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THE LOOKOUT

AUGUST 2022

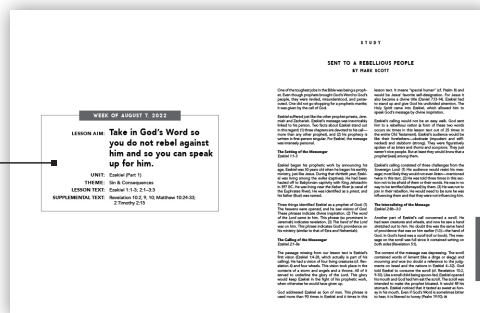
Unit: Ezekiel (Part 1)

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).

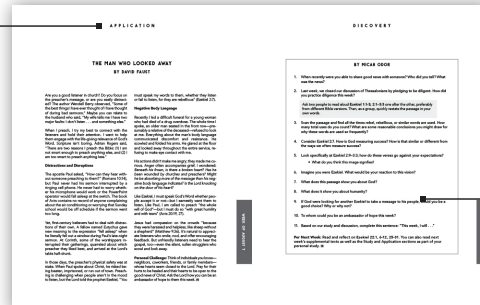
HOW TO USE

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 28, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Determine to keep the glory of the Lord in your life, in your family, and in your church.**

UNIT: Ezekiel (Part 1)

THEME: Sin & Consequences

LESSON TEXT: Ezekiel 9:1-7; 10:1-5, 18-19; 11:22-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Samuel 4:17-22; Exodus 24:15-17;
2 Chronicles 7:1-4

GOD'S GLORY DEPARTS

BY MARK SCOTT

God is a gentleman of the highest order. He will not stay where he is not wanted. However, he does not take lightly being pushed away. His patience has limits (Romans 2:4). If repeatedly pushed away, he will punish those who resist him. That is the essence of Ezekiel's vision at this point.

Ezekiel was exiled to Babylon previous to Jerusalem's final destruction in 586 BC. In his vision from God while in Babylon, Ezekiel saw Jerusalem being destroyed before it really happened (2 Chronicles 36:17-19). Following his call to prophetic service (chapters 1-3), he foresaw Jerusalem being besieged (chapters 4-5) and being judged due to her idolatry (chapter 6). He also foresaw the wrath of God being poured out on the holy city due to her abominations that took place in the temple itself (chapters 7-8). In the lesson text, we see God's glory (the symbol of his presence) leaving the city before the destruction took place.

God seems to like mobility. He likes to go where his people are, and he likes his people to go where he leads. Since no one place can contain him, he resisted the idea of locating his presence in one spot (2 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 8:27; Acts 7:48). The temptation for his people to fall into idolatry with that spot was too great (cf. Numbers 21:4-9; 2 Kings 18:4). That being said, God also knows the value of sacred space (1 Kings 8:29-30; Daniel 6:10). Therefore, Jerusalem was very special, and the temple in Jerusalem was its crowned jewel.

Saints Sealed; Sinners Slaughtered

Ezekiel 9:1-7

What Ezekiel heard and saw in this vision concerned God's glory leaving the temple previous to its destruction. (That is the bottom-line meaning of this vision, lest we get lost in all the symbolic details.) God drew upon antecedent theology (previous biblical stories) to give this message to Ezekiel, since the people had a reservoir from which to draw to understand the vision. God's glory symbolized as a cloud would make the people think back to the ordination of the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38). In 1 Samuel 4, God's glory was symbolized in a child's name—Ichabod—which made the people think back to the capture of the ark of the covenant by the Philistines (vv. 17-22). God's glory, symbolized in a royal hall containing an altar with hot coals (Ezekiel 10:2), made the people

think back to Isaiah's call to prophetic service as his sins were atoned for (Isaiah 6:6). Then, Ezekiel's own vision of God's glory alighting on the Mount of Olives would set the table for a great future moment (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-11).

God would execute his judgment on Jerusalem with unseen angels (one with a *writing kit at his side*) and Nebuchadnezzar's army. The people would see the army invading from the north (the Damascus Gate?). What they could not see was the heavenly host sealing the saints (cf. Revelation 7:3-4) and aiding in the slaughter of old and young men, women, mothers, and children. The faithful people in the city would receive a *mark on their foreheads*. This would protect them—similar to having blood on the doorposts of their houses (Exodus 12:7-13).

It would seem that the glory of the Lord was seen leaving the temple first and then the city at large—like God's presence was leaving regretfully and in stages. The remnant would *grieve* (sigh) and *lament* over the *detestable things* (disgusting or abominable) done even in the temple. But the wicked would be slain, and their bodies would *fill the courts*.

