

PREFACE

The Book of Ezekiel, with its weird creatures, gruesome depictions of bloodshed, corrupt governments, grisly prophecies, and judgments, is one that should come with a parental guidance warning. It's heavy with the weight of sin and judgment.

But, it also contains some of the most beautiful, encouraging, and inspiring messages in the Bible: God is the Good Shepherd who is fiercely loyal to His people, His glory will return to fill the temple, His Spirit will revive dry bones and breathe life into them, God will replace stony hearts with tender ones, and a river of life will flow from the temple to restore all of creation.¹

When we look closer, we see that it is a book full of justice and hope. It provides us with a profound look into the heart of our holy, faithful, sovereign, and just God.

In this study we learn that God's desire is not to destroy but to restore. He continues, as He did with the Israelites, to long for all of us to return to Him, and He promises to turn our hearts of stone into tender and responsive hearts.² Like dry bones coming back to life, He wants to renew us—to pour His Spirit out on us.³ Through Ezekiel God reveals Himself as a God of hope, justice, and restoration.

“Out of the darkness of Israel's and all humanity's evil emerges a future full of hope. New humans in a new world, animated by God's life-giving spirit and living in a world permeated with God's love and justice. This is the profound hope of the prophet Ezekiel.”⁴

¹ Ezekiel 34:11–31; 43:1–12; 37:1–14; 36:25–38; 47:1–12

² Ezekiel 36:26–27

³ Ezekiel 37:4–6

⁴ Mackie, Timothy P. *Read Scripture: Illustrated Summaries of Biblical Books*. The Bible Project, 2017.

ABOUT EZEKIEL

Author: Ezekiel,¹ son of Buzi. He was training to be a priest and was taken into exile when the Babylonians attacked Judah in 597 BC. The Babylonians took between 8,000 and 10,000 prominent figures² captive and brought them back to Babylon.³ This deportation/exile took place about five years before Ezekiel turned 30 (the typical age of someone becoming a priest)⁴ and five years before the events of the Book of Ezekiel.⁵

Audience: The people of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, who were currently exiled in Babylon; those taken captive in 597 BC.⁶

Date: Ezekiel had his first vision in 593 BC and was actively prophesying until 571 BC.

For the first seven years of his ministry (593-586 BC), Ezekiel continually heard from God and creatively communicated the message to God's people in exile about the coming judgment for their sin and the sin of those remaining in Judah: Jerusalem and the temple would fall (**Ezekiel 1–24**). Once that happened in 586 BC (**Ezekiel 33:21**), the messages moved toward restoration of both Israel and the temple. (**Ezekiel 33–48**)⁷

¹ "The name Ezekiel means 'God is strong' or 'God strengthens.'" *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1308

² "[Ezekiel] was a victim of a common policy of the Assyrians and the Babylonians: the practice of selective deportations. By removing political, spiritual and economic leadership, the Babylonians aimed to break down national resistance, prevent any possibility of revolt, and bolster the economy and military machine of the conqueror's homeland." *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture: New International Version*. Zondervan, 2016. Bible Gateway Plus

³ **2 Kings 24:10–14**

⁴ **Numbers 4:1–3, 23**

⁵ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1308

⁶ "Ezekiel was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah. While Jeremiah ministered to the people still in Judah, Ezekiel prophesied to those already exiled in Babylonia after the defeat of Jehoiachin." *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1306

⁷ Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, 2020. 579

Where Ezekiel lands in the story:

The Israelites were God's chosen people. God formed a covenant with Abraham and his descendants promising them blessing and relationship with God as well as the Promised Land where they could dwell.⁸ He became their God and they became His people. All the people needed to do was remain faithful and obedient to God. As time went on, the people had seasons where they were faithful and obedient to God but often they were rebellious and disobedient. Eventually, the Israelites became slaves in Egypt for 400 years until God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to rescue them. God reassured the Israelites that He would give them the land He had promised to Abraham.⁹ While the Israelites were waiting to enter the land, the Lord renewed His covenant with His people. He gave them many instructions and laws to obey so that they would be set apart for God. These instructions included the sacrificial system which made them right and clean before the Lord. He laid out great blessings for His people's obedience but warned of curses for their disobedience. Nevertheless, the Israelites disobeyed out of fear and ended up wandering 40 years in the desert.¹⁰

