats as found in **Matthew 25:31–33**. All the sheep and goats are members of the flock. "Ezekiel is saying that the powerful and prosperous citizens, who had been greedily taking for themselves all the good things of the land and denying the benefit of them to their fellows, were going to be judged by the Shepherd." Taylor, John B. *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*. InterVarsity Press, 2009. 217

¹⁵ "The oracle brings a promise of hope. Even if God's people were scattered and oppressed they would one day receive justice. Readers of the New Testament will see that day as the time of the return of Jesus Christ, a promise sealed by his first coming, death and resurrection." *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. InterVarsity Press, 1994. Bible Gateway Plus

Day 4: Ezekiel 36

6. The Lord spoke through Ezekiel to condemn neighboring nations who had oppressed Israel (**Ezekiel 36:1–15**). What specific actions did God call out? (**36:5, 15**)

7. As you read through the message from the Lord in **Ezekiel 36:22–38** below, underline the hope, restoration, and promises of God:

²² “Therefore, give the people of Israel this message from the Sovereign LORD: I am bringing you back, but not because you deserve it. I am doing it to protect my holy name, on which you brought shame while you were scattered among the nations. ²³ I will show how holy my great name is—the name on which you brought shame among the nations. And when I reveal my holiness through you before their very eyes, says the Sovereign LORD, then the nations will know that I am the LORD. ²⁴ For I will gather you up from all the nations and bring you home again to your land.

²⁵ “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

²⁸ “And you will live in Israel, the land I gave your ancestors long ago. You will be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ I will cleanse you of your filthy behavior. I will give you good crops of grain, and I will send no more famines on the land. ³⁰ I will give you great harvests from your fruit trees and fields, and never again will the surrounding nations be able to scoff at your land for its famines. ³¹ Then you will remember your past sins and despise yourselves for all the detestable things you did.

³² *But remember, says the Sovereign LORD, I am not doing this because you deserve it. O my people of Israel, you should be utterly ashamed of all you have done!*

³³ *“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When I cleanse you from your sins, I will repopulate your cities, and the ruins will be rebuilt. ³⁴ The fields that used to lie empty and desolate in plain view of everyone will again be farmed.*

³⁵ *And when I bring you back, people will say, ‘This former wasteland is now like the Garden of Eden! The abandoned and ruined cities now have strong walls and are filled with people!’ ³⁶ Then the surrounding nations that survive will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruins and replanted the wasteland. For I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do what I say.*

³⁷ *“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am ready to hear Israel’s prayers and to increase their numbers like a flock. ³⁸ They will be as numerous as the sacred flocks that fill Jerusalem’s streets at the time of her festivals. The ruined cities will be crowded with people once more, and everyone will know that I am the LORD.”*

8. What reason does God give for restoring Israel? (**36:21–22, 38b**)

a. Why would God want to protect His Holy name—His reputation—among the nations of the world?¹⁶

¹⁶ “God was concerned about the salvation of not only his people but also the whole world. To allow his people to remain in sin and be permanently destroyed by their enemies would lead other nations to conclude that their pagan gods were more powerful than Israel’s God (**Isaiah 48:11**). Thus, to protect his holy name, God would return a remnant of his people to their land. God will not share his glory with false gods—he alone is the one true God.” *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1357

- b. “The people [of Israel] had the responsibility to represent God to the rest of the world.”¹⁷ We, as believers today, also represent God to the world and the people around us. In what ways do you represent God to your world?

9. What three things did God promise the people in **Ezekiel 36:25–27**?¹⁸

- a. Not only did God promise to restore the land, He committed to change the very nature of His people, outwardly and inwardly. What is the difference between a stony, stubborn heart and a tender, responsive heart?

