

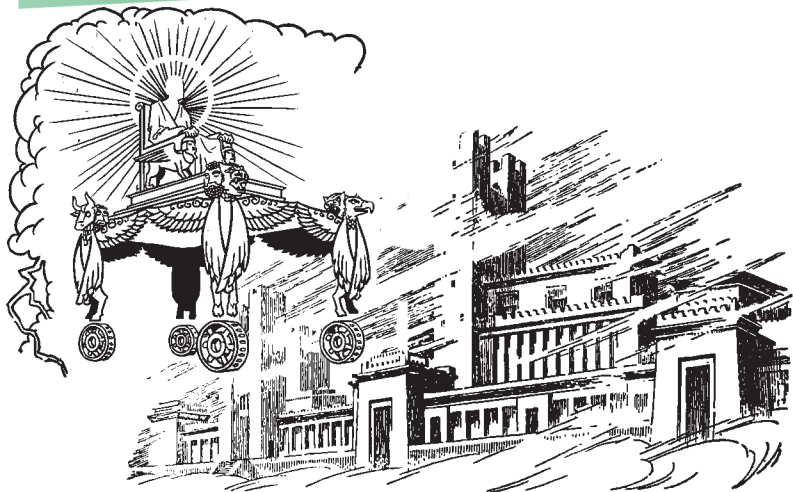


BETHEL CHURCH
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE



CHURCH

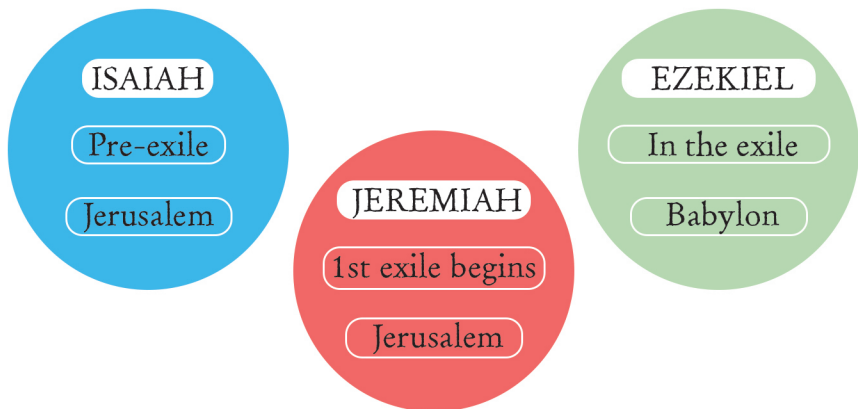
A STUDY ON EZEKIEL



INTRODUCTION

Prophet Ezekiel was a younger contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah stayed in Jerusalem and ministered to the exiles only through his letters. Ezekiel however, lived among the exiles and proclaimed God's word to them. He hailed from a priestly family and grew up in Jerusalem (1:3). When the Babylonians attacked Judah in 597 BC, Ezekiel was carried into exile along with King Jehoiachin. During the fifth year of his exile, God called him to prophecy to his fellow exiles (1:2).

Ezekiel means "*God strengthens*". God certainly strengthened and sustained his difficult ministry, which was directed from start to end by visions of the Lord's glory (Ch:1, 8, 47-48).



Ezekiel, being a priest, plays the role of a prophet, pastor, and evangelist to the people in exile. His lengthy ministry strived to disturb the comfortable, comfort the disturbed and build a community of repentance, faith, and obedience out of the ruins and trauma of exile. In short, he uniquely combined the priest's sense of God's holiness, the prophet's sense of the message that had been entrusted to him, and the pastor's sense of responsibility towards his people.

Unlike Isaiah and Jeremiah, Yahweh calls Ezekiel by the title “son of man” (lit. “son of Adam”), reminding everyone of Yahweh's creation. Later, in 2:2, the Spirit (Hebrew *ruah*, lit. “wind,” “spirit,” or “breath”) comes into “the son of Adam” (Ezekiel) and lifts him to his feet. The Holy Spirit plays a major role in Ezekiel 2 – 3, repeatedly lifting Ezekiel up (2:2; 3:12, 14, 24), and presenting him with oracles for the people (3:24 – 27).

