

J.M. DIENER



# LESSONS FROM A MAD PROPHET

a seventeen-week study of the book of ezekiel





# **Lessons From A Mad Prophet**

## A Seventeen-Week Study on the Book of Ezekiel

by

J.M. Diener

*Lessons From A Mad Prophet Study Guide*

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Dedicated to

Sue Mohnasky

Chief Proponent of Sunday School at Calvary Chapel in Canterbury Connecticut

*"Freely you received, freely give."*

— Matthew 10:8b



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# Lessons From A Mad Prophet

A Seventeen-Week Study on the Book of Ezekiel

## Introduction

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**I**t is early evening and everywhere within the encampment at Tel Abib people are working to prepare meals. Many still huddle under varicolored tents, though there are several houses, square, squat, with a courtyard and stables built underneath the regular living quarters. Here and there farmers are returning home from their fields, merchants are gathering up their wares and there is a general sense of the ending of the day.

Then, from the west, where the river flows, a man comes staggering in to the town. He is slack-jawed, a vacant look in his eyes. Spittle has run into his beard as he sways his way down the central thoroughfare to his house, trembling all the way. He stumbles through the gate, his right hand automatically brushing the carefully incised words of the Torah on the doorpost. Inside a woman is preparing the evening meal, grain cakes baked on a metal plate over an open fire. She hears him and looks up, a half-smile on her lips that turns to a look of horror.

“Ezekiel!” she exclaims, rushing to her husband as he sways towards her uncertainly. “Ezekiel! What happened?” He looks at her and a spark of recognition glints in his eyes. His slack lips form a half smile and one hand comes up to touch her. She grabs on to him and leads him to the fire in the courtyard, where he sits down, eyes now vacant again, shaking his head, mouth moving, silently forming words that will not come, whether in voice or in whisper. And so he sits for seven days, before he can finally explain what he has witnessed on the plain by the river Kebar.

Ezekiel the prophet, a brilliant orator, highly creative, unyielding as flint, purposeful, angry at the apostasy of his people, yet given to such strange actions and utterances, that many have believed him to be totally insane. From ancient days to modern years, scholars have had trouble with what to do with him. Psychoanalysts have denounced him as out of his mind. Commentators have shown his madness to have a very clear method to it. And such a “madness” made its point very clearly. The suffering that Ezekiel was put through to make God’s points to His people in exile is more than we can imagine. We gloss over it, and this difficult book. But much of what Ezekiel had to say to his friends and family nearly 2500 years ago applies to us today. In our daily lives, we also toy with apostasy, much like his contemporaries did. And the lavish words with which Ezekiel has characterized the falling away of Israel is a warning to us as well.

What lessons can we learn from this one Mad Prophet, empowered by the One God to teach his people? What can we see from the lengths he would go to in order to reach his audience? Let’s find out together.

## A Brief Overview

This study guide is designed to take you through the book of Ezekiel in seventeen weeks. It is strongly recommended that you keep a journal along with this study guide in which you can note down the answers to the questions posed in the text.

The study is basically set up in two parts. First, there are the daily readings, structured to be read Monday through Friday of each of the sixteen weeks. In your journal, give a title to each daily reading, write a brief summary underneath this and mark down any problem points that you may come across for later lookup or discussion with your group. You should also attempt to write at least one personal application from each passage read. Please be aware, however, that the nature of the Bible is so that not all passages will *have* an application, so don't be upset if you can't find one in your studies.

The second section is the topical study at the end of each week. It is the intent of the author that this study be done by the individual on Saturday, and then be discussed during the meeting on Sunday. This is not meant to be rigid, though. It must be noted that this curriculum was developed for use as a group study in Sunday School, but it can also be used as a weekly study, where Saturday would be the day *before* the study is looked at in a group setting. The study can also be used very well by the individual for personal edification, as can any group study.

These studies will follow the Inductive Bible Study method pioneered by Kay Arthur and expanded by Joan Havens of Columbia Biblical Seminary. Hence, questions will be preceded by the letters O, I, and A.

**O** = Observation question. The answer is found in directly in the text word-for-word.

**I** = Interpretation question. There are hints to the answer in the text itself, but often other biblical knowledge or general knowledge will have to be accessed to answer this question. These are usually used to tease the principles out of the text

**A** = Application question. Causes the student to think about how to apply the principles to their lives. There are really no "right" or "wrong" answers to these questions, as each one can be answered in a multitude of valid ways.

The two exceptions to this rule are the first lesson, which deals with the history of Ezekiel and the tenth lesson whose goal is to lead the student through a step-by-step acquisition of a personal opinion on a difficult biblical topic.

This is not a "canned" study. In other words I do not supply the answers to the questions in this study. You may find some answers to the more difficult questions by consulting a commentary or a study Bible.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I recommend using the commentaries of David Block (*NICOT*) and Ralph Alexander (*The Expositor's Commentary*), which are listed in the Works Cited and Sources Consulted section at the end of this book. Matthew Henry is always useful, as are the NIV Study Bible or the Ryrie Study Bible. For my opinion on really sticky stuff, feel free to e-mail me at [writing@wolfhawke.com](mailto:writing@wolfhawke.com).

## Using the Study Guide With a Small Group

As there are no answers directly supplied with the study, it is assumed that the facilitator of the group will take the time to go through the study in depth and work out the answers to the questions. A suggested “hook” topic may be found at the top of most lessons.

In a small-group or Sunday School class setting the ideal amount of time to set aside for this study is eighteen weeks: seventeen weeks of the individual lessons and one week to go over what each student has learned from the book individually and a discussion of the “Three Key Messages of Ezekiel”. If you do not have that much time, you can abbreviate by combining weeks sixteen and seventeen into one and leaving off the ending discussion, though that will undoubtedly weaken the end result as closure is always recommended. If you are going to do this study in a group setting, you may wish to use the Lessons From A Mad Prophet Workbook instead of the study guide, as this gives you space to write your answers to the questions right in the text.

## Bible Translations

Most of us cannot read Hebrew or Greek and so we’re stuck with reading English translations of the Bible. All of the English translations of the Bible are valid and none should be put down as inadequate.<sup>2</sup> However, in the transition from the original languages to the English, things get lost, especially when dealing with the Hebrew. It is therefore advisable to have several translations on hand while studying the Bible and especially Ezekiel, which admittedly is quite a difficult book.

While not dogmatic about the selection of translations, the author strongly suggests that each student at least have access to a *New International Version* (NIV) and a *New American Standard Bible* (NASB). These two translations will give you the best understanding of what the text says in Hebrew, though the NASB will tend to rely more heavily on the Greek. When quoting scripture in this study, the author will primarily refer to these two.

*The NIV will be displayed in this font.*

*The NASB will be displayed in this font.*

In addition, you may want to have a *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), and a *New Living Translation* (NLT) on hand to help with some of the more difficult passages. The *King James Version* (KJV) or *New King James Version* (NKJV) are also beneficial. Be aware, however, that the KJV does not reflect some of the more recent finds of ancient Hebrew manuscripts<sup>3</sup> that have influenced the translation of the NASB or NIV, and so it may sometimes differ radically from these two.

The more translations you have on hand during your group studies, the better. The five mentioned above should most definitely be present, as well as any others that the participants enjoy.

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<sup>2</sup> The one exception to this might possibly be the *New World Translation* of the Watchtower Tract and Bible Society (also known as the Jehovah’s Witnesses).

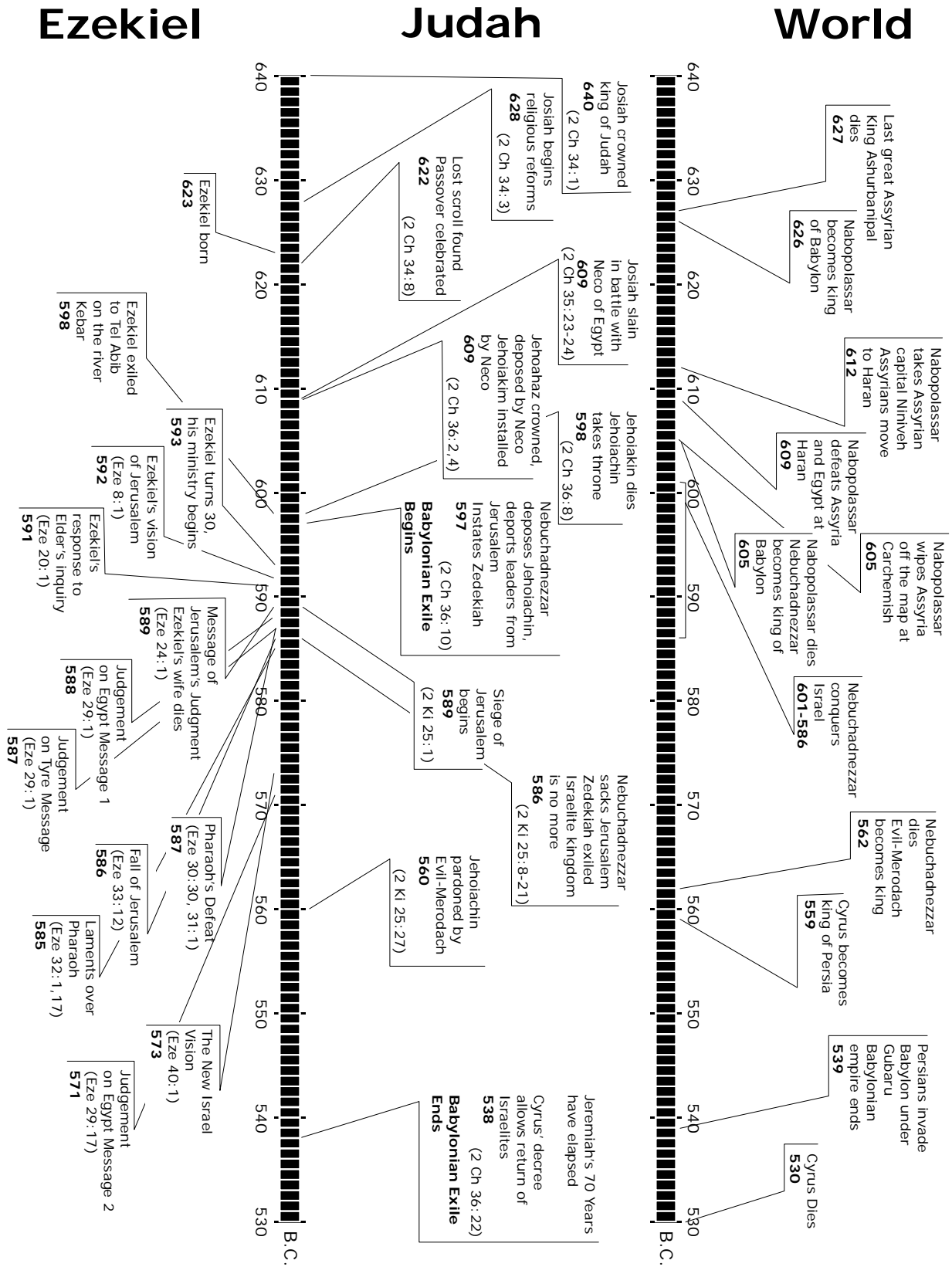
<sup>3</sup> E.g. the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered between 1947 and 1956.

## The Hebrew Calendar

Hebrew Name	English Transliteration	Month Number	Length	Gregorian Equivalent
ניסן	Nissan	1	30 days	March-April
אייר	Iyyar	2	29 days	April-May
סיון	Sivan	3	30 days	May-June
תמוז	Tammuz	4	29 days	June-July
אב	Av	5	30 days	July-August
אלול	Elul	6	29 days	August-September
תשרי	Tishri	7	30 days	September-October
חשוון	Heshvan	8	29 or 30 days	October-November
כסלו	Kislev	9	30 or 29 days	November-December
טבת	Tēvēt	10	29 days	December-January
שבט	Shevaṭ	11	30 days	January-February
אדר	Adar	12	29 or 30 days	February-March
אדר-שני	Adar II	13	29 days	March-April

*Adar II* was a month that was used as an intercalary month, occurring seven times in a 19-year period, used to correct the loss of days in the calendar system, much like our leap year corrects for it.

# A Timeline of Ezekiel



## Week One

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### The Historical Background of Ezekiel

Text: Ezekiel 1:1-3

The book of Ezekiel opens in *“the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, ... it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin”*. To us as westerners, this date reckoning can be a little bit vague.

According to the Ezekiel Timeline, what year is the *“fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin”*?

What is the location of Ezekiel according to v.3?

As Ezekiel stands by the Kebar river in Babylon, we are left with the question as to why Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, an Israelite priest, is to be found in a province of Babylon, rather than in the temple at Jerusalem, where he should be leading the people in worship. Ezekiel’s being in exile at this time is a direct result of his people’s unfaithfulness to their God.

In looking back at Israelite history, we find ourselves also dealing with Ezekiel’s personal history. Most scholars believe that *“the thirtieth year”* refers to Ezekiel’s age at the time of this writing, making his birth date about 623 BC. In order to pick up the thread, we need to take a look back at the period right before his birth.

### A Sordid History

Israel’s history, from her very inception, has always been rather sordid, and especially Ezekiel makes no bones about that. Even during the Exodus, when the Israelites had seen their God’s amazing power, they turned away from Him to worship idols. And this practice continued on through the days of Moses, Joshua, the Judges, and into the Kingdom period. Granted, under David idolatry was almost completely erased, but like cancer, it had only gone into remission until the next susceptible generation came along.

From the days of Solomon in about 930 BC on to the days of Josiah both the northern and southern kingdoms wallowed in idolatry and immorality. There were a few good kings in the south who did their best to clean up the country’s act and turn the people back to God, but they failed, and the northern kingdom was exiled in 722. After the godly King Hezekiah, who ruled from about 715 to 686, Manasseh, the worst king of Judah, came to the throne of the surviving southern Kingdom. He spent most of his reign actively disregarding the God of Israel and is even credited with having executed the prophet Isaiah. However, he was captured by the Assyrian king late in his reign and repented of his sin and tried to set things straight (see II Chronicles 33:11-20). This had absolutely no impact on his son, Amon, who came to power upon Manasseh’s death, showing once more that the example a parent sets early in life will invariably shape the child later, even if the parent changes.

## The Historical Background of Ezekiel

Fortunately Amon's reign was fairly short, a mere two years, before his servants assassinated him and installed his eight-year-old son, Josiah, on the throne of Israel. The year, according to our time reckoning, was 640 BC.

### A Last Glimmer of Hope

Josiah was by no means a chip of the old block. According to II Chronicles 34:2, he had a conversion experience when he turned sixteen and began to *"seek the God of his father David."* Then, in 628, just about the time he would have turned 20 and become a man, he instituted rigorous religious reforms. It probably took him four years to do so, because he needed to assert his own autonomy over his advisers and regents.

Read II Chronicles 34:2-7 and list all of the ways that Josiah instituted his reforms. What was the next step Josiah took, according to II Chronicles 34:8?

As Josiah began his repairs of the temple in his eighteenth year, which would have been 622 BC, he discovered a scroll that contained the law (presumably a copy of Deuteronomy). During the reading of this scroll, they came across a series of curses regarding what would happen if the Israelites turned from God.

Read Deuteronomy 28:15-68 and list all of the curses that would come upon the people of Israel in the left column. In the right column list a fulfillment of each curse.

Josiah's immediate reaction was to consult the prophetess Huldah as to what Yahweh, the God of Israel, would do. The message was that God was going to destroy Israel and exile it, but He would grant a measure of grace, because of Josiah's faithfulness. Josiah immediately proved his devotion to God by instituting the first Passover in years and the first one that was performed according to the letter of the law since the death of the prophet Samuel (see II Chronicles 35:18).

Interestingly, it was the year before this momentous Passover that Ezekiel was born into the priestly family of Buzi in Jerusalem.

### The End Draws Near

The time of reform came to an end, however, when Josiah decided to get involved in international politics by attempting to keep the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco from assisting the Assyrian king against Nabopolassar and the Babylonian armies in Haran. Being the godly king he was, Josiah was probably favorably inclined towards the Babylonians, as he was advised by Jeremiah, who, along with the prophets preceding him, had encouraged submission to Babylon. However, in this fateful battle in 609 BC, Josiah was slain by Pharaoh Neco.

His second son Jehoahaz was crowned by the people, but was deposed by Neco who came south, smarting from a sound defeat at the hand of Nabopolassar's superior army. He installed Eliakim, Josiah's first-born son, and renamed him Jehoiakim. Neco probably reasoned that Jehoiakim would be loyal to Assyria, which turned out to be wrong. In 605 Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar wiped Assyria off the face of the earth, and, following his father's death, Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to annex the remaining middle east to their empire.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week One

What does II Chronicles 36:5 tell us about Jehoiakim?

Nebuchadnezzar had more trouble with Israel during those years, and when Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin came to the throne, he finally had enough, swept in to Jerusalem, detained the king, his mother and wives, and deported him along with much of the nobility of Jerusalem. The 25-year-old Ezekiel was part of this deportation, making it clear that he was probably not only the son of a priest, but the son of an *important* priest.



Map 1 — The Exile of Jehoiachin and Ezekiel

Nebuchadnezzar instated Josiah's son Mattniah as ruler and renamed him Zedekiah. Most Israelites, including Ezekiel, considered Zedekiah no more than a regent, as the line of David continued through Jehoiachin to Joseph Ben Jacob of Nazareth.

What incident does Ezekiel date his utterances by?

Ezekiel and his contemporaries were settled in Tel-Abib on the river Kebar<sup>4</sup>, which is a canal branching northward off of the Euphrates river. It is here that Ezekiel had his first visions from God and where he received his commission as a Prophet.

## Weekly Readings

- Monday:** Ezekiel 1:1-28
- Tuesday:** Ezekiel 1:28-2:7
- Wednesday:** Ezekiel 2:8-3:15
- Thursday:** Ezekiel 3:15-21
- Friday:** Ezekiel 3:22-21

<sup>4</sup> Kebar is according to the Hebrew: כְּבַר = *k<sup>h</sup>bār*, whereas the spelling *Chebar* comes from the Greek Χοβάρ, *Chobár*,



## Week Two

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### Call and Commission

Text: Ezekiel 1:1-3:15

**H**ave you ever seen a thunder storm sweeping across the open plain? What about a downpour so hard that you cannot see out the windshield of your car? Or have you ever experienced some other type of force of nature bearing down upon you? What did you feel? How did you respond to that? Did this force of nature show you something about God?

