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# THE LOOKOUT

**AUGUST 2022**

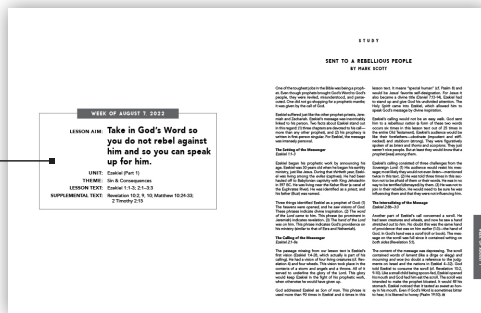
## Unit: Ezekiel (Part 1)

### Theme: Sin & Consequences

**Overview:** The major prophetic book of Ezekiel is the Judges of the exile. It is the Dark Ages of captivity for Israel. This prophet-priest had to announce that sin came with consequences. Idolatry caused a downward spiral for Israel. Students will learn that when God's people (and her leaders) are rebellious and sinful, God's glory will depart from them. Ezekiel proclaimed judgment to Judah and the nations around her (chapters 1-32), but he also proclaimed restoration (chapters 33-48). When God restores people, he always does so for the glory of his own name (a concept that appears 60 times in Ezekiel).

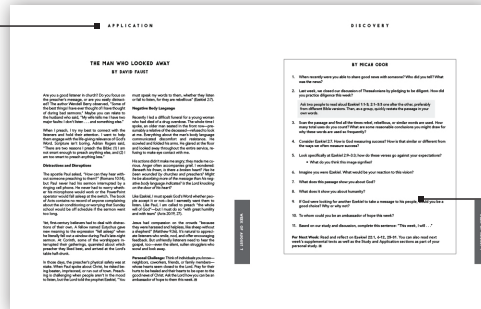
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF AUGUST 14, 2022

**LESSON AIM:** **Confess the sins in your  
life and in the lives of  
your family and church.**

**UNIT:** Ezekiel (Part 1)

**THEME:** Sin & Consequences

**LESSON TEXT:** Ezekiel 22:1, 6-12, 25-31

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** James 3:1; Malachi 2:7-9; Acts 20:28-31

## STUDY

### SINS OF THE LEADERS

BY MARK SCOTT

It is often said, “A group never rises higher than its leadership.” It could equally be said, “A group never stoops so low as its leadership.” John Maxwell said, “Leadership is influence.” But that influence can be positive or negative. In this book of prophecy, the leadership was primarily negative.

Since the call of this exilic prophet (in Ezekiel 1-3), the prophet had cried out against Israel’s idolatry and the sins of Israel’s leaders. The result was that leaders began persecuting Ezekiel. At this juncture *the word of the Lord* came to Ezekiel to cry out against those leaders.

#### The Leaders

*Ezekiel 22:6, 25-27, 29*

Five different expressions are used to talk about God’s leaders and the people who follow them. They are called *princes* in verse 6. This word means “captain,” or “chief governor.” They are called *princes* again in verse 25. But this is a different Hebrew word, which is normally translated “prophet.” They are called *priests* in verse 26. The Hebrew word means “chief ruler” and is used of Melchizedek. They are called *officials* in verse 27. This word means “chief ruler.” While it sounds like the same word as in verse 6, it is a different Hebrew word. They are also called *prophets* (v. 28). Then, in verse 29, the phrase *people of the land* is used. These are not leaders. In fact, this famous Hebrew phrase referred to just plain people who wouldn’t give a fig about obeying the law. They were viewed as dirty and unclean. But they are the ones affected by corrupt leaders.

These leaders perhaps committed or participated in the sins of the text, they perhaps taught the followers they could commit the sins in the text, or perhaps all of the above (cf. Romans 1:32). We have examples in pre-exilic Israel of leaders committing some of the sins mentioned in this lesson text (Numbers 12:1-16; chapter 25; Joshua 7:1-26; Judges—the whole book; 1 Samuel 15; 2 Samuel 11; et al.). The leaders in this exilic text are described as lions and wolves tearing their prey (vv. 25, 27).

#### The Sins

*Ezekiel 22:6-12, 25-29*

The vice lists in these paragraphs—the sheer number of sins and the depth of this leadership’s depravity—are

overwhelming. Depending on how a person categorized these sins, they total 14 in number. (1) They *shed blood* (vv. 6, 9, 12, 27). In other words, they murdered—often for unjust gain. (2) They mistreated parents (v. 7). They forgot the fifth commandment—the one that had a promise of long life (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). (3) They (extorted) foreigners and denied them justice (vv. 7, 29). (4) They *mistreated* (wronged or neglected) orphans and widows (vv. 7, 25). (5) They *despised* (held in contempt) holy things (vv. 8, 26). This was more than being careless with things in the temple. (6) They *desecrated* (polluted or profaned) the Sabbath (vv. 8, 26). It probably meant they violated it or did not keep it. (7) They slandered (v. 9). They lied. It might have shown up particularly as giving *false visions* or *lying divinations* (playing the role of a soothsayer). They *whitewashed* (plastered over) *their deeds*. (8) They ate at *mountain shrines* (catered to and committed *lewd acts* at the high places).