In the book of Ezekiel, one finds that God promises to deliver His people out of chaos, into security, back from disgrace, up from the grave, and together out of division. The emphasis on newness is overwhelming and is emphasized by the following phrases: a new shepherd, a new spirit, new hearts, new breath, and new unity.



THE BIG IDEA OF EZEKIEL

Ezekiel's message is similar to the standard three-part message of the pre-exilic prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Ezekiel declares:

- (1) People have broken the covenant, so repent!
- (2) Judgement is a natural consequence that follows a lack of repentance! And Judgment will also come on the nations.
- (3) Yet, there is hope beyond judgment for a glorious future restoration, both for Judah/Israel and for all the nations.

Within that three-part message, however, Ezekiel focuses on two related themes throughout the book.

First, he stresses the sovereignty and glory of Yahweh. The Israelites may be in exile, but Yahweh is still in control of history, and He is moving events along according to His sovereignty and His glory.

Connected to this theme is the phrase “*I am Yahweh*” along with associated variations such as “*that you may know that I am Yahweh*” (which occurs 70 times in Ezekiel). Yahweh declares quite clearly that everyone will know that He is Yahweh—the sinful ones through the judgment they receive; and the believing, repentant ones through the blessings and restoration they will experience. Thus, the sovereignty of Yahweh is related to the main prophetic points of sin/judgment and restoration/blessing.

The second major theme of Ezekiel is the presence of Yahweh. At the heart of the covenant was the promise, “*I will be with you/I will live in your midst.*” Yahweh’s powerful presence was with Moses and Israel when they came out of Egypt. His presence was manifested in the cloud and the pillar of fire that led them through the wilderness; and later took up residence in the tabernacle. When the temple was built by Solomon, the presence of Yahweh came and filled it. From then on, the powerful presence of Yahweh was associated with the temple. It was arguably the most significant blessing that Israel had while dwelling in the land. When Yahweh departed from the temple (Ezek. 8 – 10), Israel lost that powerful presence and the wonderful blessings that accompanied it.

The latter chapters of Ezekiel, however, describe a time of glorious restoration, centered on the new temple that is characterized by the presence of Yahweh. This is highlighted by the final statement of the book, “*And the name of the city from that time on will be ‘Yahweh is there’*” (Ezek. 48:35).

Ezekiel is a big book with valuable themes and lessons. One cannot exhaust the riches in this book.

The other themes found in this book include:

- Our reliability on God’s word
- Our responsibility to be obedient
- How judgment satisfies the justice of God but brings Him no pleasure
- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit that brings life to the repentant
- The restoration of Israel as Yahweh’s means of honouring His name amongst the nations

CHAPTER SUMMARY

CHAPTERS 1-24

Behold the end of Jerusalem

Ezekiel 10:18:
“Then the glory of
the Lord departed
from over the
threshold of the
temple and stopped
above the cherubim.”

CHAPTERS 25-32

Behold the end of nations

Ezekiel 25:17:
“I will carry out
great vengeance on
them and punish
them in my wrath.
Then they will know
that I am the Lord,
when I take
vengeance on them.”

CHAPTERS 33-48

Behold a New Israel

Ezekiel 36:24-27:
“For I will take you
out of the nations; I
will gather you from
all the countries and
bring you back into
your own land.²⁵ I will
sprinkle clean water
on you, and you will
be clean; I will
cleanse you from all
your impurities and
from all your idols.²⁶ I
will give you a new
heart and put a new
spirit in you; I will
remove from you your
heart of stone and
give you a heart of
flesh.²⁷ And I will put
my Spirit in you and
move you to follow
my decrees and be
careful to keep my
laws.”

Chapters 1-24 Behold the End of Jerusalem

• EZEKIEL'S VISION AND THE GLORY OF GOD

Ezekiel 1:1: *“In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.”*

Ezekiel's prophecy is filled with visions. No other Old Testament book contains such vivid imagery of divine visions. God used these visions to convey His truth to His people through His prophet.