When Ezekiel was first commissioned, he faced a storm quite unlike any other that existed before or after. His descriptions of what he saw are vivid and awe-inspiring, confusing and fascinating. Let's take a closer look at some of what Ezekiel saw.

### Inaugurated into Office (1:1-3)

Most translations render the first line of Ezekiel "*In the thirtieth year*" (or, "In my thirtieth year"). Most commentators take this to mean that it was when Ezekiel turned thirty.

**O:** What office did Ezekiel have according to v.3?

**I:** Why do you think the thirtieth year would be significant to Ezekiel's office?

The age thirty was critical to the priesthood and the Levites who served the temple. Numbers 4 clarifies who was allowed to serve in the temple itself.

**O:** What were the ages of the men who were allowed to serve in the temple according to Numbers 4:3,23, and 30 and I Chronicles 23:3?

**I:** What did this age mean to Ezekiel?

We have no knowing *why* Ezekiel was standing by the River Kebar in Babylon at this time. He may have had a field he worked in there. He may have gone there to meditate on this, his thirtieth year, the year that would mark his induction into office in the Temple – *if* he'd remained in Jerusalem. It would have been a melancholy year for him.

If we look at Ezekiel's character, it is probable that he was longing for his calling as a priest to be fulfilled and that he wanted to serve in the Temple. His love for the Temple, the worship of God, and the Law is apparent throughout the book.

### The Chariot-Throne of Yahweh (1:4-28a)

Ezekiel was confronted by a strange vision of the glory of God, a vision that would repeat itself twice during his tenure as Prophet of Yahweh. Many people have speculated as to what it was that Ezekiel saw and what it looked like. Some have even gone so far as to describe it as a space ship, and the image of the one on the space ship as an alien.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Two

**Optional Assignment:** Take some time to look for pictures of what some artists have interpreted Ezekiel's vision to be, or draw your own representation of the image. A good place to start is the Images search on Google.

This vision of Ezekiel has often been called the Chariot-Throne, as it has many of the elements of some sort of conveyance. Poetic literature often describes God as "sitting between the cherubim." Look at the poetic imagery of God's arising in these passages: Job 40:6; Psalm 18:9-12; Amos 4:13

There are four parts to God's chariot, note them down in your journal.

The center of the vision, however is that of the One who sits on the Throne, one whom Ezekiel cannot look at and before whom He falls to the ground in fear.

Compare this vision to that of Isaiah in Isaiah 6 and to that of John the Apostle in Revelation 4. What are some similarities? What are some differences?

### The Commission (1:28b-3:13)

**O:** What does the Lord do to Ezekiel in 2:2?

Imagine being in the presence of the Holy God. How did these other great prophets respond to God's presence? Moses in Exodus 3:6; Isaiah in Isaiah 6:5

Ezekiel needed strengthening from God to be able to withstand the weight of His glory. And the message that Ezekiel was to give to the people was no easy task either.

**O:** How does God characterize the Israelites in 2:3 and 3:7?

**O/I:** Will the Israelites accept Ezekiel's message? Why or why not?

God charges Ezekiel to be different from the people that he was being sent to and he gave him a scroll to eat, on which were the words of what he was to say to the people.

**O:** What did the scroll taste like to Ezekiel?

**I:** Why do you think it would have tasted that way?

God's word is often described as sweet to those who focus on it. Take a look here at the following passages:

*The ordinances of the LORD ... are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.*

— Psalm 19:9-10

*How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

— Psalm 119:103

**A:** In what ways should the Word seem sweet to us as we read it? What are some ways in which you personally have experienced that sweetness?

The terms used for stubbornness and obstinacy in 2:4 in the Hebrew are literally, “hard of face” and “hard of heart.” And so God gives Ezekiel what he will need to put up with this stubbornness.

**O:** How does God phrase his gift to Ezekiel in 3:8-9?

The Hebrew word used here is שָׁמִיר (šāmîr), which is translated variously as “hardest stone” (NIV, NRSV), “emery” (NASB), “corundum” (NASB footnote), “adamant” (KJV), or “diamond” (Holman Christian Bible). The word denotes a rock that is incredibly hard, strong and sharp. Emery and corundum are extremely hard gems used mostly as abrasive materials. Diamond is the hardest substance on earth and adamant is an archaic term denoting an extremely strong substance, which the above-mentioned elements would fall under.

**I:** What do you think it means that Ezekiel’s forehead would be “like emery harder than flint”?

Ezekiel was charged with bringing the Truth to a people who did not want the Truth. In our day and age, we as Christians are charged with the same thing.

**A:** What are some instances where you have had to be adamant about the Truth with someone? How did that conversation end?

### The Return (3:14-15)

**O:** How did Ezekiel feel when the Lord left Him?

**I:** Why do you think he felt that way?

Ezekiel was human and his anger was probably directed at the fact that he knew people wouldn’t respond. Jeremiah and Isaiah had to wrestle with the same truth. The people would have to be judged and there was no way around it.

**I:** Why do you think that Ezekiel sat in stunned silence for seven days?

Sometimes when God shows us a truth about Himself, we should take the time to sit quietly and contemplate what He wants to teach us through it. The harder the truth, the more time it often takes to accept it. But in accepting it, we accept the light granted us by God.

Ezekiel, despite his bitterness and his knowledge that his task would be incredibly difficult, accepted God’s calling and became one of the most amazing prophets in Scripture. In all of his sufferings he is probably only surpassed by Christ himself, as he put himself through highly uncomfortable experiences to get his people to understand the truth about their situation and what

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet — Week Two

God wanted them to do. It was a tough road, but in the end, Ezekiel, the man of adamant, prevailed.

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 4:1-17

**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 5:1-17

**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 6:1-10

**Thursday:** Ezekiel 6:11-14

**Friday:** Ezekiel 7:1-27

## Week Three

---

### The Day of the Wrath of the Lord

Text: Ezekiel 7:1-27

**W**hat comes to your mind when you hear the term *idolatry*? What is an idol? How does the worship of an idol manifest itself?

The people of Israel were notorious idolaters. Blessed with a wonderful relationship with the living God, they none-the-less turned away from Him and His loving requirements to pursue false gods of stone, wood, iron, gold, and silver. For some they were undoubtedly the deities of the Canaanites or other peoples. For others it may have been science, materialism, wealth.

In the past chapters Ezekiel showed God's judgment upon His people through various sign acts that would have made his contemporaries think he had gone absolutely mad. Now, in chapter seven, Ezekiel begins to deal with the coming wrath of the Day of the Lord.

This call sounds like a series of trumpet blasts that a watchman sounds in the face of an on-coming army. Ezekiel, the Watchman of Israel is warning his people about an inexorable enemy, whom they can never overcome.

#### The First Trumpet (7:1-4)

God announces the coming of "an end" to His people.

**O:** What is the picture God uses to describe the land in v.2?

Job 38:12-13 uses a similar image. God speaks to Job, proclaiming: *"Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?"*

The image here is one of God taking the land by its four corners and shaking it, much like a table cloth full of crumbs, to empty it of wickedness.

**I:** Do you think this judgment is unjustified? Why or why not?

**O/I:** What is God's express reason for this judgment according to v.4?

#### The Second Trumpet (7:5-9)

Knowing the first announcement was not enough, Ezekiel makes a second call for the people to listen. Much of what is said is identical to vv.1-4.

**I:** What do you think God means by *"bring upon you all your abominations"* in v.8?

The first prophet to use the term "the Day of the LORD" was Amos. Take a look at Amos 5:18-20 and 8:9-10 for some of the characteristics of the day of the Lord listed there.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Three

While in Amos' time the people might have viewed the Day of the Lord as a time of delight, when God would return and set all things right, they did not realize that this would take their being judged. Even these Israelites forgot that their days began not with sunrise, but with sunset, the darkness giving birth to a new and glorious day.

How often do we as Christians also look forward to God's return with a light heart, not realizing the dark pain that will precede His coming? Whether or not we will share in it, it will be a terrible time that will crush this world and bring it to its knees before the sun can dawn. Truly the Day of the Lord is a dark day, one that is to be feared.

### The Third Trumpet (7:10-27)

Ezekiel's third pronouncement is much longer than his first two and it describes a lot more about His people's suffering. In the first verses God once more makes it abundantly clear that this wrath of His is a just punishment for all of the wickedness found in the land. If this is vague, wait until Ezekiel gets into some of the abominations that were going on in the land!

**O:** To whom is Ezekiel speaking to especially in vv.12-13?

**I:** What sins is he particularly addressing here?

Materialism is not just a problem we face in the modern world. Ezekiel's time had plenty of it, too. Zephaniah also points out that many Israelites felt that money could solve all problems (see Zephaniah 1:18). A few coins here, a few there, and the wheels of society got greased so that the rich became richer, the poor became poorer and the ruthless rose to the top of the pile.

**O:** What methods is God going to use to judge his people according to v.15?

**O/I:** Ezekiel used a certain symbolic action in chapter 5 to describe how the people would be judged. What did he do? What did each of these actions mean?

**O:** How do the people respond to this punishment according to vv.16-19?

God gives the reason for this punishment once more in verse. 20: *"They transformed the beauty of His ornaments into pride, and they made the images of their abominations and their detestable things with it;"*

**I:** What do you think these "ornaments" were that they converted into pride?

**A:** What are some of the "ornaments" God has given us that we convert into pride? How does this conversion look in our lives?

As the Israelites turned their gold and silver into false gods, both by making them into statues of these false gods, as well as worshipping wealth as a means itself, we sometimes do the same thing. Our wealth and possessions often have more of a hold on us than we would admit. In the end we

## The Day of the Wrath of the Lord

suffer from much the same illness as the Israelites did and often, like a sick man, we don't realize we're ill. God has to shake us up before we realize how much we need to change to please Him.

We need to remember that, according to II Peter 3:7 this entire world – and its possessions – are going to burn up. How much more important it is to invest in the human being – the eternal soul that can be saved – than in things that can easily be replaced and that will be destroyed in the end anyway.

**O:** What is God going to cause to happen according to vv.21-24?

**I:** Notice the results of this judgment in vv. 24-27. From your knowledge of history, cite some examples of how these results manifested themselves.

God was going to judge Israel, but he was not about to leave them without warning. And this was all done for the simple reason, "*And they will know I am the LORD.*" This was about His people returning to Him and He was going to pull out all the stops until they left their wicked ways and submitted to their One God. Nothing was going to stop Him now.

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** 8:1-18  
**Tuesday:** 9:1-11  
**Wednesday:** 10:1-22  
**Thursday:** 11:1-12  
**Friday:** 11:13-25

## Week Four

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### The Vision of Jerusalem

Text: Ezekiel 8:1-11:25

There is a prophet among the refugees at Tel-Abib by the river Kebar. Certainly by now this had become common knowledge among the Judean exiles. Added to that, Ezekiel's strange behavior, his harsh messages and words of judgment would have been very hard for people to avoid. While some may have been interested because of true spiritual hunger, others would come to hear Ezekiel out of a morbid curiosity and perhaps even would look for a chance to jeer at this prophet.

The nice thing is that Ezekiel dates his prophecies well and he gives the date of this one as *"the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month"*.

According to the Ezekiel Time Line and the Hebrew Calendar, when was this prophecy given to Ezekiel?

During this time, Ezekiel would have been observing his siege of Jerusalem. The elders of Judah were sitting with him when he was given a vision of what was going on in Jerusalem. In his vision, the first thing he saw was, *"a figure like that of a man. From what appeared to be his waist down he was like fire, and from there up his appearance was as bright as glowing metal."* (Ezekiel 8:2)

**O/I:** Compare this figure to that of rider of the throne-chariot in 1:27. Who do you think it is?

Ezekiel is taken by the Spirit to the temple in Jerusalem, where God shows him the abominations happening in the city.

### The Abominations of Jerusalem (8:8-18)

**O:** What are the four abominations that Ezekiel witnesses?

Compare these four abominations to the list of forbidden worship practices in Deuteronomy 4:16-24. Which do you find there?

From what we know of Ezekiel, he was probably seeing what was happening in Jerusalem on Elul 5<sup>th</sup> of Exile Year Six. These abominations were all ones that Manasseh had followed when he was king and forty years of religious reform under the auspices of the godly King Josiah had done *nothing* to rid the nation of its idolatry. The kings Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin were both idolaters, as was Zedekiah. And when there is rot at the top, the people quickly follow.

**O:** Who is it that Ezekiel recognizes in the room with the elders?

This man was evidently an acquaintance of Ezekiel's before the exile. Now we must remember that all of the leading people and nobles of the people had been deported to Babylon by this time. These men that Ezekiel saw were the new nobility, many of whom were probably merely aspiring to



leadership, but couldn't make the cut earlier. Now was their turn to run things and they were evidently enjoying what they were doing, including their heathen worship.

**I:** These elders of the people were secular leaders, not priests. How would the priest, Ezekiel, react to their doing the task of priests – even though these were heathen tasks? Try to back you reasoning up with examples from Scripture.

Names have great meaning in the Bible. The name Jaazaniah<sup>5</sup> means “Yahweh listens” and it is ironic that this man is one of the people who is turning *away* from God to worship idols.

**O:** Why are the elders doing this sort of worship according to 8: 12?

The “*mourning for Tammuz*” offered up by the women in v. 14 is presumably a song of worship to Tammuz, who was the Babylonian form of the god Ba'al, whom the Israelites had been worshipping for centuries. And what is even more ironic is that the men on the top of the Temple, worshipping the sun are facing *east*, away from where the glory of God is sitting, the direction that Adam and Eve and Cain were driven when they left the presence of God.

### The Punishment of Jerusalem (9:1-10:8)

God now steps down from His throne above the cherubim in the Holy of Holies and comes to stand at the threshold of the Temple, preparing to leave.

**O:** What does God do to the people in Jerusalem for these abominations in chapter 9?

The term “mark” here, literally refers to the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, called Taw (today it looks like this: ט). In the days of Ezekiel it was marked either as a cross or as an X and was used both as a mark of ownership, as well as a signature. Next to the seal it was the way people signed their documents. This marking of those who loved God occurs several times in Scripture, among other places in Revelation 4:7. As a matter of fact, Ezekiel's great predecessor Isaiah writes in Isaiah 44:5:

*One will say, 'I belong to the LORD';  
another will call himself by the name of Jacob;  
still another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,'  
and will take the name Israel.*

Many commentators make the point that the one marking his hand here is using a Taw to do that, much like the angel does in Ezekiel 9.

**O:** What is the angel told to do in 10: 2?

**I:** Why do you think God has him do that?

<sup>5</sup> Hebrew: יְאֲזַנְיָהוּ *Ya'āzānyahû*

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Four

Ezekiel then sees God's Throne-Chariot appear again. This time he's looking at it from the east which is why he sees the "face of the cherub" – or ox – first and describes it first, whereas in chapter one he would have seen it from the south, the direction in which the human face of the cherub faces.

### The Flesh in the Pot (11:1-12)

Again Ezekiel is faced with the new leaders of Jerusalem, two of whom he recognizes. This Jaazaniah is not the same as the one in chapter 8. The other man is Pelatiah son of Beniah, whose name means "Yahweh has rescued" and whose father's name means "Yahweh has built". Again, Ezekiel knows both these men, presumably from when he was living in Jerusalem before the exile.

**I:** What do you think that *"This city is the pot and we are the flesh"* means?

**O:** What is Ezekiel supposed to prophesy over these smug, self-sufficient men?

### A Promise of Sanctuary (11:13-25)

**I:** What symbolism, knowing the meaning of Pelatiah's name, is there in his death in v.13 and why do you think that it takes this man's death to make Ezekiel protest that God is wiping out his people?

It seems that at this point God has wiped out all of the people in Jerusalem, and that none are left over who could carry on the line of Israel. For that reason he answers Ezekiel's horrified plea with a message of hope that is echoed again and again throughout the Bible.

**O:** Who does God point out to be the remnant that He is going to preserve?

**O/I:** Who or what is the sanctuary for these people according to 11:16? Why is that significant?

The word "sanctuary" means both a holy place, where a Deity is worshipped, as well as a place of refuge or protection. The Hebrew word also carries this connotation with it.

**A:** In what way is God a sanctuary to us today? Think of a time when you have experienced Him in that way.

**O:** What is God's goal in all of this punishment and regathering?

In Leviticus 26:12 God proclaims to His people: *"I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people."* That has been God's goal from the beginning, to be the God of His people and He has decided that He will go to any lengths to accomplish that goal.

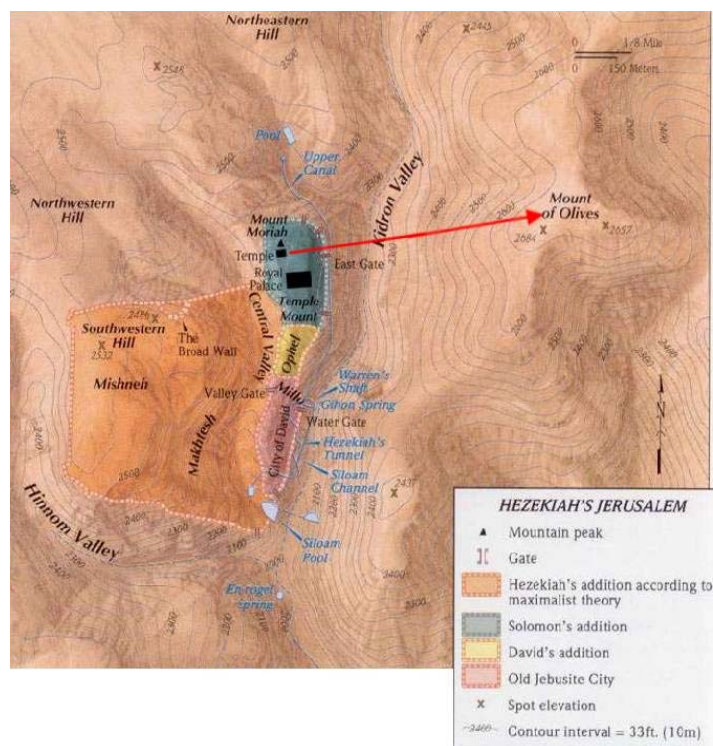
**A:** The image of the heart of flesh, versus the heart of stone is not a new one. Compare the image in Ezekiel 19:19-20 to the one in II Corinthians 3:2-3. How are we as Christians meant to manifest our "heart of flesh"?