Once the Israelites finally entered the land, they disobeyed God by not killing all of the other nations, which led them to be heavily influenced against God.¹¹ For years, the Israelites were governed by the judges God put in place. Whenever the Israelites had a period of prosperity they would fall into a pattern of sin and rebellion, then God would allow others to oppress them until they cried out in repentance. So God would raise up another judge who would help rescue them from oppression and the cycle would repeat.¹²

Eventually, the people cried out for a king to rule them like the other nations, even though God was supposed to be their king. God raised up a man named Saul to be the king. Saul struggled with trust and obedience and ultimately the kingship was taken away from him.¹³ Then David, a man after God's own heart, was given the throne.¹⁴ After David's reign,

⁸ **Genesis 12:2–3**

⁹ **Exodus 1–14**

¹⁰ **Exodus 19–34; Leviticus 1–7; Deuteronomy 28; Numbers 14**

¹¹ **Judges 1:1–2:15**

¹² **Judges 2:16–23; 17:6**

¹³ **1 Samuel 8–31**

¹⁴ **1 Samuel 16; 2 Samuel 1–1 Kings 2**

his son Solomon ruled.¹⁵ After Solomon's reign, the nation was divided into two nations: The Kingdom of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and the Kingdom of Judah (the Southern Kingdom). Each kingdom had a series of kings, some kings followed and obeyed God and some kings were evil and did not follow God. Regardless of their leadership, the people continued to be heavily influenced by other nations and other gods.¹⁶

In 722 BC, as a result of their sin, the Northern Kingdom was defeated by the Assyrians and the people were exiled. In 597 BC, the Southern Kingdom was infiltrated by Babylon and many prominent figures, including Ezekiel, were taken captive and exiled to Babylon.¹⁷ Five years after this deportation is when the book of Ezekiel takes place.

Key Terms:

Israel: The people of God, descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (later given the name Israel). They are called the Israelites, the House of Israel, the Children of Israel, or the Twelve Tribes of Israel. They are also referred to as the Jews and the Hebrews. After Solomon died and his son, Rehoboam, took over the kingdom, 10 of the 12 tribes rebelled and made Jeroboam their king.¹⁸ They named their kingdom "Israel." The Kingdom of Israel was also called the Northern Kingdom.¹⁹ Because Israel was used by the prophets for the collective people as well as the Northern Kingdom, it can be somewhat confusing. The capital city of the Northern Kingdom was Samaria.

¹⁵ **1 Kings 2–11**

¹⁶ **1 Kings 12–2 Kings 25**

¹⁷ **2 Kings 24:10–14**

¹⁸ After Solomon turned to the gods of his many wives, God vowed to take part of the kingdom away from him and his descendants. Jeroboam was one of Solomon's officials in charge of the labor force from the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. He was from the tribe of Ephraim (**1 Kings 11:26, 28**). The prophet Ahijah met Jeroboam on a road outside Jerusalem and acted out the prophecy, tearing his new robe into twelve pieces and giving ten to Jeroboam. This symbolized God giving ten tribes to Jeroboam to rule, leaving only Judah and Benjamin for Solomon and sons (often just combined to be called Judah). When Solomon heard, he tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt until Solomon died. When Solomon's son Rehoboam became king, Jeroboam led ten tribes to rebel against Rehoboam and he was made king over those tribes. Both kings did evil in the sight of the Lord. (**1 Kings 11:29–12:33**).

¹⁹ Youngblood, Ronald F., et al. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Thomas Nelson, 2014. 519, 523

Judah: The Southern Kingdom, or the Kingdom of Judah, was made up by the Israelites who remained loyal to Rehoboam (the 2 remaining tribes). Their capital was the city of Jerusalem. These were the people to whom Ezekiel was prophesying.

Covenant: A covenant is a solemn agreement between two parties where both parties make promises and commitments to each other. There were multiple covenants made between God and His people in the Old Testament, which itself is often referred to as the Old Covenant.²⁰

Jerusalem: The holy city where Solomon built the temple of God. It was the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was invaded in 597 BC and it completely fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC.