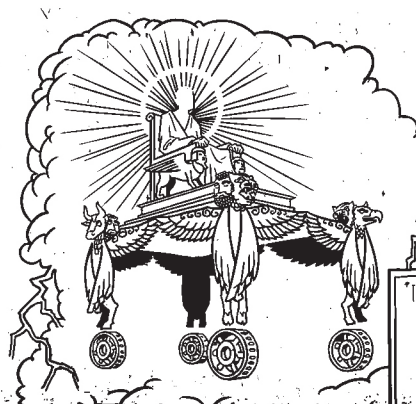
Recall Isaiah's encounter with Yahweh in the temple when he was commissioned to be a prophet (Isaiah 6). That made sense because the presence of Yahweh resided in the temple. Like Isaiah, Ezekiel also encountered Yahweh seated on His throne, but not in the temple. He was in exile by a river in Babylon. This is a profound vision and highly significant because Yahweh demonstrates that His powerful presence and the throne He rules from are not tied to the temple in Jerusalem but are mobile and equally powerful throughout the world, even in the enemy's territory.

Ezekiel 1 – 3 (the prophet's encounter with Yahweh) revolves around the theme *“The Glory of Yahweh”* (1:28; 3:12, 23). The prophet describes this encounter in Ezekiel 1:4–28. Like Isaiah, he emphasizes the throne/chariot and the creatures that serve Yahweh more than Yahweh Himself. This was probably because Ezekiel wasn't able to look directly and fully absorb the glory of Yahweh.

Ezekiel sees four living creatures, which he later identifies as **cherubim** (10:20), arising from a windstorm, engulfed in lightning and emitting dazzling light. Each creature has four faces (**man, ox, lion, and eagle** – the most intelligent creations of God) and four wings, bright as fire and flying back and forth with the rapidity of lightning (1:4–14). Beside each one is a **wheel** (i.e., the four wheels of a wagon or four-wheeled chariot), and the uniqueness of this throne-vehicle is that it is completely mobile. The chariot can go up or down, backward, forward, left or right, in an instant—like lightning itself. Above the wheels and the cherubim is a spectacular **throne** on which sits someone who looks like a man but whose brightness is overwhelming. This, Ezekiel explains, is the “*likeness of the glory of Yahweh*” (1:25 – 28).

In the New Testament, we find “*four living creatures*” around the throne in **Revelation 4:6–8** and **5:8**. These “*living creatures*” have similarities to both the cherubim in Ezekiel and the seraphim in Isaiah 6.

The underlying message conveyed by the four living creatures in these passages is that the presence of God is holy, powerful, eternal, and sovereign over all creation, and worthy of worship.



The purpose was not simply to dazzle Ezekiel, but to proclaim a message that:

- **God is on the move**
- **He allows Himself to be seen**
- **He appears even in what people think is a godforsaken place**

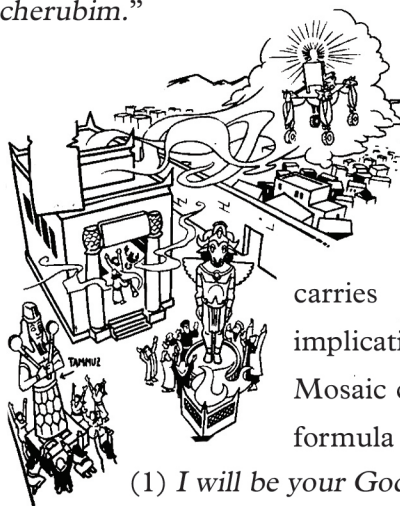
“**Coram Deo**” is a Latin phrase (meaning “***in the presence of God***”) from Christian theology which summarizes the idea of Christians living in the presence of, under the authority of, and to the honour and glory of God.

What an enduring message of hope! How important it is for us to remember that God is never confined, never limited, never distracted, and never disinterested in His people. Our God moved with His faithful ones like Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, and other believing exiles. History shows that truly He never abandons His children. Ezekiel’s vision of the divine glory leaving the temple (Ch. 10) and later returning (Ch. 43) is a symbol of the transition from the old age to the new age in Christ.