God demands that His people be holy so that He can live among them, but first He must transform those who love him and purge those who hate Him. For that reason He arises from His temple in Jerusalem, steps onto his Throne-Chariot and leaves.

**O:** Where does the glory of God go to in 11:23?

**I:** Where is it, according to Zechariah 14:4, that God will return to?

And so Ezekiel returns to his people and tells them about his horrifying vision. God has left Jerusalem and now it is prey to the destruction that must be visited upon it. The people will not escape the just punishment that their God has decreed for them, but a remnant will remain and that remnant will be forever changed.



Map 2 – The Glory of God Leaves the Temple

## Weekly Readings

- Monday: Ezekiel 12:1-16
- Tuesday: Ezekiel 12:17-20
- Wednesday: Ezekiel 12:21-28
- Thursday: Ezekiel 13:1-16
- Friday: Ezekiel 13:17-23

## Week Five

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### The Punishment of False Prophets

Text: Ezekiel 13:1-23

**T**here are many people who are not what they claim to be. How can you tell when someone is a fraud? What are some of the signs you look for?

Ezekiel also had his share of frauds to deal with, men and women who purported to speak for God, but were in fact doing so from their own minds for their own gain. How does a True Prophet deal with a false one? What does God do with such false prophets? And what is the difference between the false and the true in God's eyes? God answers these questions quite conclusively in this brief passage.

#### A Pronouncement Against Prophets (13:1-16)

God has had enough. The false prophets have been speaking to His people both in Israel and in exile, proclaiming that His wrath was not going to be poured out on Jerusalem, that the exiles would soon return and that they would all be happily reunited in Israel again and become the Number One Nation of the world once more. After all, is not Yahweh, the True God with us?

No, He is no longer with us, reply the True Prophets of the Living God. And God is tired of these false pronouncements which keeps the truth from being heard, because His people want their ears tickled.

**O:** What does God compare the false prophets to in 13:4?

**I:** What characteristics do these men exhibit that would make this an apt picture of their actions?

**O/I:** God uses another picture of what the prophets did *not* do in 13:5. What is that and what do you think God means by this picture?

We must think here of the people being defended against false teaching, against godlessness and against the idolatry that has always plagued Israel. The priests were the first defense against this and when they failed, the prophets were commissioned. The prophets were the last defense against apostasy and they had failed. They had refused to stand in the breach. Not only are they leaving Israel defenseless, but like "*jackals*" they are feeding off of the spiritual disintegration of society. They, the guardians of Truth have become the scavengers of lies.

And God is not at all pleased with this state of affairs. In 13:6-7 He states *twice* that what they are saying is not what God says and that He has not sent them. And so He is going to punish them.

**O:** This punishment is laid out in 13:9. What are the three things God promises to do to the false prophets?

These three punishments are the worst ones that any Israelite could face. In essence God is revoking their citizenship among His people. The first punishment deals with their not being part of the

## The Punishment of False Prophets

Community of Faith and so may not enter the Temple any more. The second punishment is a removal of their names from the register of all true Israelites. Their children would no longer be citizens of God's nation. And the third punishment was probably the worst – at least to their minds – they would be thrown out of the land, never to return. God was removing this rot from His house, sum and sundry.

But God was not finished yet. He uses a second metaphor to describe what these prophets were up to. This metaphor was taken from the realm of building. In the ancient Middle East, most houses were made of mud and straw bricks, held together by mortar and then whitewashed over with another coat of mud mixed with lime that would keep the rain out. Defective walls were especially dangerous and probably were fairly frequently built when builders either skimped on straw to hold the mud together, or had badly mixed mud. If it rained hard enough and there was enough wind, a defective wall would crumble and all the whitewash in the world would not hold it together, because that was just a beautification, not a true repair.

**O:** What message are these people proclaiming, according to 13:10, that is just such a whitewash?

**I:** What should the prophets have been doing, rather than “whitewashing the walls” and how might this have looked?

If the prophets had done their work, there would be no defective wall under the whitewash. Ironically, the Hebrew here uses a wordplay that might in modern days be translated as: “As you whitewash over the ills of society, you give my people nothing but hogwash.”<sup>6</sup>

“With their self-inspired predictions of peace they have covered up the fundamental deficiencies of the Israelite society and encouraged an illusory sense of well-being.”<sup>7</sup>

**I:** Who do you think the ones who built the defective wall might be? Why would you think they are the builders?

**A:** How might we, as prophets of the Living God, be whitewashing the walls of our society?

**A:** Are there times when we “see visions of peace” for our people when there is none? How can we combat this?

## A Pronouncement Against False Prophetesses (13:17-23)

And when Ezekiel was finished with the false prophets, he still had another whole group to contend with, namely those false prophetesses. Actually, God doesn't even use that term for these women who are prophesying against Him as if it were from Him. They are simply “*the daughters of your people*”.

<sup>6</sup> See here Block's description of the wordplay in his commentary *The Book of Ezekiel – Chapters 1-24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), p.407.

<sup>7</sup> David I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel – Chapters 1-24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 407.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Five

**O/I:** What are the things that these women are doing, as described in 13:18 and what do you think that these actions signify?

It is not entirely certain what Ezekiel is describing here, but it seems that these practices that these women are up to involve black magic similar to that used by Babylonian and Assyrian magicians of that time. The “bands” are probably some sort of charm, as are the “veils”.

**I:** Who do you think are the ones who should not die in 13:19? Who are the ones who should not live?

In the end it seems that what these women are about is not merely prophecy and lulling of people, whether in Jerusalem or among the exiles, but it is about controlling their lives through charms and veils that have power over them. They seem to be casting spells using the “*barley and fragments of bread*”, which were classic means of divination at the time of the exile, or else these are used to pay them for their services as witches.

**I:** Where are these women getting their power from?

**O/I:** What is God going to do about these women and their charms?

**O:** What is God’s express reason, according to 13:22, that He is going to mete out judgment upon these women?

**A:** Can you think of ways that we Christians “bind bands on all wrists” in order to keep people from straying? What should we do instead?

In the end effect, we, as well as these men and women, sometimes end up whitewashing over the ills of society and binding people to man-made rules and regulations in an effort to lull them in peace and not have to face God’s Truth and wrath. We can be just as guilty as these people, because, though the methods change, the end result is often the same.

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 14:1-11  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 14:12-23  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 15:1-8  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 16:1-34  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 16:35-63

## Week Six

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### The Child In The Field

Text: Ezekiel 16:1-63

**T**he quickest cure to complacency is shock. As icy cold marbles slipped under the covers of a teenager's bed have a very quickly invigorating effect, so a splash of the frigid Truth in the face of a calm, complacent individual often provides amazing results and a change in life.

Ezekiel had just such a problem. His people were smugly complacent in their heritage as God's favored nation. Their mother, Jerusalem, was a prized possession of the One God and there was nothing that could turn His favor from them – or so they thought. God gives Ezekiel an oracle that comes as a slap in the face of these smug, self-centered people who thought they were completely safe from any punishment God had for them, for – by God – they were His people and He would only give them *good* things, wouldn't He?

**I:** In reading this passage, what is your first reaction? What do you think of the way that Ezekiel writes this story of the child in the field?

**I:** How do you think that the Israelites would have felt to hear such an oracle from a True Prophet? How might they have responded?

### Rejection (16:1-5)

**O:** Who are the birth-parents of Jerusalem according to 16:3?

**I:** What kind of parents – spiritual or physical – do you think these are? Why?

If you look at the list of peoples living Canaan given to Moses in Exodus 3:8 and 17, you'll find that the Hittites and the Amorites were two of the principle peoples. It makes sense that these, the two most powerful and corrupt of all Canaanite people would be used to represent the parents of the infant Jerusalem.

The practice of exposing an unwanted girl-child to the elements to dispose of her was common in the ancient Middle East. The fact that the child is not even accorded the standard practices of postnatal cleaning makes it clear that her parents don't want her and would rather she be dead.

### Rescue (16:6-7)

**O:** Who is it that saves the child?

**O/I:** What are his reasons for saving this child?

The language used in v.6 is a classic ancient Middle Eastern form of adoption. Yahweh has now adopted the girl-child by accepting her while the fluid of her birth is still clinging to her. She is now his daughter and He causes her to grow.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet — Week Six

### Marriage (16:8-14)

Yahweh's next act is to take this girl-child as His bride. *"I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness"* is reminiscent of Ruth's request of Boaz in Ruth 3:9, where she asks him to *"Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer."* Boaz immediately understood this as a marriage proposal on Ruth's part and Ezekiel's contemporaries would have understood this wordless action of Yahweh's in the same way.

**O:** But Yahweh doesn't merely spread His garment over her to show He's married her, He does more. What is it?

He adorns her as a queen in the finest clothing possible, feeding her the finest foods imaginable and, in His mercy, turns her in to a woman of stunning beauty.

**O:** What is the result of this transformation according to v.14?

**O:** Who is the source of Jerusalem's splendor?

### Infidelity (16:15-34)

But now this fairy tale takes a tragic turn as Jerusalem turns from her loving Husband who has not only given her life, but has taken her as His queen.

**O:** Verses 15-21 describe Jerusalem's religious infidelities. List all of the ways in the text that she performs this infidelity.

**O:** Not enough that these things she did were utterly evil in themselves, the real kicker is found in v.22. What is it?

**I:** What makes her sin in v.22 worse than all the rest?

**A:** Can you think of instances where we commit the same sin? What is it that leads us to such sins?

Added to her religious infidelities, Jerusalem prostitutes herself politically as well.

**O:** Three nations are mentioned in particular in vv.23-29. Who are they?

If we look at Israel's history, these three nations were her three biggest allies and abusers. Egypt was often seen as a protector against the juggernauts of Assyria and Babylon and as this was written, the Judean King Zedekiah was actively allying himself with Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon.

The adultery with Assyria is described in Isaiah 7, when Ahaz sought to ally himself with Assyria to keep from being overrun by his stronger northern neighbors Ephraim and Damascus.



Of all people, the godly King Hezekiah, was the one who began the fateful liaison of Jerusalem with Chaldea, or Babylon, when he allied himself with them as they sought to depose the Assyrian Empire in the early seventh century (see here I Chronicles 32:27-31).

It's interesting that even the Philistines, people who were at least as corrupt as the Canaanites, were ashamed at what Jerusalem was up to with her alliances with the various world powers. Once having tasted power under Solomon, it seems that Jerusalem would do anything to get it back and be queen of the world.

**O:** But it's not enough that she offers herself up to her lovers, Jerusalem has to twist things around. How does she do this according to vv.30-34?

**A:** Can you think of instances where we as Christians play the twisted harlot to this world?

### Punishment (16:35-52)

And Yahweh has enough. Jerusalem has gone too far. She's profaned the beautiful religious relationship with Him, by prostituting herself to false gods and by sacrificing the children she born to Him to these false gods. She's also rejected the political independence He's given her through His relationship to her by offering herself to the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans and she's used all the wonderful gifts He's given her to do so. She's been *bribing* her lovers to sleep with her and, worst of all, she's forgotten who she was and how she came to be queen of the world. Yahweh is not going to put up with this and so He comes down on His wicked wife.

**O:** What is God going to do to Jerusalem, according to vv.37-41?

**O:** What is the punishment for adultery according to 20:10?

In Hosea 2:2-7 God makes a similar pronouncement over His wife, Israel:

*Contend with your mother, contend,  
For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband;  
And let her put away her harlotry from her face  
And her adultery from between her breasts,  
Or I will strip her naked  
And expose her as on the day when she was born.  
I will also make her like a wilderness,  
Make her like desert land  
And slay her with thirst.  
Also, I will have no compassion on her children,  
Because they are children of harlotry.  
For their mother has played the harlot;  
She who conceived them has acted shamefully.  
For she said, "I will go after my lovers,  
Who give me my bread and my water,  
My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink."  
Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns,*

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Six

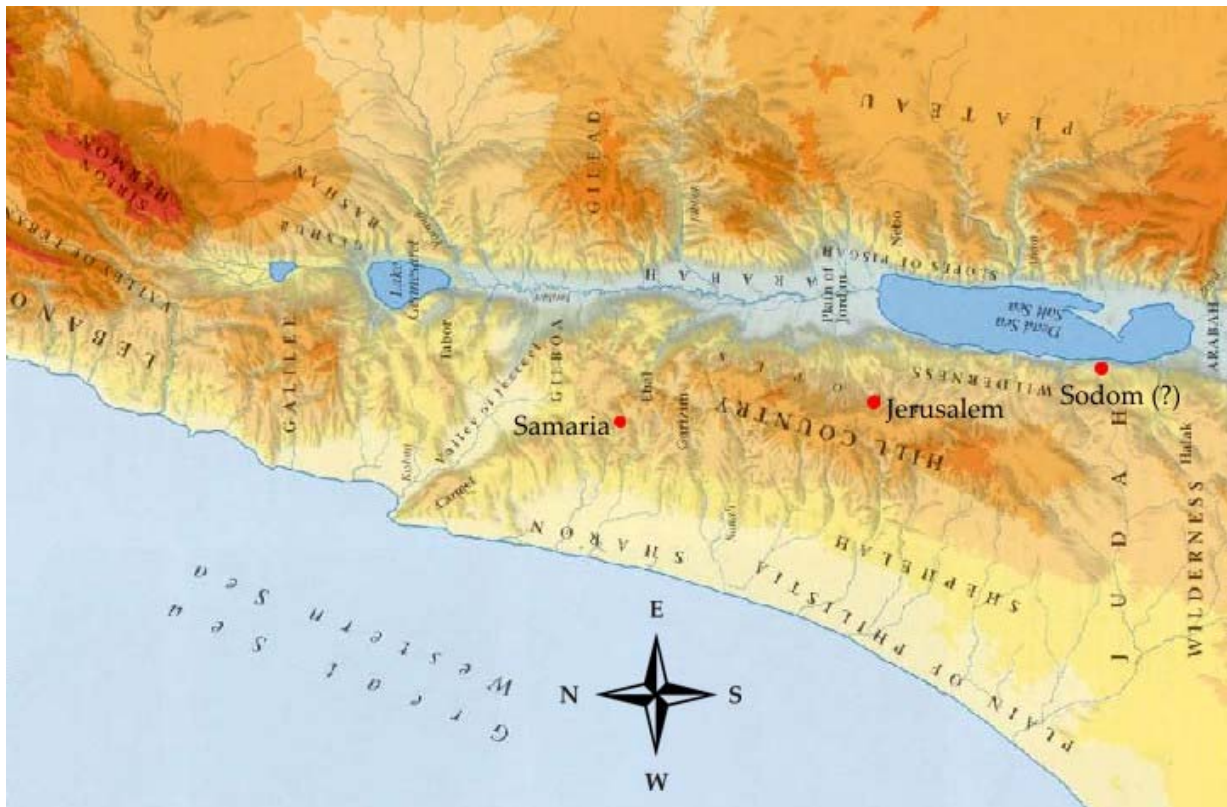
*And I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths.  
She will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them;  
And she will seek them, but will not find them.  
Then she will say, "I will go back to my first husband,  
For it was better for me than than now!"*

**O:** How will God feel once this judgment has been carried out on His wife?

As if the punishment of Israel were not enough to shock the socks off of the Israelites – well, they didn't believe it would happen anyway – Ezekiel pulls out another card, comparing Jerusalem to two cities she despised.

**O:** What were those two cities according to v.46?

If you look at a map, from a Judean perspective you will see the following:



**Map 3 – Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom from a Judean Perspective**

The Judeans looked at East as we look at North, thus – as the Hebrew says – Samaria would be to Jerusalem's left and Sodom would be somewhere to Jerusalem's right.

**I:** Why do you think that comparing Jerusalem to Samaria and Sodom would be shocking to the Judeans?

Sodom's wickedness is detailed in Genesis 18 and 19 and throughout Scripture it is held up as the epitome of a godless city. That Jerusalem would be considered *worse* than Sodom, "the sister she despised", would be a real shock to the Israelites. God pulled no punches to make it clear that Judah had not only succumbed to Sodom's sins of arrogance, gluttony, complacency, and disregard for the downtrodden in society, she had taken them much farther. Her whoring after other gods and disregarding where she came from had eclipsed the sins of Sodom.

### Restoration (16:53-63)

Now that God has the attention of Jerusalem and has punished her, He promises to restore her, but this promise of restoration is different from many of the other ones in Scripture, because it focuses not on the happy ending, but on the shame that Jerusalem will feel for the rest of her days.

**O:** What is the reason for that shame?

**I:** What is the reason for this constant shame that God wants Jerusalem to feel?

**A:** Can shame be good? If, yes, how so?

God's restoration of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom encompasses the three key groups of people in Israel: The religious, but unfaithful Israelites, the completely apostatized Israelites, and the Gentiles. God will restore all of these under the hand of Jerusalem and there will be peace, but God will *never* let Jerusalem forget where she came from. She will always remember her origins, her infidelity, and her Husband's amazing grace that has restored her to her former glory.

We as Christians need to remember where we came from as well, so that we don't become smug and complacent like Jerusalem and fall under a similar judgment. It is so easy to fall into such a trap and it is very difficult to get out of it.

### Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 17:1-24  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 18:1-32  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 19:1-14  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 20:1-26  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 20:27-44

## Week Seven

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### Individual Responsibility

**Text:** Ezekiel 18:1-32

**I**n a third-world country a man is tried for manslaughter and convicted. He is sentenced to life in prison, in the harshest conditions. Needless to say, he is not happy with the prospect, tries to escape, and is shot by the prison guards in the process. However, the country's laws stipulate that the crime must be paid for *as ordered by the judge*, so, in accordance with the laws of the land, the police take the man's eight-year-old son and put him in a maximum security prison to serve out his father's sentence.