Spirituality goes hand-in-hand with sexuality. Idolatry leads to immorality. That is seen in many of their sins. (9) They were sexually deviate (vv. 9-10). This manifested itself in idolatrous acts, dishonoring their father’s bed (“uncovering it” as Reuben did, Genesis 49:4), violating women during their menstrual cycle (Leviticus 18:19), as well as committing adultery and incest. (10) They accepted bribes and stole (v. 12). (11) They took advantage of the people—in particular, they oppressed the poor (vv. 12, 25, 29). (12) They mistreated their neighbors (vv. 12, 29). (13) They committed robbery (vv. 25, 29). (14) The worst sin of all—they *forgot* (ignored or ceased to care about) the Lord (v. 12; Ezekiel 23:35).

#### The Intercessor

*Ezekiel 22:30-31*

Is there any leader who can intercede for all this wickedness on the part of God’s people? God was looking for someone—maybe Ezekiel? God needed *someone* (an “ish,” a “man” or person) to *build up the wall and stand before God in the gap*. Could someone step up and intercede for the people as Moses did (Numbers 14:13-19) or as Jesus did (Hebrews 7:25)?

For the moment, God *found no one*. So wrath (indignation) and *fiery anger* would have to come down on Israel. What leader today would cause God’s people to rise up? ■

## APPLICATION

# DON'T LOSE YOUR BEARINGS

BY DAVID FAUST

Someone said that a leader “has a compass in his head and a magnet in his heart.” Effective leaders know where they are going, and they draw others to journey with them. John Maxwell said, “A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.”

Sailors at sea and explorers on land use compasses to clarify their sense of direction. If you're lost or groping in the darkness, a compass can help you get your bearings and find your way. Bad things happen, though, when leaders lose their bearings. Leaders who lack a moral compass are “blind guides” who steer their followers into a ditch (Matthew 15:14).

### Pitfalls

It's sad when anyone falls into flagrant sin, but the damage multiplies whenever church leaders fall. Satan laughs. Skeptics scoff. Congregations suffer. Trust is shattered. Ministries dissolve. New believers find their faith shaken and longtime Christ followers feel the pain of disappointment.

Long ago the prophet Ezekiel identified several danger signs of moral failure. How can we tell if our leaders are losing their bearings? Ezekiel 22 identifies five leadership pitfalls—ways the “princes of Israel” were veering off course.

1. *Disrespect for family.* These corrupt leaders “treated father and mother with contempt” (Ezekiel 22:7). Leadership starts in the home. How do we treat our parents, spouse, children, and grandchildren? Two-faced pretenders look like spiritual giants in public but act like jerks at home. “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?” (1 Timothy 3:5).

2. *Mistreatment of the vulnerable.* Israel's princes lost their bearings when they “oppressed the foreigner and mistreated the fatherless and the widow” (Ezekiel 22:7). Self-centered leaders cozy up to power brokers, abuse their authority, and push people around, but

Christlike leaders care for the weak and speak up for the defenseless.

3. *Irreverence.* The Lord declared that corrupt leaders “have despised my holy things and desecrated my Sabbaths” (v. 8). Do we take seriously the Lord's commands recorded in Holy Scripture, including sacred institutions like baptism and the Lord's Supper? If we treat “holy things” lightly, it's a sign we are losing our bearings.

4. *Sexual impurity.* Israel's princes committed “lewd acts” and even engaged in incest (vv. 9-11). There's nothing new about sexual temptation, but today's technology makes it more accessible, and shifting cultural norms make it seem more acceptable. The great King David's influence waned and his reputation suffered after he succumbed to sexual impurity.

5. *Financial mismanagement.* The leaders in Ezekiel's day took bribes, profited at the expense of the poor, and extorted their neighbors in the pursuit of “unjust gain” (v. 12). Paul warned, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:10).

### Safeguards

How can we keep our bearings and stay on course? It starts by recognizing and admitting our vulnerability. It requires ongoing humility, self-awareness, submission, repentance, and staying in touch with God and in close community with others who hold us accountable.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” This ancient wisdom will help us of us keep our bearings—including those who are called to lead.

**Personal Challenge:** Examine your own attitude and lifestyle in light of the five pitfalls listed above. Ask the Lord to help you guard your heart and “keep your bearings” so you can lead others well. ■

## DISCOVERY

### BY MICAH ODOR

1. Have you ever seen someone abuse their power or authority? How did it feel to watch it happen?
2. Last week, we talked about being an ambassador of hope and sharing God's love with someone. How did that go?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 22:1, 6-12, 25-31** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions.

3. God describes a lot of bad behavior in these verses. How many did you notice?
4. Verses 6-10 contain a shocking list of bad behavior. But a careful reading shows God is upset not just at the perpetrators but at the nation that allows these crimes. Read these verses again, replacing "In you" with "In you, America," or "within her" with "in America." For the sake of discussion, let's assume you have not personally done the things described here. What is your emotional response to being counted as part of the guilty group?
  - Is God being unfair to the majority of Israel?
5. Look again at verses 25-29. Read the first short phrase in each verse to see the parallel structure in this passage. What do the people in these positions of power have in common?
6. In those same verses, work backward to find what a "righteous" or "just" person would do in that situation. (In other words, what is the opposite of the actions described in each verse?)
7. What would it look like to "build up the wall" or "stand before God in the gap" (v. 30) against the atrocities we see in this chapter?
8. What does this passage teach you about God?
9. What does it teach you about yourself and the groups you are in?
10. God said, "I looked . . . but I found no one" (v. 30). What would need to change in your life to keep that statement from being true today?
11. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 18:1-18, 22**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