SIX MAIN VISIONS OF EZEKIEL		
1.	Vision of the Cherubim	1:4-28
2.	Vision of the Scroll	2:9-3:3
3.	Vision of the Plain	3:22-23
4.	Visions of Jerusalem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four abominations in the Temple • Inhabitants of the city slain • City destroyed by fire • Departure of God’s glory 	8:1-18 9:1-11 10:1-22 11:1-25
5.	Vision of Dry Bones	37:1-10
6.	Vision of the New Temple and Associated Scenes	40:1-48:35

• YAHWEH'S DEPARTURE FROM THE TEMPLE
AND HIS PROMISED FUTURE RETURN

Ezekiel 10:18: *"Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim."*



The departure of Yahweh from the temple is one of the most significant events in Ezekiel's stint, as it carries tremendous theological implications. At the heart of the Mosaic covenant was the three-part formula stated by Yahweh:

(1) *I will be your God*; (2) *You will be my people*;
(3) *I will dwell in your midst*. Yahweh's departure implies an end to this arrangement.

A belief that God could never leave His temple was commonly held during the ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Thus, the people paid little heed to the prophets' call for repentance, even though they prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. They were certain that the Lord could not leave Jerusalem. So how could it be destroyed? It was a common practice for them to shout *"This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord"* to divert the threats of divine judgment (Jer. 7:4).

Later, they were brought to the harsh realization that He no longer dwelt in their midst—at least not in Jerusalem or the Promised Land. (An interesting side note is that after the exile when the people returned to Palestine and Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple, there is no mention of the presence of Yahweh returning to dwell in the temple. That is, there is no indication that things returned to the pre-exile status. Yahweh's presence did not dwell in the rebuilt post-exilic temple as it did in the old temple.)

The biblical narrative indicates that Yahweh's presence did not return to the temple until Jesus walked through the gates. Ironically, when that happened, what did Christ find? Moneychangers and scoundrels, but no true worshippers. The situation that Christ encountered in the temple was similar to that in Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's days. As did Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Jesus pronounced judgment on the temple and the city of Jerusalem, which was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

Just like the Lord Jesus desired to meet true worshippers during His time on Earth, He is searching for true worshippers even today (John 4:24).



• ISRAELITES' LOVE FOR WORLDLINESS
DESTROYED THEM INTERNALLY

Ezekiel 20:33-35: *“As I live,” says the Lord GOD, “surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. ³⁴**I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. ³⁵And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face.***

Israel became a nation, in the first place, by means of a divinely controlled process. That process took place over a forty-year period (ca. 1440–1400 B.C.) and included the nation’s rescue from bondage in Egypt, their reception of God’s covenant at Mount Sinai, the purging of the unfaithful during the wandering in the wilderness, and the conquest of Canaan, thus fulfilling the promises to the patriarchs.

The prophets were often inspired to look back upon that process as a symbolic model for the restoration of Israel from the Babylonian exile. In the present passage, Ezekiel reveals God’s promise to his audience - a similar symbolic model for the gathering of the Israelites and their return to the Promised Land. This “new exodus” motif also has a particular emphasis on the fact that Israel will not go through the process again and remain unstable in its commitment to the Lord.

Through Ezekiel, God reiterates a long history of His goodness to His people despite their repeated rebellion against Him. He gives; they ignore. He forgives; they continue to sin. He blesses; they defile.

Ezekiel 20:1–44 describes Israel’s weakness towards idolatry. Idolatry kept Israel from God’s favour and blessing. Therefore, it was seriously condemned by the prophets. What the passages within 20:1–44 demonstrate is that idolatry was not something Israel had flirted with now and again. Instead, it was a way of life to which the people were so attached that only the miraculous grace of God could rescue them from it and its penalty. And so it is with sin in general. We get into a rut of sinning so deep and long that our human nature offers no hope of rescue (Rom. 7:5–24). Sin is, in effect, addictive. Without God’s grace (Ezek. 20:44) there is no hope for a sinner.

Ezekiel 21 reminds the leaders and inhabitants of Jerusalem that it is Yahweh himself who will fight against them. The main theme in this chapter is the “*sword of Yahweh*.” Indeed, the word “*sword*” occurs 19 times in this chapter (89 times in the book of Ezekiel!). But Yahweh makes a startling declaration when He tells the people that the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar’s sword will carry out the judgment of Yahweh (21:19).