What is your first reaction to this story? Why do you react that way? Is it fair for the son to have to pay for his father's crime? Why or why not? How much of your reaction do you think is cultural, how much is objective?

Most western cultures hold to the notion of individual responsibility and corporate, or national responsibility is only viewed as secondary. The Israelites, and most Middle-Eastern peoples for that matter, put corporate responsibility above individual responsibility. We see this in many of the prayers prayed by the great saints of the Old Testament, such as David, Asaph, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Esther. And it is precisely something like this that Ezekiel must deal with.

### The First Challenge: Punishing the Children for the Sins of the Father is Unjust (18:1-4)

*The fathers eat sour grapes,  
and the children's teeth are set on edge.*

This was a classic proverb about the time of the Exile, dealing with the people of Israel's view of generational sins. The fathers sin and the children pay for it, no way out about it. Lamentations 5:7 makes it even clearer than this simple proverb.

*Our fathers sinned and are no more,  
and we bear their punishment.*

**I:** Do you think this is a biblical view? Back your answer up with Scripture.

God does talk about sins passing from generation to generation. Read Exodus 20:5.

**O:** How many generations does God punish for their sins according to this verse?

So God *will* visit the sins of the fathers on their children, as He did with Israel when he punished Manasseh's grandchildren and great-grandchildren for what that king had done in Judah. However, what the Israelites in exile were saying was not simply a truism that they were being punished for their fathers' sins. They were insinuating that they were being punished unjustly by

## Individual Responsibility

God, since they hadn't done anything wrong! It was all their fathers' fault! And it was the cruel fate of the universe that caused them to suffer.

This idea was carried even into Jesus' day. In John 9:2, Jesus' disciples ask him about a blind man: "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?*" They thought the same thing as Ezekiel's contemporaries about sin and punishment.

**A:** What is "fate" or "destiny"? Do you think it's a biblical concept? Why or why not? Think of ways that the ideas of "generational sins" or "fate" are espoused in the church.

The idea of the unavoidable fate written in ages past is summed up by the Muslims as "kismet"<sup>8</sup> and that is almost exactly the same thing that these people are espousing.

**I:** God's answer to this idea in v.4 is that all souls belong to Him. What do you think He means by this statement?

### The First Reply: A Family Story (18:5-18)

Ezekiel then goes on to give an example of a family of three generations: a righteous father, an evil son, and a righteous grandson.

**O:** Read through this section of what the various actors in this story do right and do wrong, compare them and write them down in your journal.

**O/I:** What is Ezekiel's main point with this parable?

The people had to understand that it was not only for the sins of their fathers, but for *their own* sins that they were being punished. Ezekiel is completely unequivocal about that. The people are not suffering because of what their fathers have done.

### The Second Challenge: Unjust Mercy Towards Sinners (18:19-20)

It seems that Ezekiel's listeners were quick to rally towards his statement that God is merciful towards those who do what is right. Ezekiel has, after all, challenged their fatalistic thinking that they were being punished for their fathers' sins and that they were innocent. So, thinking that they can still abdicate responsibility, they turn the issue back on Ezekiel: "*Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?*"

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<sup>8</sup> Pronounced *KISS-met*

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Seven

**O/I:** Read Deuteronomy 24:16, compare it with Ezekiel 18:20 and fill in the chart below:

Deuteronomy 24:16	Ezekiel 18:20
<i>Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons</i>	_____
<i>nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers;</i>	_____
<i>everyone shall be put to death for his own sin</i>	_____
	_____
	_____

Ezekiel takes Deuteronomy 24:16, which should be well known to the exiles, as they were mostly upper crust Jews, and turns it around to make his point. Each person shall die for his own sin, not for the sins of others. Thus the Jews – and we – are each punished for what *they* did, not merely for what their fathers did.

And it is God’s prerogative to punish as He wills. In order to make His point, Ezekiel tells another parable.

### The Second Reply: Repentance and Apostasy (18:21-29)

**O:** Who are the two people who are contrasted in this passage?

**O:** What is it that Israel is saying about the Lord?

**I:** Do you think God is fair to deal with these two men that way? Why or why not?

God is interested in the heart and the Old Testament makes it very clear that action characterizes what is in the heart of man. The sinner who turns from his sin and follows God is showing a repentant heart, whereas the once righteous man is showing that he didn’t really care about God in the first place. It is the *actions* that show what is inside, not the words that come out of our mouths.

If we look at the term “repent” in Hebrew, **שׁוּב** (*šûb*), it doesn’t just talk about turning away from something, it’s turning towards something else. The sinner repents from his sin and turns towards righteousness. The righteous man repents from his righteousness and turns to sin. The only difference here is the direction that men are turning and it is the actions later in life that characterize what will happen to them, not what they did before times.

**A:** How do we act towards the sinner who repents and the righteous man who becomes apostate in the church?

### Conclusion: Each Is Judged For His Own Sins (18:30-32)

Ezekiel’s point is clear: each man is judged for his own sins, and so he issues a call to repentance.

**O:** What does God say in v.32?

And so He issues the decree for Israel to repent, but unless they do, He will have no choice but to punish their sins.

**A:** In his commentary on Ezekiel David Block makes six statements about this passage. Look at them below and think of one instance where the church has taught something similar to this, as well as the response you should make to this statement:

1. "Ezekiel repudiates any systematic doctrine of sin and retribution that would allow one person to blame another for his or her fate."
2. "Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine of eternal security and eternal damnation that would hold a person captive to the decisions of the past."
3. "Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine that would accuse God of unscrupulosity and capriciousness."
4. "Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine that would perceive God as primarily bent on judgment and death."
5. "Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine of ministry that encourages a prophet to proclaim only what people want to hear."
6. "Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine that God's covenant with Israel is over."<sup>9</sup>

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 20:45-49  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 21:1-32  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 22:1-16  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 22:17-22  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 22:23-31

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<sup>9</sup> David I. Block, *Ibid.*, pp.589-590.

## Week Eight

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### The Song of the Sword

Text: Ezekiel 21:1-27

**W**hat images come to your mind when you hear the word *sword*? Can you think of a single modern term which would encompass those same ideas?

In Ezekiel's day the sword was the ultimate weapon of destruction. All were equal before it. It did not differentiate between young and old, male or female, warrior or civilian, righteous or unrighteous. God gives Ezekiel a prophecy about the Sword with which He will strike His people Israel and He does so in three stanzas.

#### The First Stanza (21:1-7)

**O:** What three things is Ezekiel supposed to directly prophesy against?

**O:** According to v.3 who all is going to be cut off by the Sword?

**I:** Since being "cut off" often means killed, do you see any problems with this statement about God killing *both* of these people? Why or why not?

At this point the Sword is going to indiscriminately wipe out all people in the Land of Israel. Judgment time has arrived and nothing is going to stop it until "*all flesh*" has been "*cut off*" from the land.

**O:** For this reason God gives Ezekiel a new sign to show the people in exile. What is that sign?

**I:** What did this action symbolize to the Israelites?

The utter devastation of Israel needed to be acted out before the Exiles, because they still mistakenly believed that God was going to pull them out of the way of the whirlwind. They were not going to escape the tribulation of the years to come, no matter how much they believed they might yet get away from it. The Three Pillars of Israel's security in God's plan – the possession of the Land, the promise of the Throne, and the precincts of the Temple – were going to be taken away from them until they had been completely remade in the image God wanted them to have.

#### The Second Stanza (21:8-17)

The Sword has been prepared for battle. As is the case in ancient times, it has been polished, the flashing gray-silver of iron, and sharpened, honed to razor sharpness, which allows for the cleaving of human flesh and wooden shield with a minimum of effort. All was ready and the judgment was already glinting in the distance, but the Judeans still would not believe it.

21:10b often causes difficulty both to the interpreter and the reader, as is the related v.13. It seems that in the height of his prophetic ecstasy, Ezekiel cried aloud phrases that would be clearly



## The Song of the Sword

understood by his contemporaries, but are obscure to us because of the idioms. The term “the rod of my son”<sup>10</sup> could have been a contemporary term for the scepter of Judah. The “rod” or “staff” are often used in the Old Testament to denote the ruler’s scepter. Here the NIV does the best job of interpreting what the prophet probably meant:

*Shall we rejoice in the scepter of my son Judah? The sword despises every such stick.*

**O:** What is Ezekiel to do in v.12?

These actions are symbols of intense mourning. Ezekiel is mourning His people’s demise at the sword of the one God.

Once more 21:13 is a difficult verse, but the NIV is helpful here.

*Testing will surely come. And what if the scepter of Judah, which the sword despises, does not continue?*

**I:** Using this translation of the verse, what does it seem to you that God is saying?

If the scepter of Judah comes to an end, what will happen to the promises that God has made to David about a his seed perpetually being on the throne of Israel? What happens if *there is no throne*? This is a difficult thing for the people to understand. Will the people be found pure in the testing, or will they be discarded as dross? Will the kingship continue? This is a great dilemma for the people.

Ezekiel is now called to once more act out his message by clapping out loud. This has been variously interpreted as being an act of rejoicing in the judgment, a sign of scorn or derision, or even an expression of anger on Ezekiel’s part at the sin of the people and the need for punishment.

**I:** Which of these do you think fits best with the context? Why?

The image of the sword doubling and tripling will recall what a blade looks like when it swings back and forth at a great speed. The blurring of the shining, razor-sharp blade will make it look like the wielder is swinging two or three swords at once, an awesome, terrible sight.

**O/I:** What does God do when the sword has meted out judgment? What do you think this action means?

## The Third Stanza (21:18-27)

**O:** Who is the one wielding the sword, according to verse 19?

Now Ezekiel makes another model of a crossroads with a signpost.

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<sup>10</sup> Hebrew שֵׁבֶט בְּנֵי שֵׁבֶט *šebet bēnī*

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Eight

**O:** What two cities are inscribed on the signpost?

If you look at a map, Nebuchadnezzar is coming down from the north into Canaan and when he reaches Damascus he has to decide whether to attack the important Rabbah (modern-day Amman in Jordan), or the annoying Jerusalem. And in order to find out where he should go at this critical juncture, he consults his gods using various common-day methods of divination.

**O:** What three methods of divination does Nebuchadnezzar use to determine what he's going to do?

**O:** Which city does he decide to attack as a result of his divination?

**I:** Who do you think was guiding this divination and why do you think that?

**A:** What are some "methods of divination" that we Christians use? Are we right to use them? Write down your reasoning.

God will use all kinds of methods to get people to do the things that He wants them to, including attempts at divination. After all, He is in control of everything that happens. And at this point, He seeks to punish Jerusalem who really deserves what she's getting.

**O:** God is going to lay waste to the land. According to v. 27, when will He restore the land?

It is for Christ and Christ alone that the Land of Israel is restored, because the Messiah will rule the land and fulfill the promises to David, but until He comes Israel must bear the punishment for their sins as decreed in the Law of God.

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 23:1-35  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 23:36-49  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 24:1-14  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 24:15-27  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 25:1-17



Map 4 – Nebuchadnezzar's Choices

## Week Nine

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### The Death of Delight

Text: Ezekiel 24:15-27

**E**zekiel has had a tough life as a prophet of God. Consider all that he has had to go through so far: He's had to do weird symbolic acts, like playing with clay like a child, lying on his side for extended periods of time, cooking his food over cow dung and eating a very limited diet. He's had to shudder and shake, he's been unable to say anything, unless God spoke through him and that meant that all he ever proclaimed was judgment, judgment, judgment. Ezekiel certainly suffered through this time and it seems that throughout his ministry there was one thing that gave him delight apart from God himself – his wife. And now, in order to make a very important point to the Exiles, God was going to do something with his wife, something terrible.

#### Prophecy and Fulfillment (24:15-18)

**O:** What does God say that He is about to take away from Ezekiel?

From all accounts, it seems that Ezekiel and his wife had a very loving relationship and a delightful marriage, as the term that the Bible calls her the delight of Ezekiel's eyes. Certainly she was the one happy light in his difficult life.

**I:** How would you react if God told you that you were going to lose your spouse in order to make you a symbol to speak to His people?

Not only was it not enough that Ezekiel was going to lose his wife – certainty of the Afterlife was not as clear as it is in New Testament times – he was not allowed to do what would come most naturally to him, mourn for the one human he loved above all others. And she was going to be taken away *“with one blow”*, suddenly and without warning, as the people of Jerusalem would die by famine, plague, and sword.

**O:** What things is Ezekiel forbidden to do by God in vv.16-17, what things is he commanded to do? Make a list in your journal.

Typical Jewish mourning customs of the day, included loud cries of anguish, profuse weeping, the shaving of the head and facial hair, uncovering your head, taking off your shoes, wearing coarse sack-cloth, spreading dust on your head and clothes and sitting in the ashes. Included in this was the communal mourning of eating the mourning bread<sup>11</sup>. The question as to *why* Ezekiel is supposed to do these things will become clear.

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<sup>11</sup> Textual Note: While the NASB and KJV translate the Hebrew literally as *“the bread of men”*, the NIV, interpreting the text, makes it clearer that this is *“the customary food of mourners”*, or as the NRSV puts it, following the Aramaic and Latin, *“the bread of mourners”*.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Nine

**O/I:** Ezekiel is not the only one whose family life God used to make a point to his people. Take a look at these three prophets and write down what happened in their lives that God used symbolically to make His people understand the truth:  
Hosea 1:1-11; 3:1-5; Jeremiah 16:1-2; Isaiah 7:3; 8:1-3

**I:** Do you think God is too harsh in making Ezekiel perform this sign? Why or why not?

And so what God has decreed comes to pass: Ezekiel's wife dies suddenly in the evening after the pronouncement. The day of her death is surmised to be Tevet 10, Exile Year Nine (January 15, 588 BC), the precise day that Nebuchadnezzar began his final siege of Jerusalem.

### Question and Answer (24:19-27)

By this time Ezekiel has been acting out signs and portents before the Exiles for four years and so they immediately know that what he has been doing has a significance beyond his merely not mourning for his wife. And so they pose the question:

*"Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?"*

And Ezekiel is eager to oblige.

**O:** What is the Lord going to do according to v.21?

**O:** What is to be the response of the people?

**I:** Why do you think God wants His people to respond to the destruction of Jerusalem this way?

The Temple of Jerusalem had been so utterly defiled that God needed to purge it, along with the idols of the heart of the Israelites, before they could truly worship Him. Judgment had to be carried out on Israel completely before God would turn and offer His mercy. So God gives Ezekiel something to look forward to.

**O:** What event were Ezekiel and the Exiles look forward to according to vv.24-25?

**O:** What would happen to Ezekiel once this event took place?

The lifting of Ezekiel's muteness entailed his being able to speak the message of hope and restoration that so shines through the second half of his book. He would finally be free to act as a true priest, a mediator between Yahweh and His Exiled People, and no longer as God's bailiff.

**I:** Having looked at the entire passage, what is your reaction to God taking away the woman Ezekiel loved so much? Do you think God is too harsh on Ezekiel?

In Philippians 3:8-11, Paul writes:

## The Death of Delight

*More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

**A:** What are some practical ways in which you, or people you know have had to fulfill this verse? Were any of their experiences similar to those of Ezekiel? How was that?

Dennis Cochrane, a man who has suffered profoundly for the cause of God, has said, "How much does God love you? So much that He has given His word, never ever to keep from you even one thing that would be good for you!"<sup>12</sup> That includes any pain He knows you need. And sometimes that means that *you* will be put through extreme difficulties so *someone else* can grow. Not all of our sufferings are for our own growth, but for the experience so that we can *help others grow*. So, let's carry our burdens patiently and with praising God, because, as it is written in Psalm 84:

*Even though they pass through the Valley of Tears,  
They turn it into a Place of Springs.  
The early rains come and shower the land with blessings.*

Psalm 84:6<sup>13</sup>

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 26:1-21  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 27:1-25  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 27:26-36  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 28:1-10  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 28:11-19

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<sup>12</sup> Dennis Cochrane. *Grief and God's Amazing Love*. 2002. Forever Songs. Jan 31, 2005. <<http://www.wolfhawke.com/foreversongs/message.php>>

<sup>13</sup> Author's translation

## Week Ten

### The Prince and the King: A Quandary

Text: Ezekiel 28:1-19

*Note: This lesson is in a different format than the previous ones, due to the difficulty of the passage and the fact that the student will be encouraged to draw his or her own conclusions regarding the persons addressed, especially in the second part of the passage. For the author's point of view, see Appendix A: On the King of Tyre. It is strongly recommended that the student complete the study below by himself before reading the appendix.*

As with many prophets, Ezekiel is not only sent to the people of Israel, but he's also sent to proclaim God's word to the nations around Israel. In chapters 24-32 Ezekiel does precisely that, focusing on the various neighbors and erstwhile allies of Jerusalem. Most of his speeches are directed against the city of Tyre and against Egypt.

Chapters 24-28 deal primarily with the fall of Tyre and it is in this section that we find this fascinating passage of a taunt-song against the Prince of Tyre and the lament of the King of Tyre. What makes this passage all the more intriguing is the various ways that it has been interpreted by various expositors and the conclusions that they came to regarding the personages who are mentioned here.



Map 5 - The Coast of Canaan

Read through Ezekiel 28:1-19 and see if you can discover why especially the second half of the chapter might cause difficulty in defining who or what the King of Tyre might be. Write the answer down in your journal

Having read through this passage, who do you think the Prince of Tyre is? Why? Who do you think the King of Tyre is and why do you think so?

## The Prince of Tyre (28:1-10)

Ezekiel opens this passage with a command to prophesy against the “*ruler of Tyre*” (or, as the NRSV puts it, the “*prince of Tyre*”)<sup>14</sup>.