Son of man: “Ezekiel is called ‘son of man’ ninety-three times in his book, a title that the Lord also gave to Daniel (**Daniel 8:17**). ‘Son of man’ is also a messianic title (**Ezekiel 7:13**), which Jesus applied to Himself at least eighty-two times when He was ministering on earth. But in the case of Daniel and Ezekiel, the title ‘son of man’ emphasized their humanity and mortality.”²¹

²⁰ The first covenant was called the Noahic covenant in which God promised Noah that He would never again destroy the world with a flood. The sign of this covenant was a rainbow (**Genesis 9:9–17**). The Abrahamic covenant was the covenant God made with Abraham where, “God promised to bless his descendants and to make them His special people. Abraham, in return, was to remain faithful to God and serve as a channel through which God’s blessings could flow to the rest of the world (**Genesis 12:1–3**).” The sign of the Abrahamic covenant was circumcision (**Genesis 17:11**). The Mosaic covenant was God’s covenant with the people of Israel. “Its establishment (**Exodus 19:3–25**), stipulations (**Exodus 20:1–17**), exposition (**Exodus 20:22–23:33**), and confirmation (**Exodus 24:1–12**) constituted the formal basis of the relationship between the Lord and his chosen people until it was superseded by the new covenant (**Hebrews 8:3–13**).” The sign for the Mosaic covenant was the Sabbath (**Exodus 31:13, 16–17**). God also made a covenant with David—the Davidic covenant. He established David and his descendants as the royal heirs to the throne, culminating with the Messiah (**2 Samuel 7:12; 22:51**). Youngblood, Ronald F., et al. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Thomas Nelson, 2014. 275

²¹ Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete Old Testament*. David C Cook, 2007. 1278

The Prophetic Literature of Ezekiel:

Like many prophetic books, Ezekiel uses the following general outline:

1. You (Israel/Judah) have broken the covenant; you had better repent!
2. No repentance? Then judgment! Judgment will also come on the nations.
3. Yet there is hope beyond the judgment for a glorious future restoration both for Israel/Judah and for the nations.

However, one of the ways that Ezekiel is unique among the prophetic writings is that in contrast to the short poetry of other prophetic books, Ezekiel contains long sections of narratives and oracles. In addition, Ezekiel himself plays a significant role, he both speaks and acts as God directs, even to the point of acting out the messages from God. “At the same time, the prophet is dwarfed by God, for whom he speaks. The book of Ezekiel thus presents the prophet as doing and saying nothing apart from what God wants him to do.”²²

Near and Far Prophecy:

Often it is hard to know if a prophet is talking about events that have happened already or events that are still to come. In fact, “When the prophets paint pictures of the future they often don’t appear to make chronological distinctions. For example, in a poetic picture of future judgment, they may mix together into the same vision numerous future events, some from the immediate future and some from the far future.

“In proclaiming the future restoration, the prophets will likewise often mix and merge several different events into one powerful poetic picture of restoration. ... This poses a challenge for us as interpreters because we often cannot tell if they are describing the ‘near future’ or the ‘far future.’ That is, the prophets will often slide back and forth from describing events that will occur soon within their lifetimes (the near view) to events that will occur during the first advent of Christ (the far view) to events that are still future even for us (the even farther view).

“This near view/far view feature of the prophets can

²² Boda, Mark J., and Gordon J. McConville. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*. “Ezekiel: Book Of.” InterVarsity Press. 2012. 218–220

perhaps best be understood through an analogy. If you stand on the flat prairie and look west toward the Rocky Mountains, you will see the view of overlapping mountains.

“From a distance, the mountains in this view look to be two-dimensional; that is, they all appear to be in the same area and equidistant from us. The mountains in front and the mountains in back merge together into one flat picture with little distinguishable distance between them. Yet in reality, the various mountains in our picture are rather far apart, with significant valleys between them.”²³

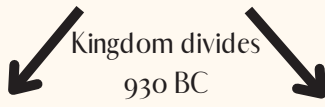
Thus, since prophecies include what has already been, what is currently happening, and what is yet in the future, it is difficult to determine with precision an accurate timeline of these events. Therefore, we must remain humble in our understanding and interpretation.