The terrible sins of Jerusalem and her leaders are reviewed in *Ezekiel 22*: *killing innocent people* (22:2–3,6); *idolatry* (22:4); *social injustice, that is, oppressing foreigners, widows, and orphans* (22:7); *sexual sins* (22:9–11); and *economic sins* (22:12). All of the various leaders are also included in this prosecution: *princes* (i.e., kings and nobility) (22:25), *priests* (22:26), *officials* (22:27), and *prophets* (22:28). Finally, the “*people of the land*” are also included for participating in the social injustice being committed (22:29). It is at this point that Yahweh declares, “*I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none*” (22:30). The entire leadership of Jerusalem had collapsed and fallen into serious sin. Jeremiah, remember, also makes this discovery as he searches the streets of Jerusalem looking for just one who is righteous (Jer.5:1–6).

“I, Yahweh have spoken. The time has come for me to act” (Ezek. 24:14).

All people, groups, and professions have a role in creating and maintaining a good society. If even one group of people firmly resists the tendency to slide toward corruption, dishonesty, exploitation, and immorality, which is natural in all human cultures, there is a possibility of reformation and renewal. God was not looking for everyone to be perfect in Judah (v. 30). He was looking for some—enough to make a difference—to do His will.

The few should, therefore, always do their best to influence the many and never stop doing what is right simply because they are outnumbered. **We are called to be the light in the darkness.** If the government fails, the church must not! If church leadership fails, the church must not. If prominent citizens allow immorality to continue unchecked, the church must firmly resist and obey God in every area.

The sober concluding words of Ezekiel 1 – 24 state, “*and they will know that I am Yahweh*” (24:27). Ultimately, everyone will know Yahweh, either through His judgment (Ezekiel 1 – 24) or through His restoration and blessing (Ezekiel 33 – 44). People cannot turn their backs on Him or ignore Him.

JUDGMENT PARABLES BY EZEKIEL			
• Parable of the Vine	15:1-8	Judah had become useless and now served no other purpose than to be burned up	
• Parable of the Orphan baby	16:1-14	Illustrates how they abandoned God’s love and redemption	
• Parable of the Eagles & Cedars	17:1-24	Illustrated the foolishness of King Zedekiah, whose rebellion invited Nebuchadnezzar’s troops to destroy Jerusalem	
• Parable of the Fiery Furnace	22:17-22	Illustrated that God would purify His people through the siege of Jerusalem	
• Parable of the Two Sister Prostitutes	23:1-49	Symbolized the spiritual adultery of Israel and Judah	
• Parable of the Cooking Pot	24:1-14	Symbolized how God would use the “heat” of hardship to purge Jerusalem of its impurities	
• Parable of the Irresponsible Shepherds	34:1-31	Foretold how God would deal with Jerusalem’s poor leaders and take His place as the good shepherd	

Chapters 25-32 Behold the End of Nations

Judgements against the surrounding nations of Israel

A second division of the book begins at this point. The first 24 chapters were concerned primarily with prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem, but this section is about the fall of neighbouring nations that once tormented Israel.

Ezekiel 25:7- “...*I will cut you off from the peoples, and I will cause you to perish from the countries; I will destroy you, and you shall know that I am the LORD.*”

In chapters 25–32 we encounter oracles against sixteen nations, all of whom in one way or another had incurred God’s wrath, and all of whom, therefore, receive in these chapters a prediction of God’s judgment against them. The nations are Ammon (25:1–7), Moab (25:8–11), Edom (25:11–14; 32:29), Philistia (25:15–17), Tyre (26:1–28:19), Sidon (28:20–24), Egypt (29:1–32:21; 32:31–32), Ethiopia [Nubia] (30:4–9), Libya (30:4–9), Lydia (30:4–9), “All the mingled people” [Arabia] (30:4–9), Chub (30:4–9), Assyria (32:22–23), Elam (33:24–26), Meshech (33:26–28), Tubal (33:26–28).