**O:** What are the sins that the prince of Tyre exhibits which God is calling him to account for?

**O/I:** What is the precise reason, according to v.2 that God is against the prince of Tyre?

The humanity of the “*ruler of Tyre*” is unquestionable. Ezekiel makes it abundantly clear that we are dealing here with a man who claims to be a god – yes even *the* God<sup>15</sup> – though he isn’t a god, but merely a man.

**O/I:** What are some of the possibly positive character traits that the prince of Tyre exhibits? And why are they marred?

**O:** What is the punishment that God is going to pour out upon the prince of Tyre?

The city of Tyre was built half on the mainland, and half on a rocky outcropping the Tyrian harbor. Nebuchadnezzar brought Tyre under his sway early in his reign, mostly because he supported the Phoenician city against the Assyrians, but the city did always pose a bit of difficulty for the various empires that tried to rule over it. It was finally subdued by Alexander the Great and never really entirely recovered from his conquest. To this day the island city is uninhabited, while the city itself moved a little ways farther up the coast.

The Prince of Tyre was brought down by the strangers and died “in the midst of the seas”, where he thought he would be safe. If God is against you, there is no safety to be found anywhere.

## The King of Tyre (28:11-19)

The true difficulty of this passage is not so much in the identity and punishment of the prince of Tyre – that is fairly straightforward – but in identifying the King of Tyre.

Who is the King of Tyre? Is he merely a man, or is he more than that? Why does God command Ezekiel to denounce the king separately from the ruler? Aren’t they both the same person?

In the end it usually comes down to two basic identifications of who the King of Tyre is.

1. He is a human king, probably the same person as the prince, who has elevated himself to a position that no man can take and is punished for it. Thus most of the text is poetic hyperbole.

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<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew נָגִיד (nāgīd) can be translated variously, but it is mostly used to denote a leader of some sort, whether political, religious, or otherwise. It is rarely, if ever, used for kings, but very frequently used for the viceroy or crown prince who is ruling under the authority of a king. See here Kenneth T. Aitken נָגִיד NIDOTTE.

<sup>15</sup> This probably is referring to the primary god of the Canaanite pantheon, ‘El, rather than to the Hebrew God Yahweh. Either way, this is a gross affront to whatever deity the prince is setting himself up as. And Yahweh takes it personally.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Ten

2. He is some sort of spiritual being, perhaps Satan, who is being addressed as the true King of Tyre and the text, while effusive, is an accurate description of this spiritual being.

We'll now examine both positions regarding this passage.

**O/I:** Read through the passage again and review what you wrote at the beginning of the lesson about the identity of the King of Tyre. Have your views changed at all?

Keep your thoughts in mind as we continue the study and look at the various arguments for and each position.

Often when studying various passages of Scripture, it's important to see how an author uses certain terms in his writings. Let's take a look at how Ezekiel uses the term "king" throughout his book. Here is a list of all the passages in which the word appears in Ezekiel.

Look through these passages and designate whether Ezekiel is referring to human or spiritual rulers: 1:2; 7:27; 17:12,16; 19:9; 21:19,21; 24:2; 26:7; 27:33,35; 28:12,17; 29:2,3,18,19; 30:10,21,22,24,25; 31:2; 32:2,10,11,29; 37:22,24; 43:7,9

Who does Ezekiel almost exclusively use the term "king" for? Human or spiritual rulers?

On the other hand, we must also make sure that we think of what the intended recipients of the message would understand when they hear the term "King of Tyre". The people for whom this message was intended were the Tyrians themselves. Their principal deity was Melqart, the king of the city<sup>16</sup>. The human king of the city was seen as the servant of this deity who truly ruled.

**Optional Assignment:** See what you can find out about Melqart. A good place to start is Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia at <http://www.wikipedia.org>.

Who do you think that the Tyrians would think of when they heard Ezekiel prophesying against the King of Tyre?

There are other passages in Scripture where a human being is clearly addressed in almost super-human terms. One of these is Isaiah 14. If you read the chapter without any preconceived notions, it is clear that the King of Babylon is a human being who is accused of the sin of pride and who is portrayed in the most glowing, hyperbolic language. In Psalm 86:2, God says of the Israelites: "*I said, 'You are gods, And all of you are sons of the Most High.'*"

Seeing as this chapter is extremely poetic, and a literal reading of a passage dictates that we look at the form that it is written in, what could we infer from the above evidence regarding hyperbole used on humans?

On the other hand, there are certain features of the text which strongly suggest that a super-human creature is being addressed in this chapter despite the hyperbole.

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<sup>16</sup> Melqart is a contraction of the Phoenician words *melk* (king) and *qart* (city). See here "Melqart." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. 2005. Accessed February 7, 2005. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melqart>>



## The Prince and the King: A Quandary

Get a concordance and look up the occurrences of the term "cherub" or "cherubim" in Scripture. Can you find any instances where that term is applied to a human being besides possibly this passage?

Hebrews loved parallelisms and often stated the same idea in two different ways to make a point. Read through the Prince of Tyre passage and the King of Tyre passage and write down all similarities you can find in your journal.

The term "signet ring" or "seal" is often used in Scripture of highly prized humans. The seal of a king or of a person was considered their most prized possession. Take a look at the following passages regarding these human seals: Jehoiachin in Jeremiah 22:24; Shulamith in Song of Songs 8:6; Zerubbabel in Haggai 2:23.

While the King of Tyre might be human, it still does not address the typically Old Testament idea of types. A type is "a person or thing ... believed to foreshadow another"<sup>17</sup>. The Old Testament is full of types, both of good and evil things and especially the New Testament sheds light on what may and may not be types. Two key types are found here. Write the answer in your journal.

\_\_\_\_\_ is a type of \_\_\_\_\_ in Hebrews 5.  
\_\_\_\_\_ is a type of \_\_\_\_\_ in Romans 5.

There are also types of evil in Scripture. Antiochus Epiphanes, the evil Greek king of Syria, was a type of Antichrist according to Daniel 11 and 12.

When we look at passages pertaining to Satan in the New Testament, what is the sin that he fell from glory for according to I Timothy 3:5-6?

Let's summarize.

Write down here the arguments for each view of who the King of Tyre is and then circle the title of what you believe the King of Tyre to be. Then write down why you believe that now. Compare what you've written below with what you wrote at the beginning of the lesson. Have your views changed or been strengthened?

In the end effect we must each decide for ourselves what we will view as true in such difficult passages. It is extremely important to know what you believe and *why* you believe it and hopefully you know more now why you believe the King of Tyre is who you believe him to be.

Whether or not we are right, we must assess whether it is important to spend a lot of time thinking about such obscure references. Granted this is an interesting topic, but does believing that the King of Tyre is a man or an arch-demon make any change to my being saved? Is arguing about this going to get me closer to other Christians or not?

There are many lessons to be learned about pride and the punishment for it from this passage, but what it all comes out to is that we must not let our fascination for the obscurities of Scripture cloud the importance of the clear, basic doctrines and so allow us to be separated from our brothers and sisters who believe differently from us on the minutiae such as the person of the King of Tyre.

<sup>17</sup> "Type." Merriam Webster On-Line Dictionary. 2005. Accessed February 7, 2005. <<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=type&x=0&y=0>>

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 28:20-26

**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 29:1-16

**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 29:17-20

**Thursday:** Ezekiel 30: 1-19

**Friday:** Ezekiel 30:20-26

## Week Eleven

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### A Judgment on Egypt

Text: Ezekiel 29:1-16

The rebel regime of a small country has finally attracted the attention of one of the superpowers in the world. The dictator finds himself besieged in his own capital city with the superior air and ground power of his mighty enemy pounding away at him. Around his country all of his enemies are just waiting for him to fall so they can sweep in after the superpower and take control of the parts of the country that their giant ally has promised them.

And then, suddenly, there is a ray of hope ... one lone country, once the most powerful country in the whole world, is willing to stand up to the superpower on behalf of the rebels.

How would you think the rebels would respond?

Judah found itself in just such a situation, except for one major difference: They were not supposed to resist the superpower on their doorstep, they were supposed to surrender. And God was going to make certain that they did – if it cost them their very lives.

Ezekiel and his exiled fellow countrymen would have listened breathlessly for news as to what was happening back in their homeland, how the war was faring and whether they might yet be able to get off without losing the “delight of their eyes.” They still couldn’t seem to fathom that they had to drink the cup down to its dregs.

And in rolled Egypt, purporting to help Israel in their hour of need. But God wasn’t about to let that happen, so He gave Ezekiel a new message to preach against Egypt.

**O/I:** When was this oracle given according to 29:1, the Hebrew Calendar, and the Ezekiel Timeline?

This pronouncement against Egypt came right at the time when Egypt’s king Hophra was marching into southern Israel to challenge Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem and it is the first in a series of seven oracles given Ezekiel against Egypt. Up until this point He was denouncing Israel’s closest neighbors, who were sitting on the borders, just waiting for Israel to fall, so that they could sweep in and plunder what was left. Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, and Sidon each got their turn, and now it was Egypt who was going to hear what God was about to do to it. Sitting on the sidelines waiting for Israel to get destroyed so they could get rich off it was one thing, but getting in the way of God’s plans for His people by trying to thwart His purposes and stop His designated tool, Babylon, that was quite another and Egypt was in really deep trouble for that.



Map 6 — Israel's Enemies

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Eleven

### The Crocodile (29:2-5)

**O:** Who is the prophecy pointed against in v.2?

**O:** What does God compare Pharaoh to in v. 3?

This “great monster” mentioned here is probably a crocodile of the Nile, a beautiful, large, powerful reptile that was considered a god of the Nile.

**I:** What sin is inherent in Pharaoh’s words in v. 3? Does it remind you of another king you studied recently?

**I:** If Pharaoh is the Crocodile, who do you think the fishes might symbolize?

God is going to punish all of Egypt, not just Pharaoh, who is pitting himself – perhaps unwittingly, perhaps purposefully – against God’s plan for Israel’s punishment.

**I:** How is God going to punish Pharaoh and Egypt according to vv.4-5?

### The Reed Staff (29:6-7)

God has a second complaint against Egypt in that they were a “staff of reed” to the house of Israel. The reed God was talking about here was a flimsy plant which did not have the correct properties to make it able to bear the weight of a man. If a wounded man leaned on it, it would break and send its long, sharp splinters into the man’s hand or arm-pit, causing him great pain and giving him no aid, and wounding him even more than he had been to begin with.

**I:** How do you think Egypt is a “reed staff” to Israel?

This “reed staff” picture was by no means a new one. The servants of the king of Assyria described that country to Hezekiah in that way when they were besieging Jerusalem over a hundred years earlier (see here Isaiah 36:6). Things certainly hadn’t changed in the last century.

### The Desolation (29:8-12)

God always had a bone to pick with Egypt and this country had a long, nasty history of being God’s primary example of God’s true enemies.

**O/I:** What was Egypt for Israel according to Exodus 1:8-22?

**O/I:** What was the king forbidden to do in Deuteronomy 17:16?

**A:** What is Egypt often likened to among Christians today? Why do you think that is and how should we respond to the “Egypt” of our day?

## A Judgment on Egypt

God had enough. Egypt, the symbol of the bondage of sin and suffering was going to finally get hers.

**O:** What is God going to do to Egypt according to this passage?

**O:** According to Jeremiah 43:8-13 who was going to punish Egypt and how was he going to do that?

## The Restoration (29:13-16)

Interestingly enough, God does something strangely merciful now. Whereas all of Israel's other enemies would be wiped off the map and forgotten, He has different plans for Egypt: He's going to restore them.

**O:** What is the time period that Egypt is going to lie barren?

**O/I:** What is this restored Egypt going to be like?

Looking at the history of Egypt, you can see that this has been fulfilled. The once powerful nation that ruled the entire Middle East for centuries was first conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, then by Persia, then by Alexander the Great. The Greek kings of Egypt held a little power in the Middle East afterwards, but it was a pittance compared to the might wielded in centuries past.

Under the Romans Egypt prospered, but it was still just a backwater province of the great empire. Once Rome fell, Egypt passed on to the Muslim Arab empire and from there into the hands of the Turks and then on to the English.

Even though this country is now self-governing, and the U.N. would like to accord it a role in the Middle East peace processes, the Egyptians are looked on with derision and scorn by their Arab neighbors. In most Arab movies the Egyptians are the fools and comic relief. None of their neighbors take them seriously any more, nor will they ever be according to Ezekiel.

**O:** Isaiah goes even one step farther in 19:16-25 in his book. What does he prophesy about Egypt there?

**I:** Compare this prophecy to what you see today. Has it been fulfilled? How?

Unfortunately Egypt will remain the ultimate rebel. According to Zechariah 14:16-19, Egypt will even rebel against God during the reign of Messiah from Jerusalem. God has His hands full with these guys and they're targeted next, after He's done with Judah. It is a dangerous thing to get in the way of what the living God is doing.

**A:** Can you think of any other instances in history or in your personal experience where someone got in God's way? What happened and what was the final outcome?

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet — Week Eleven

### Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 31:1-18  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 32:1-16  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 32:17-32  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 33:1-20  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 33:21-33

## Week Twelve

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### Reactions to Jerusalem's Fall

Text: Ezekiel 33:21-33

**H**ave you ever waited for something for a long time, earnestly desiring it to come? What was it and what did it feel like when the day arrived?

Ezekiel was also waiting, waiting for the time when God would set him free from this gag order placed on him at the beginning of his ministry (3:26-27). He was waiting to be able to speak freely to the people around him, not just speak judgment. He wanted to once more be the true mediator between God and the people, the one who could speak mercy as well as punishment.

And then, finally, the day came.

#### A Word from a Refugee (33:21-22)

**O:** What, according v.21, was the event that Ezekiel was waiting for?

**O:** What was the date of this proclamation, according to the Ezekiel Timeline and the Hebrew Calendar?

The most detailed account of the fall of Jerusalem is found in Jeremiah 39:1-10. Of those who came out of the siege alive, many were also deported to Babylon, but a small group was left there to till the land and at least keep it somewhat arable. These refugees that reached Tel-Abib on the 5<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, Exile Year Eleven were the last ones deported from Jerusalem. It had taken them roughly five months to make the journey from their homeland to their new abode and they were most certainly a bedraggled, pitiable lot. But they were welcome, especially to Ezekiel.

**O/I:** What happened to Ezekiel when the refugees came? Why do you think this happened?

The ministry of pure judgment was over and Ezekiel was free once more to proclaim mercy. God had purged Jerusalem and razed it to the ground. His anger was nearly spent and He was nearing the calm after the storm. But there were two more things He had to address, both in Israel and in Babylon. And so Ezekiel is given two more oracles to speak, one to those who have remained behind in the homeland and now view themselves as the cream of the crop, and one to the smug, self-sufficient exiles that Ezekiel lives among in Babylon.

#### A Word for the Survivors in Judea (33:23-29)

**O:** According to Jeremiah 39: 10, who are those *"living in those ruins in the land of Israel"*?

Just as the power passed from the true nobility to the middle class in 597 BC, so the power has now passed to the lowest class.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Twelve

**O/I:** Who are these survivors comparing themselves to in v.24? What makes their comparison flawed?

While these people pretend to be little Abrahams who supposedly “*was only one man, yet he possessed the land*”, they are by no means like him.

**O/I:** Read Genesis 17:1. What was God’s injunction to Abraham for living in the land?

These people were by no means living up to Abraham’s example. Their desire to populate the land was based on a selfish, secular viewpoint, which left God out of it completely. After all, to their heathen minds, Yahweh had been defeated and He’d left the promised land. And so they would take possession of it by their own strength. God had a few things to say about this and His prophet minced no words.

**O/I:** What does God accuse the survivors of doing in vv.25-26?

We have seen all of these abominations before in the way that the citizens of Jerusalem lived. The only really new one is the fact that they eat meat with the blood in it. It is interesting to note that this is a command not just given to the Israelites. The first occurrence is given to Noah in Genesis 9:3-4: “*Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.*” Thus, these people are not only breaking the Mosaic Law, but also a much more ancient code of conduct.<sup>18</sup>

**O:** According to Jesus in Matthew 26:52, what is the fate of someone who relies on the sword?

These people who were so caught up with violence were about to reap their just deserts.

**O:** What does God promise to do to them in vv.27-28?

The tragic account of how this prophecy is fulfilled is found in Jeremiah 40-43. These people had to drain the cup of God’s wrath to its very dregs and their sin caused the death of one of the greatest prophets to walk the earth, Jeremiah of Anathoth.

**A:** Can you think of ways in which we as Christians think of our salvation in a similar way to the way these people thought of theirs? How can we combat such views?

**O/I:** What was God’s primary purpose in this punishing of these people according to v.29?

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly this very injunction is upheld for Gentile Christians by the Jerusalem church council in Acts 15:20!



## A Word for the Exiles in Babylon (33:30-33)

Meanwhile the Exiles had become reconciled to where they were and were content. They were after all safe from the wrath of God. They had been removed from the cauldron and the land of horror to a fair land where they could live in relative freedom. And best of all, they had their own personal prophet!

**O:** What is the primary topic of discussion of the Exiles when they come together to hang out?

Ezekiel had become their own resident superstar. They loved to come listen to this mad prophet, because he was, after all, preaching the word of God!

**I:** What are these people evidencing on the surface, which the survivors in Judea where not?

**O/I:** What is God's assessment of their devotion?

**I:** What do you think is more important to God, the action or the motivation? Why would you say that?

It is interesting that God talks about the Exiles hearing Ezekiel's words, but not putting them into practice. After all, the Hebrew sense of the word "*hear*"<sup>19</sup> involves taking in what was said and *acting* upon it. These people still had the illness that Isaiah was warned about over 100 years earlier, since they would "*be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.*" (Isaiah 6:9)

**O:** What is Ezekiel compared to in the minds of the Exiles?

Like to a crooner or to a pop star, people came to Ezekiel for the experience and the high, not for truth. It's no more than a momentary feeling of euphoria that dissipates and needs to be relived again soon. They want all the benefits of listening without the hard work of translating what was said into action.

**A:** Can you think of any ways in which we do the same thing as Ezekiel's fellow Exiles? Who are some of the godly people we listen to, but whose words we don't act upon? What are some steps we can take to stop consuming and start living the way God wants?