¹⁷ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1357

¹⁸ The sprinkling of clean water symbolizes forgiveness of sins. “According to Mosaic law, every Jew who became defiled had to be cleansed before he or she could return to the camp and the blessing of the covenant community. This was accomplished either by bathing in running water or by being sprinkled with water prepared for that purpose. (**Leviticus 14:1–9; Numbers 19; 8:5–7; Hebrews 10:22**)” Wiersbe, Warren W., and Ken Baugh. *Be Reverent: Bowing before Our Awesome God: Ezekiel*. David C Cook, 2010. 191-192

- b. While the Old Testament saints experienced the work of Holy Spirit, that work was always partial. Through Christ's death and resurrection, Holy Spirit has been given to us completely, making us holy. Underline the promises about Holy Spirit you see in the verses below:

i. **Romans 8:1–4**

¹ So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. ³ The 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. ⁴ He 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.

ii. **Romans 8:26–27**

²⁶ And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. ²⁷ And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.

iii. **Ephesians 1:13–14**

¹³ And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. ¹⁴ The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

Day 5: Ezekiel 37

10. The Spirit of the Lord took Ezekiel to a valley filled with bones. What question did Spirit ask Ezekiel, and what answer did Ezekiel give? (**Ezekiel 37:1–3**)
 - a. Spirit then instructed Ezekiel to speak a prophetic message to the bones. What happened next? (**Ezekiel 37:7–8**)
 - b. What was still lacking in the bodies, and what was the response? (**37:8–10**)

c. Who did the bones represent,¹⁹ and what was the promise of God? (**37:11–14**)

d. How does God breathe life into us just as He did in Ezekiel's vision of the dead bones?²⁰

11. God continued to speak His promises, hope, and new covenant blessings over Israel in the final verses of **Ezekiel 37**.²¹ Read **Ezekiel 37:24–28**. The picture of “life in the land” was a promise for the exiles of Israel then and is a prophecy of eternal life with God in the future, which we get to experience because we have been made part of the family of God.²² What do you look forward to most in the coming kingdom of God?²³

¹⁹ “The bones represent the Israelites in exile. They have been there for more than ten years now, and what glimmerings of hope they had when first they arrived have now been altogether extinguished. Their hope was lost: as bones, they were very dry.” Taylor, John B. *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*. InterVarsity Press, 2009. 228

²⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W., and Ken Baugh. *Be Reverent: Bowing before Our Awesome God: Ezekiel*. David C Cook, 2010. 201

²¹ In **Ezekiel 37:15–23**, Ezekiel speaks with a symbolic action, taking two sticks labeled Judah and Ephraim and holding them together representing God's vision and promise of a restored Israel. Taylor, John B. *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*. InterVarsity Press, 2009. 232

²² **Ephesians 2:19** “So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.”

²³ Wiersbe, Warren W., and Ken Baugh. *Be Reverent: Bowing before Our Awesome God: Ezekiel*. David C Cook, 2010. 201

12. In what way(s) do the promises found in this lesson help us and impact the Church today?²⁴

²⁴ "God's promise here goes beyond the physical and geographical restoration of Israel. He promises to breathe new spiritual life into his people so that their hearts and attitudes will be right with him and united with one another. This same process is described throughout God's Word as the cleansing and renewing of our hearts by God's Spirit (**Titus 3:4-6**)." *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1359

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

In these chapters, Ezekiel speaks about the Good Shepherd and how we are perfectly cared for by Him. He also speaks often of Holy Spirit giving life.

Take some time to reflect on the truth that we only live, move, and exist because of God, our Good Shepherd, and Holy Spirit who dwells within us.²⁵

The world we live in often focuses on being busy, but how often do we take time to sit in the mystery and presence of the One who gives us life?

Take 20–30 minutes to sit in God’s presence. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Become quiet. Express to God your intention to rest in His love.²⁶

What is it like to receive God’s gifts of life and being?

²⁵ **Acts 17:27–28**

²⁶ Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. InterVarsity Press, 2015. 56

ON MISSION

One of the blessings God promised to the people in **Ezekiel 36** was the reunion of fellowship or relationship with Him. Can you remember a time before you started your relationship with God? Or a time when God restored greater fellowship with Him? Consider sharing that experience with your group.

Describe what it is like to be in fellowship with God.

By sharing and practicing the telling of your story and your experiences with God, it helps hone the art of communicating who God is to others. How could you share your experience of fellowship with someone who isn't in a relationship with God?

Ask God to provide an opportunity and the courage to share more about your story with this person.

TAKEAWAY SUMMARY

When you think about hope for God's people, what is one key takeaway from this lesson?

Write a brief summary of your takeaway on page 106.

PRAYER REQUESTS

SERMON NOTES

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