It is noteworthy that one major nation is not mentioned in these chapters: Babylon. This is not because Babylon was relatively good in God’s eyes. Babylon shared some or all of the prophecies against other nations as they were to conquer them shortly.

Babylon, from a different perspective, was the temporary agent of God. Though other prophets had already preached its eventual downfall, for the time being, the Babylonians were the people God had chosen to punish the nations.

So, in one way, the oracles against foreign nations were always implicitly oracles of encouragement for God's people.

Suppression of Israel's enemies meant support for Israel (see also the discussion on 21:28–32). So even at a time when all seemed hopeless from a human point of view, God was already offering hope to His defeated, exiled people. Comprehensively revealing the coming doom of Israel's enemies through the prophet Ezekiel,

“Eat the Scroll” - The Art of Spiritual Reading (Lectio Divina)

Ezekiel 3:3- *“Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.’ So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.”*

There are three instances in Scripture when a man of God was instructed to “eat” a holy scroll. Those would be Ezekiel in Ezekiel 2:8; Jeremiah in Jeremiah 15:16; and the Apostle John in Revelation 10:9. “Eat this” of course, was metaphor to take what was written on the divinely inspired holy document, internalize it, and then think and act accordingly.

Lectio Divina has been used throughout the history of the church to allow the Scripture to be a vehicle whereby we encounter the living God. Just as the food our body consumes is internalized, metabolized, and converted into energy for physical activity, our reading and study of the Bible should have a similar spiritual impact on us.

So, the four parts of lectio Divina involves **reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation.**

God was clearing the way for His people to expect their deliverance and eventual exaltation.

If this control of God over the events of nations through history could be understood, then it could be believed that God had the power to restore little Israel, which in Ezekiel's day stood shamed before the other nations of the world as a destroyed, deported, and "dead" nation. The exiled Israelites were in desperate need of enlightenment. They had to realise that God was running history and controlling the states of the Earth. The Babylonians were not in charge. God was! He would eventually shame the other nations, at whose hands Israel felt ashamed. He would cease the powers that seemed to have effected Israel's end.

Once again, the oracle exemplified God's determination to reassure His people that they were not alone or forgotten in their sufferings. It also served to assert the fact that His glory would eventually be recognized. Babylonian armies were merely His minions; Nebuchadnezzar himself was merely His minion in the task. Egypt, once a great nation, was rendered impotent under the Babylonians, which further reminds us of the greatness of our God. After Nebuchadnezzar was finished with Egypt, the nation never reclaimed its greatness. This should encourage all who trust in the Lord! If His promise was true in this case, will it not be true in all others?

Chapters 33-48 Behold a New Israel

A quick review of what we've studied so far:

- Ezekiel 1 – 24: focused on the judgments regarding Judah/Jerusalem
- Ezekiel 24: marks the fall of Jerusalem
- Ezekiel 25 – 32: pronounced words of judgment on the surrounding nations

In the final unit (Ezekiel 33 – 48), after the fall of Jerusalem, Yahweh points to the future with an emphasis on the final point of the prophetic message - **hope and restoration**. Yahweh reverses many of these judgment events. New life and restoration become the focus. **Yahweh promises a (new) covenant in which His Spirit will reside within His people**. A Davidic king will come to shepherd the people in justice and peace.

Finally, the last chapters (40 – 48) describe a spectacular future temple. The glory of Yahweh (as seen by Ezekiel in his opening vision in chapter 1) returns to the temple and the presence of Yahweh dwells with His people. Indeed, “Yahweh is there” becomes the very name of the new city. To a considerable extent, this is the object of the entire vision.

“And the name of the city from that time on will be: Yahweh is there.” - Ezekiel 48:35

The Irresponsible Shepherds and the True Shepherd

Ezekiel 34:15-16- *“I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. ¹⁶I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.”*

Ezekiel 34 introduces the path to restoration. This entire chapter uses the shepherding image as the major motif. In 34:1–10, Yahweh declares that Israel’s current shepherds (i.e., leaders) are greedy and selfish, and have not cared for the weak or sick. Remember, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel devoted much of their prophetic message to criticizing the ineffectual, rebellious, and arrogant leadership of Israel/Judah. Yahweh underscores how terrible these leaders have been and declares that He will rescue the people from them (34:10). Yahweh then promises that He Himself will come to shepherd His flock. **In contrast to these bad shepherds, Yahweh will shepherd with justice and will care for the weak** (34:11 – 16).