In the end God will be proven right, as He promises Ezekiel in 33:33. Ezekiel undoubtedly knew what was going on in the hearts of his listeners. After all, you can see what a person truly believes by their conduct. He had no illusions there and did not revel in his stardom. He might have even been a bit depressed by the way his ministry was actually not accomplishing anything besides garnering a passive audience. However, God promises him, that very soon these people would suddenly realize that Ezekiel was a true prophet and his words were not simply "*a sensual song*

<sup>19</sup> Or "*listen*" Hebrew: שָׁמַע (šam'a)

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet — Week Twelve

*by one who has a beautiful voice*", but that they were truly the words of God to this people – words of judgment and woe.

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 34:1-16  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 34:17-31  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 35:1-15  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 36:1-15  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 36:16-38

## Week Thirteen

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### A Question of Honor

Text: Ezekiel 36:16-38

**W**hat do you think of when you hear the word honor? Does the idea of honor matter to you? Why or why not?

**honor** (ɔn'ɔr) *n.* 1. Special esteem or respect; reverence ... 2. a. Reputation; good name b. A source or cause of credit ... 3. a. Glory or recognition; distinction.<sup>20</sup>

“Honor” does not carry much weight in western society nowadays. It is an anachronistic term that we mostly shrug off or laugh about in our comedies, since it calls up images of King Arthur and knights on horseback or people with swords or pistols or you name it trying to kill each other because they “lost their honor.” It is not something we take seriously.

In the Middle East, however, honor was and still is extremely important. No anachronistic term, the honor of a monarch or a deity was sacrosanct. Bruising this most precious possession of any man would drive him to any lengths to restore his honor – be it through violence or great acts of human prowess.

Yahweh, being the Middle Eastern God that He is, takes His honor very seriously. The honor of His “holy name” or “great name” is extremely important to Him and He will go to any length to make sure that it is preserved.

### Yahweh Loses His Honor (36:16-21)

**O:** What has God done to Israel in vv.16-19?

**I:** Why do you think that God’s name is profaned by the nations in vv.20-21?

In the theology of the ancient world there was a sacred trinity of the god, his people, and his land. The god was pledged to protect his people and his land from the incursions of other peoples. Thus, when one nation conquered another the god of the vanquished nation was shown to be impotent. Often the defeated people were deported, not merely for political or pragmatic reasons, but to show that the god of the victor had ousted the god of the conquered. Neither he, nor his people, nor his land were together any more.

The nations thought that because Yahweh had allowed the capture of His people Israel, He was a defeated, impotent god who had been vanquished by the more powerful Marduk of Babylon. They did not understand that *Yahweh* was the one who had engineered the fall of His people for a certain reason. And this besmirching of His honor angers Yahweh very much.

An interesting side-point is that in this passage Ezekiel is shown to have joined the elite of God’s prophets. God is speaking directly to him, like a friend, disclosing to him the reasons for His actions. Like Moses (Exodus 33:12-34:9) and Abraham (Genesis 18; James 2:23) Ezekiel is now in the

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<sup>20</sup> “Honor.” *The American Heritage Dictionary*. Second College Edition. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985).

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Thirteen

confidence of the King of All. It is a high privilege which came with the high cost of Ezekiel's having to act out the role of Yahweh before the Exiles to the point of even losing his beloved wife.

**I:** Why is it important for God to restore the honor of His name?

**O:** When God seeks to destroy the Israelites for worshipping the golden calf in Exodus 32, what is it that Moses appeals to in Exodus 32:10-14 in order to get God to desist?

## Yahweh's Quest for His Honor (36:22-32)

And so, like the True King He is, God will personally step out and reinstate His honor in the eyes of the nations.

**O:** What is God's goal according to vv.22-23?

**O/I:** In vv. 25-30 God is going to do four things to Israel so that His honor will be restored. What are they? Write down which verse you found each of these in.

**I:** What is the key change that God is going to make that will make His new relationship to Israel possible?

This is one of the most wonderful promises given in Scripture and from this point onward God again and again talks about His restoration of His people. The message of judgment is past. The message of hope has come.

This message of restoration is a direct echo of the promise or regathering God gives Moses in Deuteronomy 30:4-6.

*Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.*

**O/I:** How is Israel going to respond to God's magnanimity according to vv. 31-32?

**I:** For whose sake is God going to restore Israel? Why is that significant?

**I:** How might you reconcile this to the seemingly selfish reason of God's with other prophets who state that it is because of His love for His people that He is going to restore them?

**I:** Which do you think is more primary, God's honor or His love for His people? Why?

**A:** How do you think God's honor is served in His saving us in this day and age?

## Yahweh's Honor Restored (36:33-38)

**O/I:** What is the nations' reaction to God's restoration? How do they view the land of Israel when God is done with it?

In v.36 God puts the signature of His guarantee that He will do this on the oracle. And, interestingly, He links it to His word of honor: *"I, Yahweh, have said it and will do it."*<sup>21</sup> There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it. He will see it's done. He guarantees it.

**O:** What does God say about Israel in vv.37-38?

**I:** Do you think this prophecy has been fulfilled? Why or why not?

God has linked His personal honor to this enterprise. He will do what it takes to restore His honor among the peoples of the world and they will worship Him for it.

**A:** What some ways in which the world impugns God's honor today? Think of one or two and write down what you would answer if faced by that question.

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 37:1-14  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 37:15-28  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 38:1-23  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 39:1-16  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 39:17-29

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<sup>21</sup> Author's translation.

## Week Fourteen

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### The Valley

Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14

**W**hen people who have more than a little knowledge of the Bible are asked about Ezekiel, two images come to mind. First is the amazing vision at the beginning of the book, whirling wheels, four-faced figures, flashing lightning and a throne of chrysolite with a flaming figure perched on it – fascinating, difficult to interpret, and utterly unearthly.

Secondly there is the vision of the valley of dry bones. It is also a fascinating prophecy, but this is one of *hope*, in which Ezekiel, his audience, and the reader are treated to Yahweh's amazing powers of resurrection.

This section is quite straight-forward in that Ezekiel is first granted a vision and then God gives the explanation of this vision.

### Valley of Dry Bones (37:1-3)

**O:** How does God transport Ezekiel to the Valley?

The term "*the hand of the LORD was upon me*" suggests the immense weight of the experience that Ezekiel was given.

**O:** What does Ezekiel find in this valley?

**I:** Why do you think Ezekiel stresses the dryness of the bones in v.2?

In ancient Israel the bodies of the dead were not exposed to the elements in this way. The fact that these hundreds of thousands of human bones were not buried suggests both a death in battle as well as a fulfillment of the Covenant Curses in Deuteronomy 28:25-26.

*The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.*

**I:** What do you think that Ezekiel's response to God's question in v.3 means?

### Valley of Dead Bodies (37:4-8)

Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy to these dry bones. In the Old Testament the term "prophesy" generally denotes an ecstatic frenzy in which the prophet utters the words of God<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> P.A. Verhoef, "Prophecy: Theology." *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* CD-ROM. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001.) For more details see the section on I. Chronicles 25:1-3 in J.M. Diener's *Regarding the Morality of Music – A Response to "An Important Question for Our Times – Is Music Moral?"* by Kurt Woetzel. 2003. WolfHawke.com. <<http://www.wolfhawke.com/musing/rtmom.php?s=2#IIIE>>

O: What is Ezekiel to prophesy?

O: What is the result of His prophecy?

The bodies have been reconstituted, but there is no breath of life in them. They are still as dead as they were before. Interestingly the re-joining of the bodies (rearranging the bones into full skeletons, the attaching of tendons, the covering with flesh and finally with skin) is the exact reversal of the decay process of a body.

The term used for breath, spirit, and wind is all the same Hebrew term, רוּחַ (*rûah*). This makes for an interesting reading, because the “breath” that enters the bodies of the dead can also be translated as the “spirit” that enters the bodies.

### The Valley of a Living Army (37:9-10)

O: What is Ezekiel told to prophesy this time?

I: Compare the way that God resuscitates this army of bones with the way He created the first man in Genesis 2:7. Do you see any parallels?

The term “*an exceedingly great army*” in v.10 suggests that these dead bones that Ezekiel had seen were those who had been slain in battle.

### The Interpretation (37:11-14)

Now God explains to Ezekiel what this vision means.

O: Who are the bones according to v.11?

The quotation of the feelings of the Israelites is understandable. They have lost the “delight of their eyes”, God’s holy city Jerusalem. Their God has seemingly abandoned them in other lands. Any hope they had of restoration has been taken from them, because the Temple, Yahweh’s footstool and home on earth, is no more. This pronouncement is a direct answer to those feelings.

I: Do you think this resurrection is figurative or literal? Explain your reasoning.

Everything within this event seems to have some sort of symbolic significance, including the way that God “brought” Ezekiel to the valley. In the exact same way He will “bring” the people back to Israel.

O: What is God’s key action that will make all of this possible according to v.14?

I: What other passage in Ezekiel is this reminiscent of?

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet — Week Fourteen

The theme of the renewal of Israel will take precedence in the following chapters.

**I:** Do you think this vision has been fulfilled? When do think that was or will be?

In the New Testament Jesus talks about what it is that truly makes a human being alive. He says in John 5:24: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”*

**I:** Can you find any other New Testament passages that talk of salvation as a resurrection from the dead?

As with many passages in Scripture, this one seems to have multiple fulfillments. In some ways Israel has been reconstituted, but not to the fullness described here in Ezekiel. The day in which *all* Israel will be filled with the Spirit of God is yet in the Future, but when it comes, God will be totally vindicated and all of the earth will know that He is Yahweh, the One God.

**A:** Think of how you came to be re-born as a child of God. What was your experience like?

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 40:1-16  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 40:17-27  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 40:28-49  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 41:1-26  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 42:1-20



## Week Fifteen

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### The Gog Invasion

Text: Ezekiel 38:1 – 39:29

Can you think of an instance in your life when it was completely clear that what happened could only have come about as they did through the hand of God? What was that event? What was it that made it clear to you that God was guiding things?

Israel had many such events in their history, where God reached in and did something for them. At times it was great and liberating, at times it was painful, but it was *always* for their good, no matter what it was that happened.

Towards the end of Ezekiel's ministry God gave him an unusual word to speak to his fellow exiles. Ezekiel's listeners would have been awed by the width and breadth of this oracle and it has become one of the most confusing and exciting passages to both Jewish and Christian exegetes. There are many questions about who the principal actors are and when this will happen, but what is more important is, what this passage teaches about the One God.

#### Gog Invades (38:1-15)

O: Who is it that God addresses in vv.2-3?

One of the questions is whether the Hebrew term *rosh*<sup>23</sup> is to be translated as a place (as the NASB does) or as "chief" (as the NIV does). The fact that we know of no place in Ezekiel's time that was conclusively called "Rosh" by any of the Middle-Eastern neighbors of Israel would suggest that *rosh* is to be taken more as a title than as a place. It would also make sense to call Gog of Magog the "chief prince" (the English counterpart might be "high king") as he is the head of a large alliance of nations.

O: Take a look in vv.2, 5, and 6 and list all of the nations involved besides Magog.

We're not exactly sure what all these nations are or where they are, but as best we can guess, five of the eight are from Asia Minor and the rest are from north-eastern Africa.

One big question mark here is whether the land translated as "*Persia*" really is the Persia we know. The Hebrew name "*Paras*<sup>24</sup>" could mean Persia, though at that time that land was fairly unknown, just a little hick-town province outside of Babylon. Because it occurs in connection with Cush and Put, both of which are known to lie in Africa, Paras might also be the Hebrew or Aramaic form of the Egyptian Pathros, or southland.

Notice that the countries mentioned are far north and far south of Israel. At that time these lands were considered the wild outlands, much like Mongolia or Afghanistan might be to an American today. The uncivilized barbarians lived there and they were coming to Israel. It is also interesting that Magog has exactly seven allies who are coming against Israel. This, the perfect

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<sup>23</sup> ראש (*rōš*) literally means "head", but is usually used figuratively for "chief" or "foremost".

<sup>24</sup> Heb: פָּרָס (*pāras*)

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Sixteen

number, also suggests that these are symbolic of tribes of all the north and the south, rather than necessarily literal places in Asia Minor and North Africa.



**Map 7 – Magog and its Allies**

**O/I:** Who is it that initiates this war, according to v.4 and why do you think he does so?

**O:** When is this summons going to take place, according to v.8?

The idiom “in the latter years” suggests this will happen a long time from now, we’re not sure when. However, John the Apostle does suggest a time when this attack may occur in two places in Revelation.

**O/I:** Write down the times according to Revelation when this attack might be happening.

1. Revelation 19:17-21
2. Revelation 20:7-10

What is important is that by this time Israel has been restored to God, both in the land and in worship.

**O:** How do vv.11-12 characterize Israel at this time?

At this point the Magog alliance is joined by several other nations, Sheba and Dedan, which were tribes from the Arab Peninsula, and Tyre and Sidon, the Phoenician trade giants. All of these tribes

were known to be traders and they would have been considered from the east and the west of Israel. The whole world was now arising against Israel.

**I:** What is it that motivates Gog and his allies to attack the peaceful Israel?

**O:** What is God's reason for not only allowing, but precipitating this attack, according to v.16?

This oracle is an extension of the lesson "A Question of Honor", in which God vindicated His honor before all the nations. This is now *how* He is going to do it, by wiping out all of Gog's forces.

### Yahweh Defends (38:18 – 39:8)

**O:** Who is it that will physically destroy the Gog Alliance? How will this be done?

**I:** How is this going to prove to the nations that Yahweh is truly God, not just in Israel, but in the rest of the world, too?

**I:** Do you think it's fair for God to destroy Gog and his allies in this way if He was the one who incited this battle in the first place? Why or why not?

### Israel Cleansed (39:9-20)

Ezekiel now goes into great detail as to how the people will cleanse Israel from the leftovers of God's battle with Gog and his hordes. It is important that the land where Yahweh lives is kept ceremonially clean. It should not be surprising to the reader that a priest like Ezekiel would be very careful to write about something like this.

**O:** What do the Israelites do with the weapons?

This suggests that this war might actually be right at the end of the Tribulation, because if it were at the end of the Millennium, then there would be no need for seven years of firewood. It certainly would be a fitting way for God to inaugurate His reign on earth.

**O:** How long will the fuel last?

This suggests that because of this war the land will get a Sabbath of seven years to recuperate from the ravages of the battle.

**O/I:** What does Israel do to get rid of the bodies of the fallen soldiers in this passage?

Where exactly the valley of Hamon-Gog<sup>25</sup> will be we do not know, though there has been considerable speculation. It may be somewhere near Jerusalem, which the name of the city

<sup>25</sup> Heb: חַמּוֹן גּוֹג (Hāmôn Gôg) means "the multitudes of Gog"

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Sixteen

Hamonah (“multitudes”) suggests. Regardless of where this is, it will become an everlasting reminder to what God did for His people.

**O/I:** Whom does God invite to a feast in vv.17-20? Why do you think He does that?

In addition to the issue of disposing of the bodies – a project that will take some time – the exposing of the bones of those slain in battle is the ultimate humiliation. These people had lost to the Living God and they were being punished not just through their death, but through their treatment after death. Anyone who would have witnessed that would be in fear of the one who had done it.

## Yahweh Vindicated (39:21-29)

The key to this whole passage is in these last eight verses.

**O/I:** Why did God do all of this?

Now the nations will finally understand why God turned His back on Israel and they will revere Him as well.

**I:** What motivation does Ezekiel use once stress to explain why God dealt with Israel the way He did?

While other prophets dwell on God’s care for His people, Ezekiel, the priest, dwells mostly on how God’s honor and renown are affected by His actions. However, here we find the first mention of mercy towards Israel in the entire book of Ezekiel.

**O:** What is once more the reason that God can now live among His people according to v. 29?

He has now poured out His Spirit upon Israel as freely as He once poured out His wrath – to the fullest measure. He can dwell among them and they will never become unclean before Him again.

**A:** In reading this passage, what does it teach us about the way God deals with us, His children? How should we react when adversity threatens? Which of God’s character traits can we appeal to in order to see Him move?

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 43:1-5  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 43:6-27  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 44:1-31  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 45:1-8  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 45:9-25

## Week Sixteen

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### Israel Again — Part One

**Text:** Ezekiel 40:1 – 43:9

*Note: Weeks 16 and 17 can be combined into one lesson if time does not permit for a two-week discussion.*

**C**an you think of something that you had to wait a long time to receive? How did you feel when you finally got it? Was it worth the wait? Why or why not?

Ezekiel and his fellow Exiles were waiting for something to happen that would have brought a light to their eyes, but they would never experience in the flesh: the Return to Israel. None of Ezekiel's adult contemporaries lived to see Cyrus' decree. Seventy years passed before the Israelites were permitted to return to their homeland and all of those who had left the land as adults died in exile.

However, God gave Ezekiel one more astounding vision: a chance to look at the New Israel from afar, to experience what it would be like when Yahweh personally ruled from His holy temple. And in this instance God honors Ezekiel far above any other prophet, save Moses. Not only is Ezekiel given to see what is yet to come, he is instated as mediator of a new *torah*, or instruction, that supplants the Mosaic code.

There are some major difficulties in the interpretation of these eight chapters. Depending on what school of thought regarding the end times you espouse, you will be beset with different problems. The text is definitely difficult, but at the same time God's Holy Spirit gives enlightenment. In this passage we will approach this as we have the whole study: what does the text itself say and what would the original listeners have understood it to mean? From that point we can depart into speculation as to how to harmonize this with current Christian thought.

#### A New Vision (40:1-4)

**O/I:** What is the date when Ezekiel is given this vision and what is its modern counterpart, according the Ezekiel Timeline and the Hebrew Calendar?

**O/I:** Where does God take Ezekiel? Does Ezekiel recognize everything he sees? Why or why not?

**O:** Whom does Ezekiel meet in v.3?

This man has the working implements of an ancient Middle Eastern surveyor: the measuring reed which would be over ten feet tall<sup>26</sup>, and a measuring cord used for even longer lengths.

**O/I:** What is Ezekiel commanded to do and why do you think God commands him to do that? What effect do you think Ezekiel's vision will have on his fellow Exiles?