²³ Hays, J. Daniel, and Tremper Longman. *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*. Zondervan, 2017. 80-81

TIMELINE OF KINGS AND PROPHETS

David 1005 BC
Solomon 968 BC

★ = prophet
☺ = good king
☹ = evil king



Israel's kings and prophets:

Judah's kings and prophets:

930 BC – Jeroboam I	☹
909 BC – Nadab	☹
908 BC – Baasha	☹
886 BC – Elah	☹
885 BC – Zimri	☹
885 BC – Omri	☹
874 BC – Ahab	☹
853 BC – Ahaziah	☹
852 BC – Joram	☹
841 BC – Jehu	☹
814 BC – Jehoahaz	☹
798 BC – Jehoash	☹
793-753 – Jonah	★
782 BC – Jeroboam II	☹
760-750 BC – Amos	★
753-715 BC – Hosea	★
753 BC – Zechariah	☹
752 BC – Shallum	☹
752 BC – Menahem	☹
742 BC – Pekahiah	☹
740 BC – Pekah	☹
732 BC – Hoshea	☹
722 BC – Assyrian exile begins	
612 BC – Assyria's capitol, Nineveh, falls to Babylon	

930 BC – Rehoboam	☹
913 BC – Abijam	☹
910 BC – Asa	☺
872 BC – Jehoshaphat	☺
848 BC – Jehoram	☹
841 BC – Ahaziah	☹
841 BC – Athaliah	☹
835 BC – Joash	☺
835-796 BC – Joel	★
796 BC – Amaziah	☺
767 BC – Uzziah	☺/☹
748 BC – Jotham	☺
742-687 BC – Micah	★
740-681 BC – Isaiah	★
732 BC – Ahaz	☹
715 BC – Hezekiah	☺
687 BC – Manasseh	☹
663-612 BC – Nahum	★
642 BC – Amon	☹
640 BC – Josiah (Good)	☺
640-621 BC – Zephaniah	★
627-586 BC – Jeremiah	★
612-589 BC – Habakkuk	★
609 BC – Jehoahaz	☹
609 BC – Jehoiakim	☹
605 BC – First Babylonian deportation (Daniel taken)	
598 BC – Jehoiachin	☹
597 BC – Second Babylonian deportation (Ezekiel and King Jehoiachin taken)	
597 BC – Zedekiah	☹
586 BC – Jerusalem and temple destroyed (Third deportation)	

Stories of these Kings can be found in **2 Samuel 2 – 2 Kings 25**
Dates are approximate

HOW TO USE THE STUDY GUIDE

Recap: Each week there will be a question that allows you to process how you were able to implement the “Spiritual Practice” and “On Mission” sections from the previous week. This can help your group hold each other accountable to what you are learning and how you are integrating it into your life.

Title Section: This section reveals the main theme of the lesson and gives some framework for what we will be studying that week.

Reading Plan: Each week there will be a large section of Ezekiel for you to read. It has been broken down into smaller sections to read each day. As you read the passages, notice what words or phrases Holy Spirit highlights for you.

Overview: Because each week covers so much of Ezekiel, we will be focusing on specific passages to interact with through the questions. This section will give a brief overview of the portions of Scripture that will not have questions to interact with. We encourage you to use the reading plan each week to be familiar with the entire passage as the larger context will help in understanding what Holy Spirit is trying to reveal.

Questions: This section is composed of observation, interpretation, and application questions for you and your group to interact with on your own and with each other. They will focus on smaller portions of the larger passages for that week.

Spiritual Practice: Each lesson will have a spiritual practice that provides an opportunity to engage in worship. In addition to doing this practice on your own, please allow enough time for your group to engage with this practice together as well.

On Mission: Each week there will be a prompt for how to be on mission, a witness to the people around us and around the world who don't yet know Jesus. These prompts are tools to help you think through what this could look like, not a checklist to be completed. The hope is that you will prayerfully consider engaging with the Lord on how He is calling you to demonstrate and declare His goodness in your spheres of influence.