An interesting transition takes place in 34:23–24, as Yahweh—who was to be the new shepherd—suddenly states that He will raise a Davidic king to be the shepherd. This enigma that surrounded a shepherding dilemma (is Yahweh or a Davidic king the true shepherd?) becomes clear in the New Testament when Jesus steps into the shoes of the “**Good Shepherd**” (John 10). The foundational covenant formula language (“*I will be your God; you will be my people; I will dwell in your midst*”) dominates Ezekiel 34:25 – 31.

Renewal, Revival, Restoration – The Valley of dry bones!

In **Ezekiel 37** Yahweh takes the prophet to a valley of dry bones, probably an old battlefield where the slain soldiers were left on the field where they fell. After years of scavenging by animals, decay, and the bleaching action of the sun, all that remained were bleached white bones scattered across the field. The point is that these people were really, really dead. Yahweh, however, tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, stating that Yahweh will breathe life into them. This chapter contains an extended wordplay - the Hebrew word (*rūah*) can mean “*breath*,” “*wind*,” or “*spirit*,” and all three meanings are used in this chapter. In fact, this word occurs ten times in Ezekiel 37, including four occurrences in one verse (37:9).

There is, in effect, a **two-part formula for revival** - the first ingredient of which is the preaching of the Word of God (v. 4). “*Prophecy*” means essentially “*preach God’s Word*.” In verse 5, the other part of the formula is revealed: the Spirit of God must be in the bones for them to live.

The meaning of this chapter is tied to Ezekiel’s message of hope for future restoration. If Yahweh can bring life back to those dead, dried, scattered bones, then He can bring life back to anyone, including scattered, defeated Israel. Playing a central role in this return to life is the empowering presence of Yahweh’s Spirit (37:14), connecting this chapter back to the promise in 36:27. Likewise, in Ezekiel 37:26 Yahweh promises a covenant of peace—an eternal covenant.

The new people will not simply be the old people with more blessings. The new Israel will be obedient, cleansed from sin, and, for once, genuinely worthy to be called the people of God.

Three things are to happen to Israel:

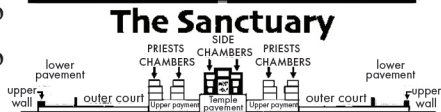
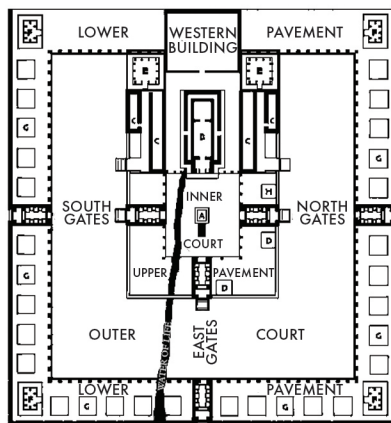
1. Renewal for God's holy name (36:16–38)
2. Revival by God's word and Spirit (37:1–14)
3. Unification under the Messianic King (37:15–28)

The New Temple

In the final nine chapters of the book of Ezekiel, chapters 40 – 48, the prophet brings his book to a climactic close by describing in detail the new temple of the future. **Hope is the focus of these last nine chapters—hope despite the depressing realities of captivity in Ezekiel's day, and hope based on the revealed plan of God to move His people into a new age of blessing and close relationship with Himself.** The visions are not designed to encourage the Israelites to expect a restoration of the life they had enjoyed before their conquest and exile, but to anticipate a much better order of things, brought about supernaturally by the Lord and not capable of being spoiled by the selfish unfaithfulness that had wrecked Israel's relationship with the Lord again and again in the past.

This grand vision account, the longest in the Bible other than the Book of Revelation, contains lengthy descriptions of the physical characteristics of the Holy City, its temple, the Holy Land, and related regulations for proper worship and membership of God's people. It was a grand sight! For Ezekiel and his audience, in a day when no temple existed, it was a guarantee of great things to come. Israel would be restored. They would one day worship again in the Lord's house. They would be guests in His divine sanctuary, a place more enormous and glorious than they had yet experienced.