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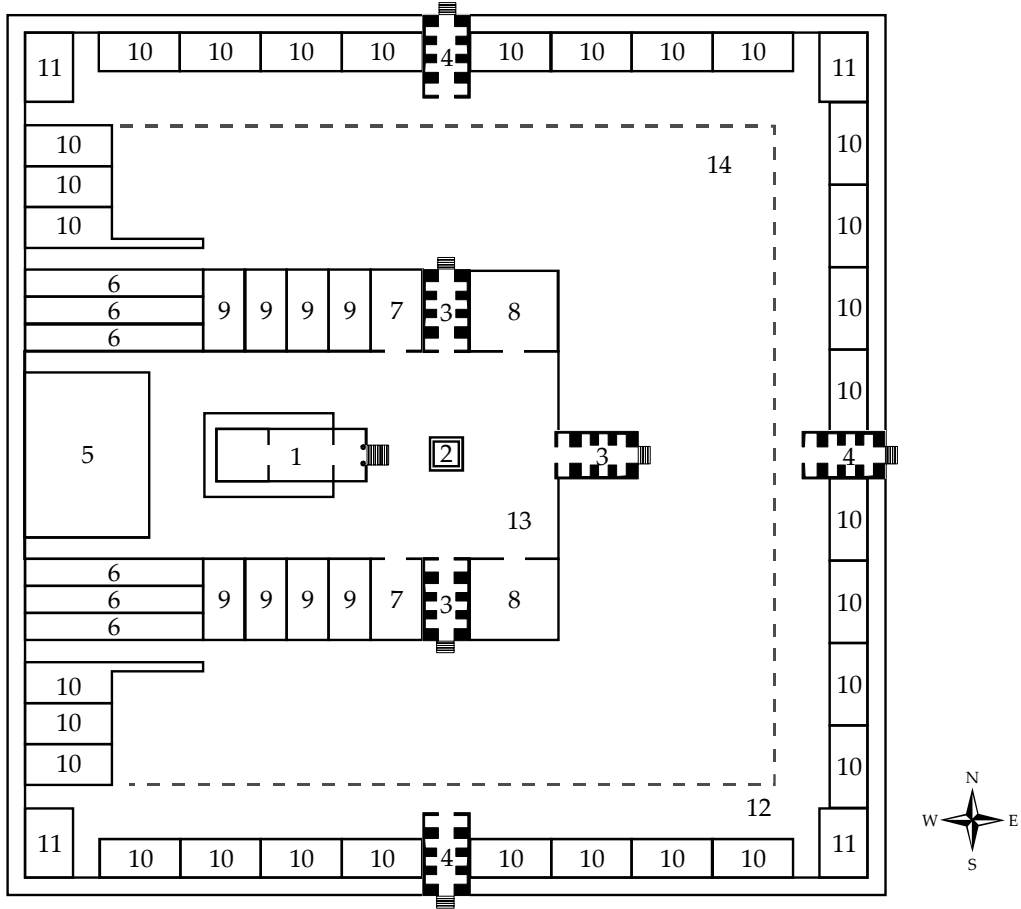
<sup>26</sup> Using Hezekiah's tunnel, the Israelite cubit has been determined to be 17.6" (44.7 cm) long and it was composed of six hand spans (each approximately 3" [7.5 cm] in length). The royal cubit used by this surveyor was a hand span longer than the "normal" cubit, making it 20.5" (52 cm) long. A six-cubit rod of the long cubit, would thus be 10'3" (3.12 m) long.

**Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Sixteen**

**A New Temple (40:5 – 42:20)**

The first place that Ezekiel is taken is into the new Temple itself, where his guide proceeds to measure the Temple.

Below is a diagram of the temple<sup>27</sup>. Using the verses listed in the table on the next page, label all of the different parts of the temple.



<sup>27</sup> Adapted from David Block's diagram in *The Book of Ezekiel – Chapters 1-24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 508.

#	Passage	Description
1	40:48 – 41:11, 15-26	_____
2	43:13-17	_____
3	40:28-37	_____
4	40:5-16, 20-27	_____
5	41:12-14	_____
6	42:1-14	_____
7	40:44-46	_____
8	40:38	_____
9	41:9b-10	_____
10	40:17	_____
11	46:19-24	_____
12	40:18	_____
13	40:44	_____
14	40:17-19	_____

**I:** Why do you think God spends so much time on this new temple?

**O/I:** In your study of the new temple, what key piece of furniture is missing that was so important in the old one? Why do you think that is?

### Yahweh’s Glory Returns (43:1-9)

Now that the new temple is complete, God’s glory visibly returns from where it left.

**O:** What gate does God’s glory come through?

**O/I:** What does God decree about the eastern gate in 44:2? Why do you think He issues this decree?

**I:** What do you think that this return of the glory symbolizes for Israel?

## Weekly Readings

**Monday:** Ezekiel 46:1-24  
**Tuesday:** Ezekiel 47:1-12  
**Wednesday:** Ezekiel 47:13-23  
**Thursday:** Ezekiel 48:1-29  
**Friday:** Ezekiel 48:30-35



# Week Seventeen

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## Israel Again — Part Two

**Text:** Ezekiel 43:10 – 48:29

*Note: If time is tight, this lesson may be combined with week sixteen. If time permits, you may want to pause after “A New Torah” and do A New River, A New Division of Land, and A New City in the following week.*

**E**zekiel has been transported by God to a new temple and given an amazing view of what the future of Israel has coming for her. The prophet is given the privilege of seeing God’s glory return to the Temple and take His place in the Holy of Holies. The reigning King of the Earth now gives Ezekiel a new position, one that his sufferings and privations have earned him: he is to be the new mediator for a new form of worship in God’s holy temple.

### A New Torah (43:10 – 46:25)

**O:** What are some things about this new worship you’ve noted in your reading of this passage?

The key, above all, is the preservation of the holiness of Yahweh. In order to do this He has set up a series of concentric circles around Himself, beginning with the temple building itself, which no one may enter. Then there is the Inner Court, which only the Zadokite Priests may enter. Then there is the outer court into which the Israelites may enter to be served by the Levites who are the mediators between the Israelites and the priests. The Sacred Zone of Israel is an area into which only true-born Israelites are permitted, and then outside of that is the land, a dwelling place for Israel and a place for the nations to visit. God’s concern is that nothing touch His holiness, and so He provides a way of worship that will preserve this precious attribute of God.

Ezekiel is given a new set of orders as to how to provide sacrifices and he is the one who is charged with purifying the Temple in 43:10. In this sense he becomes a new Moses to the new laws<sup>28</sup> that God is laying down for the restored Israel, mediating them to the people. Ezekiel, having lost his ability to do what he longed for most – minister in God’s temple in Jerusalem – has become much more than he could have ever been in Israel. Not only has he become a friend of God, whom God discloses His secret plans to, he has become a new covenant mediator to Israel.

The biggest vexation that Christians have with this passage is the sacrifices that God commands be made. Hasn’t Christ’s sacrifice paid for sin once and for all?<sup>29</sup>

**I:** How might you reconcile these seemingly disparate points of view?

While this will not be reconciled before Jesus Christ returns and sets up His new temple in Israel, there is a certain alteration to the Passover proceedings in 45:21-24 that suggests that God has already thought of this.

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<sup>28</sup> The Hebrew here is תּוֹרָה (tôrāh), which can be translated as either “law” or “instruction” and is generally used to refer to the Mosaic Law, the biblical books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

<sup>29</sup> See *Appendix B: The New Temple* for the author’s opinion. Please do not read this section before completing this lesson, though!

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet – Week Seventeen

**O:** What animal is missing from the Passover proceedings as decreed by Ezekiel?

**I:** Read Paul's words in I. Corinthians 5:7. How might this minute note in Ezekiel be reconciled to New Testament teachings when looking at Paul's statement?

### A New River (47:1-12)

**O/I:** What does God show Ezekiel in chapter 47? What is significant about what Ezekiel sees?

**I:** Compare Ezekiel's river to the River in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. What similarities do you find there?

Not only does God rejuvenate Israel through pouring out His Spirit upon them and giving them a place to worship Him, He also heals all of Israel's land. Now, these descriptions will not work literally in the current Israeli landscape, but the cataclysmic events described in Revelation and other books of the Bible might just rearrange this land in such a way that God's Holy Mountain will literally be the highest mountain in the world, as well as giving the River the ability to flow east through the cleft in the Mount of Olives that Zechariah prophesies will come in Zechariah 14:4. Regardless of how we puzzle over this passage, we must remember that God is in control of everything, including the way that history will run its course.

### A New Division of Land (47:13 – 48:29)

Yahweh, being the sovereign King of all the earth now takes it upon Himself to re-divide the land among His people. This division is quite different from that of Joshua.

**I:** What is the most notable difference between Joshua's division (see Josh 13:8) and Ezekiel's division of the land?

**O/I:** What is the center of the entire land?

**A:** What might Yahweh's placing Himself at the center of Israel suggest about what place He demands in our affections?

### A New City (48:30-35)

At the end of Ezekiel's book is the description of the new capital city of Israel, which lies south of the Sanctuary of Yahweh.

**O:** What is the name of the city?

**I:** Compare the New City with the New Jerusalem in Revelation 20-21. Do you see any similarities?

On a sidebar, notice that the name of the new city sounds similar to Jerusalem: Yahweh Shammah – Yerushalayim. But that is where the similarity ends. Jerusalem should have been Yahweh Shammah, but it would never earn that distinction because of the evil of the people who populated it and because of its origins. However, as the New Bride of Yahweh, the ancient city receives a new name and a renewed purpose. And God’s grace is manifest over all.

This, the final chapter of his book, must have made Ezekiel’s heart soar the most, because He was given the chance to see Yahweh, the God he loved, dwelling in the heart of the land of His people. And we know that Ezekiel not only returned to the Exiles at Tel-Abib and communicated his vision to them, but also passed it on in writing to us, generations later, that we can worship God for the glorious future He has prepared for His people.

However, on a sadder note, the Israelites all clung to and still cling to the Law of Moses, rather than to the Law of Ezekiel. They still offer up the Passover Lamb, which has been sacrificed for us already. One day, though, the Law of Moses will be abolished, because it will be unnecessary, and the Law of Ezekiel will reign throughout Israel under the benevolent hand of the King of Kings, Yahweh, who is Yehoshua Hammashiah, Jesus, the Anointed One.

## Three Key Messages of Ezekiel

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**H**aving reached the end of the book of Ezekiel, let's look back and ponder what we've learned from this mad prophet. What was it that drove Ezekiel to write what he did? What was God's purpose in giving Ezekiel strange visions, strange actions, and even stranger words? As New Testament people, many of whom are Gentile rather than Jewish some of the book may not apply directly, but there are many points that are just as applicable by principle.

In all I have found three key messages in my study of Ezekiel. The first deals with what is driving God throughout the book: His holiness and how it has been profaned by Israel. The second major theme is when we watch God painfully stand up and do what He has to do in order to preserve His holiness and bring Israel to the place where she should be. Third, is Ezekiel himself, sometimes painfully, having to act out Yahweh's part in the ongoing events.

### What It's All About: God's Holiness

**F**rom the very first vision Ezekiel receives he is awed by the holiness of this God that he serves. The glory and majesty of Yahweh pouring over Ezekiel makes a deep impact on him. From the beginning God makes His abhorrence of sin and wickedness clear to Ezekiel. During the visit to Jerusalem Ezekiel is confronted with how far the desecration of God's holy temple has gone. And so God's glory *must* depart from Israel, so that the complete tearing down His people can commence. God's holiness ordains it and only when His people see the full measure of the punishment promised by Moses poured out upon them will they even begin to understand what Yahweh has told them for centuries. And it is precisely in the promises of His restoring them that His amazing other-worldly difference and purity is poured forth. Once Israel is re-instated in the Promised Land and lives under the order of the New Torah of Ezekiel, God's holiness will be perfectly clear to His people.

But it's not enough that God makes His holiness clear to Israel alone, the nations have to see His holiness and His power as well. It is fascinating how Middle-Eastern God portrays Himself throughout the book, always seeking His honor, not just before the Nations, but before His people as well. Because the Nations are laughing at God and claiming that He was too weak to defend His people from the onslaught of their enemies, Yahweh is going to pull out all the stops and make it clear to everyone that He is not a God to be trifled with. There is no God like Yahweh, period. Even Gog of Magog and his allies are going to have to recognize that and until the entire planet has recognized that holiness, God will not rest, He will do what must be done.

God's holiness often takes a back-seat to some of His other attributes nowadays. It seems we like to think more of the "Teddy Bear in the Sky" rather than the burning, holy God, whose primary goal is His glory and the recognition of His holiness among the nations. The question is, do we reflect that holiness as we, little mirrors of Christ, ought to among the nations? Can someone look at you and see God's holiness sparkle through in your daily actions as well as your words?

### When God Grits His Teeth: Doing What Must Be Done

**W**hat struck me most personally was the fact that God bound both Himself and Ezekiel to a task that was extremely distasteful to the deity as well as to His servant. From the very beginning Ezekiel's ability to speak in public is taken away, unless he is declaring the awful

## Three Key Messages of Ezekiel

judgment oracles of God. Ezekiel had to live with doom, pain, and anguish for ten years before what God was going to do was accomplished and throughout it he suffered the greatest loss that any man can suffer – the death of his beloved wife. But he persevered through it, both because of his immense faith in the God who had commissioned him and his God’s odd gift of being more stubborn than any human alive.

What is fascinating is how Ezekiel’s experience of gritting his teeth and doing something extremely distasteful to him is the exact image of what God Himself is doing throughout the book. Inside Yahweh’s holy anger and drive for divine justice there is also a touching reluctance to have to go through with the punishment. It’s almost as if it hurts God more than it hurts Israel! Perhaps that’s the reason for the great number of laments throughout the book itself.

The passage in which God’s displeasure with what He has to do is displayed the most is the parable of the child in the field in chapter 16. Granted, the anger and the pain of Jerusalem’s rejection of her sovereign Husband is written large for all to see, but at the same time you find that God is pushing through His anger and the punishment of this, His wife, so that He can reach the final conclusion: *“So I will calm My fury against you and My jealousy will depart from you, and I will be pacified and angry no more.”* (Ezekiel 16:42) Even though God dwells on the shame that Jerusalem will feel at His mercy, He is still driving towards the point where He can reinstate her. He *must* do this, there is no way about it and so He grits His teeth and gets on with it.

In the same way, God sets Ezekiel and us tasks in which we must grit our teeth and press on through, even though the process is extremely tasteless. Think, for instance, of confronting people we *know* are in the wrong and who need to hear the truth. Or perhaps it has to do with taking the time to visit someone we don’t really care about because it’s the right thing to do and it’s a way to show Jesus to them. In every case the *end goal* is what should be driving us, as it drove God, as it drove Ezekiel.

## Being Yahweh: Playacting What God is Going Through

**W**e almost never talk about the humanity of God. He is certainly not human in the sense that we are flawed and sinful, but, being His ultimate creation, we find ourselves embodying His attributes in our everyday lives to some tiny extent. And through that Yahweh becomes the ultimate example of what it means to be human. Granted, this was not fully realized until He became true man in the flesh when He was born as Jesus the Nazarene, called the Christ or the Messiah, but Ezekiel ended up more often than not acting out God’s part in the historical events he was interpreting for his fellow exiles.

Several examples of Ezekiel “being Yahweh” come to mind:

- When he builds siege works against Jerusalem in chapter 4;
- When he bears the sin of Israel on either side in the same chapter;
- When he shaves his head and destroys the hair as commanded in chapter 5;
- And ultimately when he does not mourn the death of his beloved wife in chapter 24.

We know that Jerusalem was no less the beloved of God than Ezekiel’s wife was his. They were the desire of the eyes of each of their husbands and both husbands did not mourn their passing, because it was necessary for what was yet to come.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet

It takes a special man to show what God is going through and to do it day in and day out. God gave Ezekiel a special gift to do this, and in doing so not only made this man one of His special friends among humans, but also gave him a status equal to that of Moses in the final vision recorded in his book.

In many ways, we as Christians are charged with the same task as Ezekiel. We are to *be* Jesus to this lost world. We are to live as He would have lived, we are to speak as He would have spoken, we are to act as He would have acted. None of these things are easy and it takes individuals with a special gifting to do this. But every Christian already has this special gifting: the Holy Spirit, God Himself who resides in each True Christian. We have the transformed hearts that Ezekiel prophesied about and it is our task to show these to the world around us. We must *be Yahweh* to a lost and dying world, even if it makes us look mad, with the knowledge that if we really live up to our calling, the people will know of us as they knew of Ezekiel, that a True Prophet of the Living God is among them.

## Appendices

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### Appendix A: On The King of Tyre

**T**he question regarding the identity of the King of Tyre is a perplexing one. Is he merely a human king who is referred to in extreme hyperbole to mark his physical prowess and insane hubris, or is he truly a super-human being whom God is addressing through the agency of Ezekiel? The arguments on both sides are extensive and, in my humble opinion, we will not come to a completely satisfactory conclusion this side of Eternity.

What it seems like most to me is that the people who argue for a human being addressed here believe that there is no overt naming of a spiritual enemy of Yahweh before the end of the Babylonian captivity. They would rather see that there be no oblique references to other spiritual beings in the prophets. The handling of the King of Babylon in Isaiah 14 is similar, but there is some warrant there, especially when viewing the end of that “Bright Morning Star, son of the dawn.”

Ezekiel’s address is different, though. And the way he frames his lament, directly following a taunt of the Prince of Tyre, makes me think that God has more in mind than a mere human being. I will not refute the argument that God sometimes uses glowing hyperbole to describe a human and his ambitions and self-centered pride, but there seems to be a bit more going on here.

Part of the historic-grammatical method of exegesis is to view the *historical field* in which the *grammatical utterance* was placed. A true literalist will look at the genre of the passage and what literary devices are used by the author and determine whether the literal meaning is not really something behind the obvious text. As an example see Ezekiel’s uses of metaphors in describing Jerusalem as the cast out girl-child in chapter 16. This will also be extended to looking at how Ezekiel uses the term “king” throughout his book, and yes, he does only use it for humans, not for any sort of spiritual entities. However, we must ask the all-important *historical* question: Who were the recipients of this message and to whom would *they* have understood it to be directed?

While the immediate recipients of this message would have been the Israelites in exile living in Tel-Abib, the ultimate recipients would have been the Tyrians themselves, and knowing what we do about their culture and their principal god, Melqart, there is little doubt in my mind that they would not think that Ezekiel was talking about their *human* ruler.

If we look at who Melqart is in history, we find him to be the primary god worshipped in Tyre and its colonies<sup>30</sup>. His very name means “King of the City”, being a contraction of the Phoenician words king (*melek*) and city (*qart*). He was also called “ba’al”, which means “lord” or “master”. According to what archeologists have found in Tyre he was viewed as the sun god, who presided over the cycle of fertility.

Playing into the whole issue here is this odd relationship Yahweh has with the gods of the nations around Him. While He firmly denies that they are gods (see here the masterful polemic speeches dished out by Isaiah in Isaiah 40 and 41), He does not deny that they exist (see for example a more literal translation Isaiah 34:14 in regards to Babylon’s desolation<sup>31</sup>). As a matter of fact His very acknowledgment of the existence of some sort of spiritual being less than Himself in other prophetic books suggests that one may view the King of Tyre as one such being.

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<sup>30</sup> Carthage and Gades, Ebusus and Carthago Nova in Spain.

<sup>31</sup> The terms the NASB translates “*desert dwellers*”, “*wolves*”, and “*hairy goats*” are thought to refer to various demons found in Babylonian folklore and the “*night monster*” is probably a demon called Lilith. See here the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* for more information.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet

If you compare the language that God uses to describe this King of Tyre with other places in the Bible, you find the magnificence of the description of the king without equal. Knowing that Melqart is a sun god the references to the fiery stones would make sense. His principal sin is pride, making himself more than he should be and setting himself above the One God. He is charged with “the abundance of your trade” filling him with violence and sin – which would make sense for the god of a great trade nation, rather than a mere human king. The corruption of his sanctuaries may be a reference to human sacrifices that were known to be practiced by his followers in order to appease him.

Besides the historical background one other argument for the non-humanness of the King of Tyre for me is his designation as *“the anointed cherub”*. Never anywhere in Scripture is a human designated in those terms! It would be unthinkable to see a *human* as the guardian of any sort of holiness – especially not when God goes to great lengths to prove the sinfulness of humans. This could be the one exception, but it seems a stretch to me.

Why could God not be addressing a spiritual entity that embodied what Tyre was about? The high-flung language, the description of his beauty, the place he lived, and his fall because of his pride seem to suggest something more than human. The interesting thing is that, unlike either the passage before regarding the Prince of Tyre, or Isaiah’s taunt against the King of Babylon, there is no reference to his entering Sheol, the land of the dead. There is the complete destruction of this King of Tyre, as is the shock of the nations at its happening, but never is it mentioned that he sent to the land of the dead, as a human would be. He simply ceases to exist, an example of God’s manifest power.

Even though I believe that the King of Tyre is a spiritual entity that God is dealing with rather than a human, I would hesitate to make a dogmatic connection between the Enemy of God, Satan, and the King of Tyre. It takes one step too close to allegory for my tastes. Using the argument of typology one could say that God is addressing Satan here (who incidentally fell because of his pride, see here I Timothy 3:5-6). Suffice it to say the King of Tyre is not human and he is destroyed through a divine agency, an example to terrify the nations and to cause them to worship the One God, Yahweh.

As with many of these less-important, but interesting points in Scripture, I must point out that I can tell you what I believe and why I believe the way I do, but I will not fight about it, mostly because that is pointless and because it simply fosters the dubious Christian tradition of dividing ourselves over trivial matters. So, I hope those who hold to the humanity of the King of Tyre will forgive my view and join me in affirming the more important doctrines of Scripture.



## Appendix B: The New Temple

It is interesting how many Christians have issues with the last eight chapters of Ezekiel. How could there be a temple of such immense size in Israel? How could there be a re-division of the land in the way that God suggests? How could there be *blood sacrifices* after the final sacrifice of Jesus Christ? These are difficult questions, but they are not unanswerable.

We actually find that there are three main points of view on the issue. First, many Christians view this vision as an allegory: it can't be *literal* in what it is describing, because it doesn't reconcile with the view that Jesus is the final sacrifice<sup>32</sup>. Second, it is viewed as "ideological"<sup>33</sup>, i.e. it is to be taken as a literal temple, etc., but it is a heavenly vision in that it won't necessarily have an earthly fulfillment. However, it is to be taken as a serious teaching tool and as a real place that Ezekiel went to, as well as a guide to what might be done in Israel in the future. Third, there are the group of people who take it literally. This temple will exist, and the sacrifices will be made and that's that.

Personally, I see difficulties in all of the positions mentioned above and find myself caught somewhere between the last two.

My first reaction to all of this is simply, why not? Why can't God ordain another temple with blood sacrifices? Who are *we* to say that He can't do what He wants to? Who are we to put our logic above His? God has ways of reconciling things that make no sense to us in ways that we could *never* dream of.

That said, I would like to point out at least a few points that make me think that this is to be taken mostly literally with a good dose of ideology in it.

### A Question of Timing

The biggest issue with all of this is *when* is this going to occur. If you take a grammatically and historically literalistic view of Scripture, you will tend to affirm the Millennial reign of Christ from Jerusalem. A temple such as this, a land division such as this, and a worship of God such as this would very well fit within that time-frame. Many scholars have set Ezekiel's temple into this period of the end time. As a matter of fact this might be the very place from which Christ, the God-Man, will rule all of creation for a thousand years.

Placing this in that era solves a lot of problems as to geography and the flowing of the new river from the Temple through the Mount of Olives and into the Dead Sea, as well as the high mountain in Israel which doesn't currently seem to exist and the New City described at the end of the book. If all of the cataclysmic events described in the prophetic books of the Old and New Testaments come to pass, then the physical form of the earth will be much changed. Zechariah prophesies that the Mount of Olives will be split in two when Messiah comes (Zechariah 14:4). John the Apostle talks about great earthquakes in the land of Israel and many upheavals and the destruction of vast parts of Jerusalem. Ezekiel himself talks about a great earthquake that shakes the entire land in his prophecy of the Gog invasion. All of these could very easily contribute to the raising of land from the Mediterranean sea-basin (which is an extremely shallow sea to begin with), as well as the rearranging of the mountains of Israel, and the complete destruction of an ancient city that can be

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<sup>32</sup> On a side note, some of the people who claim this re-sacrifice Jesus Christ weekly during their Sunday services because of their views on what happens to the host and the wine upon speaking the words of the Eucharist.

<sup>33</sup> David Block supports this view in his commentary.

## Lessons From A Mad Prophet

rebuilt as Yahweh Shammah, rather than as Jerusalem. Also, we must note that, according to a strict reading of John's Revelation, the New Jerusalem doesn't come down during the Millennium.

There is nowhere in Scripture that suggests that God ever sets foot in the Temple desecrated by Anti-Christ and Ezekiel's measurements of the land even suggests that the Temple would be located north of the city, perhaps on a new, untouched mountain. It is quite possible that the people would not build this unusual temple until after Christ's millennial reign has begun.

Granted, this is all speculation, but it does make sense.

## A New Torah

An interesting fact pointed out by Block in his commentary that Ezekiel is actually like a second Moses in that he's given a new instruction as to how the temple worship is to progress. This suggests a radical departure from the Mosaic Code in the latter four books of the Pentateuch. There are similarities – God doesn't change, so there are *bound* to be similarities – but there are just as many differences. Note that in Ezekiel's Torah everything revolves around the worship of Yahweh, and the people involved – the Levites, the Zadokite Priests, and the Prince. There is nothing said about the every-day conduct of the people. This in itself suggests the transformation of the Israelites as a whole into a people who now follow God with their whole being, who have the laws written on their hearts rather than on tablets of stone.

What is being regulated here is not every-day life, that is now unnecessary, it is how to approach the Holy God and have communion with Him. God has not changed, He is still unapproachable by mortal man, who will succumb in His presence like a dew drop in the blazing sun. There must be safeguards, both to keep the holiness of God intact and the worshipper alive. So, a radically altered form of worship among the Israelites is not only a distinct possibility, but a pretty certain reality.

## Blood Sacrifices

Having to kill animals for the forgiveness of sin is something that particularly irks Christians, because we *know* that Jesus has died for sins once and for all and no other sacrifices are needed for the purging of sins. They have been forgiven. And that is a serious stumbling block to the sacrifices offered up in Ezekiel's vision. However, within the text is a way to reconcile Ezekiel's vision with the reality of the sacrifice of Christ as atoning.

First, we must remember that this deals with the worship of God. From the context it is clear that in this vision things on earth are still profane and these must be sanctified before God can dwell there. And so He decrees the sanctification of His altar by blood – the one thing that *can* sanctify objects. It is true that the blood of bulls cannot forgive sins, but they can sanctify the already forgiven sinner to come into the presence of God. Everything decreed here is about the preservation of the holiness of God, we must remember that, and so the blood sacrifices are a control put on the communion of mortal (and still sinful, though redeemed) man.

An interesting note is that the only person offering a "*sin offering*" is the prince and he does that once a year for all the people and for himself. The other "*sin offering*" mentioned is the one used to sanctify the altar so that offerings can be offered up on it. Granted, guilt offerings are mentioned, but those are ones for unintentional sins, and if this temple is truly the millennial one, then it would make sense that people would do small wrong things unintentionally every once in a while, because, while Satan is bound, sin still exists. Also burnt offerings and freewill/fellowship offerings are a way of worshipping God, because the worshipper is offering up something

extremely valuable to them and sharing it with God. Interestingly Ezekiel cuts down on the former in comparison with Moses, demanding only one a day (Ezekiel 46:13), rather than Moses' two (Exodus 29:38-42).

Another key difference is in the Passover celebration. Ezekiel no longer commands a lamb to be sacrificed for Passover (Ezekiel 45:21-24)! That would connect very well with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. After all He is our Passover Lamb (see II. Corinthians 5:7) and His sacrifice was sufficient – once and for all.

### Keeping A Level Head

**T**he bottom line is that we can explain away the difficulties in this passage in various ways. These are my opinions and I will stand by them generally, but I will *not* allow them to split me off from those brothers and sisters who think differently from me about them. This is something that's not worth fighting about! It's fun to think about and speculate on, but in the end it makes very little difference in our daily lives with the exception of reminding us of how seriously God takes His holiness and our worshipful relationship to Him. And may we never forget that.

## Appendix C: Sample Chapter Titles

### Week One:

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>1:1-3</b>	<b>The Historical Background of Ezekiel</b>
Monday:	1:1-28	The Vision Appears
Tuesday:	1:28-2:7	The Commission — Part 1
Wednesday:	2:8-3:15	The Commission — Part 2
Thursday:	3:15-21	Ezekiel the Watchman
Friday:	3:22-21	Ezekiel's Message Restrained

### Week Two:

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>1:1-3:15</b>	<b>Call and Commission</b>
Monday:	4:1-17	The Sign of the Siege
Tuesday:	5:1-17	The Sign of the Sword
Wednesday:	6:1-10	The Prophecy of the Mountains
Thursday:	6:11-14	A Judgment on Israel
Friday:	7:1-27	The Day of the Wrath of the Lord

### Week Three:

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>7:1-27</b>	<b>The Day of the Wrath of the Lord</b>
Monday:	8:1-18	The Vision of Jerusalem: Polluting the Temple
Tuesday:	9:1-11	The Vision of Jerusalem: Punishing the City
Wednesday:	10:1-22	The Vision of Jerusalem: The Throne of God
Thursday:	11:1-12	The Vision of Jerusalem: Judging the Leaders
Friday:	11:13-25	The Vision of Jerusalem: The Glory Departs

### Week Four:

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>8:1-11:25</b>	<b>A Journey to Jerusalem</b>
Monday:	12:1-16	The Sign of the King's Exile
Tuesday:	12:17-20	The Sign of Trembling
Wednesday:	12:21-28	The Promise to Fulfill the Vision
Thursday:	13:1-16	The Punishment of Prophets
Friday:	13:17-23	The Punishment of Prophetesses

### Week Five:

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>13:1-23</b>	<b>The Punishment of Prophets</b>
Monday:	14:1-11	Idols of the Heart
Tuesday:	14:12-23	Individual Responsibility — Part 1
Wednesday:	15:1-8	The Parable of the Vine
Thursday:	16:1-34	The Child in the Field — Part 1
Friday:	16:35-63	The Child in the Field — Part 2

**Week Six:**

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>16:1-63</b>	<b>The Child in the Field</b>
Monday:	17:1-24	The Parable of the Eagles
Tuesday:	18:1-32	Individual Responsibility — Part 2
Wednesday:	19:1-14	A Lament for the Princes of Israel
Thursday:	20:1-26	A History Lesson
Friday:	20:27-44	A Promise of Restoration

**Week Seven:**

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>18:1-32</b>	<b>Individual Responsibility</b>
Monday:	20:45-49	The Judgment of the Negev
Tuesday:	21:1-32	The Sword Comes to Jerusalem and Ammon
Wednesday:	22:1-16	The Sins of the City
Thursday:	22:17-22	The Purging of the City
Friday:	22:23-31	The Priests and the Prophets

**Week Eight:**

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>21:1-27</b>	<b>The Song of the Sword</b>
Monday:	23:1-35	The Two Sisters — Part 1
Tuesday:	23:36-49	The Two Sisters — Part 2
Wednesday:	24:1-14	The Parable of the Pot
Thursday:	24:15-27	Ezekiel's Wife Dies
Friday:	25:1-17	Judgment on Ammon, Moab, Edom and the Philistines

**Week Nine:**

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>24:15-27</b>	<b>The Death of Delight</b>
Monday:	26:1-21	Judgment on Tyre
Tuesday:	27:1-25	A Lament for Tyre — Part 1
Wednesday:	27:26-36	A Lament for Tyre — Part 2
Thursday:	28:1-10	A Lament for the Prince of Tyre
Friday:	28:11-19	A Lament for the King of Tyre

**Week Ten:**

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>28:1-19</b>	<b>The Prince and the King: A Quandary</b>
Monday:	28:20-26	The Fall of Sidon and Restoration of Israel
Tuesday:	29:1-16	Judgment on Egypt
Wednesday:	29:17-20	Egypt in the Hand of Nebuchadnezzar
Thursday:	30: 1-19	Egypt is Crushed
Friday:	30:20-26	The Breaking of Pharaoh

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### Week Eleven:

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>29:1-16</b>	<b>A Judgment on Egypt</b>
Monday:	31:1-18	A Warning to Pharaoh: The Fall of Assyria
Tuesday:	32:1-16	A Lament for Pharaoh
Wednesday:	32:17-32	Egypt in the Pit
Thursday:	33:1-20	The Parable of the Watchman
Friday:	33:21-33	Message from the Fall of Jerusalem

### Week Twelve:

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>33:21-33</b>	<b>Reactions to Jerusalem's Fall</b>
Monday:	34:1-16	Judgment on Israel's Shepherds
Tuesday:	34:17-31	God's Care for His Sheep
Wednesday:	35:1-15	Judgment on Mount Seir (Edom)
Thursday:	36:1-15	The Restoration of Israel
Friday:	36:16-38	A Question of Honor

### Week Thirteen:

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>36:16-38</b>	<b>A Question of Honor</b>
Monday:	37:1-14	The Valley
Tuesday:	37:15-28	The Sign of the Stick
Wednesday:	38:1-23	Judgment on Gog and the Prince of Rosh
Thursday:	39:1-16	The Destruction of Gog
Friday:	39:17-29	The Deliverance of Israel

### Week Fourteen:

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>37:1-14</b>	<b>The Valley</b>
Monday:	40:1-16	The New Temple — Part 1
Tuesday:	40:17-27	The New Temple — Part 2
Wednesday:	40:28-49	The New Temple — Part 3
Thursday:	41:1-26	The New Temple — Part 4
Friday:	42:1-20	The New Temple — Part 5

### Week Fifteen:

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>38:1-39:29</b>	<b>The Gog Invasion</b>
Monday:	43:1-5	The Glory Returns
Tuesday:	43:6-27	The Worship Described
Wednesday:	44:1-31	Instructions for the Priests
Thursday:	45:1-8	Division of the Land
Friday:	45:9-25	The Offerings of the Prince

**Week Sixteen:**

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>40:1-43:9</b>	<b>Israel Again — Part One</b>
Monday:	46:1-24	The East Gate
Tuesday:	47:1-12	The New River
Wednesday:	47:13-23	The Borders of Israel
Thursday:	48:1-29	The Division of Israel
Friday:	48:30-35	The City of God

**Week Seventeen:**

<b>Sunday:</b>	<b>43:10-48:35</b>	<b>Israel Again — Part Two</b>
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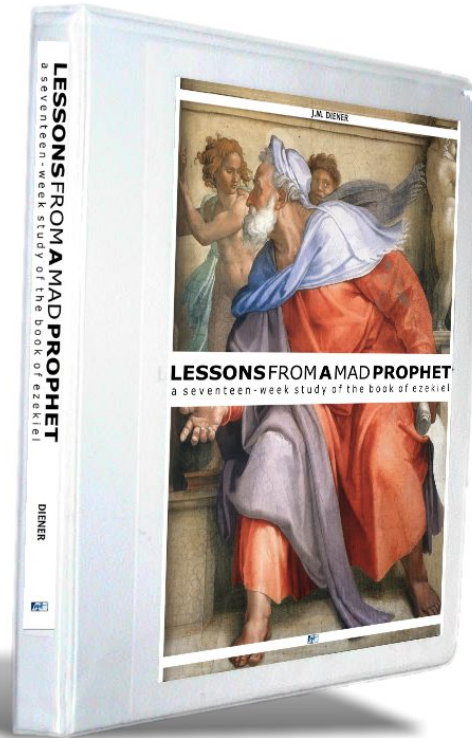
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