As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, the earthly temple, actual or visionary, was intended to function as a reflection of heavenly existence with the Lord (Heb. 9:23–25). So, even in the detailed descriptions and measurements of Ezekiel's vision, we can be reminded of the glories to come for all who belong to God—a temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, which we shall not merely visit in a vision, but dwell in forever.



There are three sections to the vision:

1. New house of worship described (Ch:40–43)
2. Nature and role of all who live in the New Jerusalem (Ch: 44–46)
3. Promised Land and its tribal allotments (Ch:47–48)

Ezekiel 47:1–12 describes a **river flowing out of the temple**. This description is similar in several respects to that of **Revelation 22:1–3**. This river flows out of the temple and gets deeper as it travels, giving life to everything along its banks (Ezek. 47:1 – 12). The theme of a river of life is found often in the Bible. **Genesis 2:10–14** describes a great river in the Garden of Eden that parts into 4 streams and flows into the whole earth. **Psalms 46:4** alludes to the “*river whose streams make glad the city of God.*” Ezekiel was inspired to make use of this happy theme of a life-giving river not as a literal prediction, but again as a symbolic depiction of the coming age of abundance. God is at the center of all the graces of the new age, and what better way to illustrate this than with a river that originates right in God’s own house—the temple building—and flows through the barren land making it lush and productive?

Here, then, is a picture of what a good God does for His people. He gives them what they need to live. He sustains them. By His supernatural grace, He makes abundance appear where only desolation once prevailed. The work of Christ, who gives “*living water*”, has begun the age seen in Ezekiel’s vision. Heavenly life will fill it, as depicted in **Revelation 22**.



We will enjoy the fruited abundance of Ezekiel's River. It will come from the Lord's house in the Holy City, where we are already citizens if we truly know the Lord. As mentioned earlier, the book of Ezekiel ends on a most important note—the presence of Yahweh, “*And the name of the city from that time on will be: Yahweh is there* (Heb. Yahweh Shammah).” But the concluding message of the book is not merely that God has returned to His temple, but that God is wherever His people are.

The New Testament makes numerous hints as well as direct connections to the concept of a new temple. John states that the “*Word (Jesus) became flesh and lived (‘tabernacled’) among us*” (John 1:14). Throughout the Gospels, many of the things that Jesus did are related to the Old Testament prophets’ words regarding the temple. In a manner reminiscent of the prophets, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple (Mark 11:12–25; 13:1–2). In Mark 14:57–58 and John 2:19–22, Jesus refers to replacing the destroyed physical temple with a temple “*not made with hands,*” an indirect reference to Himself. **Jesus prophesies that He Himself will be the new temple that replaces the old material temple as the embodiment of God's presence.**

In Acts and the Pauline letters, the **imagery of the new temple is applied to the church.** God now places His Spirit (presence) into believers. Thus, the new church becomes the location for the presence of God, which was previously located in the temple (Joel 2:28 – 29; Acts 2:1 – 4).

Along these same lines, Paul tells the young church, “*You yourselves are God’s temple*” since “*God’s Spirit lives in you*” (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21 – 22). The book of Revelation makes several references to God’s people serving Him in the temple (Rev. 3:12; 7:9, 14 – 15). Likewise, Revelation 21:2–3 connects the New Jerusalem to the most basic Old Testament covenant language regarding God’s presence, “*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them.*” At the end of Revelations, however, John declares, “*I did not see a temple in the city*” (21:22). This is rather surprising at first, but John continues by explaining, “*Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*”

● CONCLUSION ●

God's people fail over and over again. We tend to mess up soon, starting from the Garden of Eden to the times of exile and even today. Will there ever be a day when we get it right? The prophet Ezekiel said that God would renew His covenant by renewing hearts, and He would do this by giving His own Spirit to those who trusted in Him. God fulfilled His promise through Jesus. Now as followers of Jesus, we are invited to practice living with His Spirit. And as we do, we will find our hearts being renewed every day, filled with new desires and new decisions to love God and one another.



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