Idols Defeated; Glory Departed

Ezekiel 10:1-5, 18; 11:22

Similar to Moses interceding for the people (Numbers 14:13-19), Ezekiel pleaded for the city, but it was too late (9:8-11). The temple had become so corrupt that idol stones representing other gods (*lapis lazuli*) were *above the vault that was over the heads of the cherubim*. The angel was commanded to gather the burning coals and ride through the city on his chariot (*wheels beneath the cherubim*) and *scatter them over the city*.

Twice we are told the glory of the Lord moved to the *threshold of the temple* (9:3; 10:4). This probably meant the entrance to the Holy Place on its east side. From there the glory of the Lord moved to the famous eastern gate (visible yet today) and then on to the top of Mount Olivet, east of the temple proper. Ezekiel had a loud and colorful vision. The wings of the angels made a sound similar to the voice of God. It is a terrible thing when God has left the church and only the spiritually alert notice. ■

WHERE DID THE GLORY GO?

BY DAVID FAUST

During a trip to Greece, I asked our guide about church attendance in her country. “Most people don’t go to church here,” she responded without hesitation. “They think church is boring.”

Statistics support her words. According to a Pew Research Center study, less than 10 percent of Europeans attend church services—yet countries like England, Germany, and France boast some of the most beautiful church buildings in the world. Architectural marvels constructed to glorify God have become museums and visitor attractions, not centers of worship and community service.

Where has the glory gone?

Major League Baseball teams used to sponsor old-timers’ games featuring stars from yesteryear. Fans enjoyed seeing great players like Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, and Johnny Bench back on the field. We watched with a mix of nostalgia and melancholy as once-great athletes, now out of shape, hobbled around the bases—awkward reminders of fading glory.

A Temple Without God

A sad verse appears in the book of Judges. For a season, the strong man Samson prevailed over his enemies, but he made questionable choices and his impressive physical strength was offset by his spiritual immaturity. After lulling him to sleep on her lap and having a barber shave off his long braids of hair, Delilah called out, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you,” but his strength was gone. Then comes this sad verse: “He awoke from his sleep and thought, ‘I’ll go out as before and shake myself free.’ But he did not know that the Lord had left him” (Judges 16:20).

Samson’s muscular body had been a temple for God’s Spirit, but without the Lord’s presence, this once-mighty man fell feebly before the Philistines.

Until it was too late, Samson didn’t realize the Lord had left him.

The prophet Ezekiel foresaw God’s coming judgment upon the unfaithful Israelites, and even the temple sanctuary was not exempt. In fact, as Peter later noted, judgment begins “with God’s household” (1 Peter 4:17), so the Lord told his agents of judgment, “Begin at my sanctuary” (Ezekiel 9:6).

Jerusalem’s temple was supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations. It was meant to serve as a reminder of God’s presence and power, a gathering place for worship, and a holy place where animal sacrifices foreshadowed the Lamb of God’s death on the cross. But now Ezekiel saw God’s glory moving away from the temple as the city headed toward destruction.

Form Without Power

Ezekiel’s dire prophecies serve as a warning for us today. God’s grace abounds, but we shouldn’t take it for granted. We can’t live in the past, savoring the glory days behind us. Nor is it enough for a church to have a big building, a large staff, and well-organized programs. Without consistent prayer and wise, courageous leadership, a church can lose its way, forget its mission, and abandon the faith once for all delivered to the saints. It can end up with “a form of godliness” while denying God’s power (2 Timothy 3:5).

God still looks for those “who grieve and lament” (*King James Version*: “sigh and cry”) over their own sins and the sins of society (Ezekiel 9:4). We need to be faithful and watchful lest one day we wake up, surprised by our weakness, and wonder, “Where did God’s glory go?”

Personal Challenge: Where do you see evidence of God’s glory in the church where you worship and serve? What makes you “grieve and lament” over the sins of society (or the sins you struggle with yourself)? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICAH ODOR

1. What's one thing you're unquestionably good at? Have you ever received recognition for it?
2. Where do you see evidence of God's glory in the church where you worship and serve?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 9:1-7; 10:1-5, 18-19; 11:22-23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly restate the passage in your own words. (This symbolic vision of Ezekiel is difficult to read and understand. If your group gets confused and stuck, consider reading Ezekiel 8 for context.)

3. In this vision, what is the defining difference between those who are slain and those who are spared?
4. What's your reaction to 9:1-7?
5. What action is taking place throughout the remainder of the reading? What is the progression?
6. Thinking about what we have studied over the past three weeks in Ezekiel, what is the reason for God's glory departing? What is its significance?

Now ask someone to read **Jeremiah 31:31-34** aloud.

7. What is the relationship between this passage and what we read from Ezekiel 9-11?
8. Taken collectively, what do these passages tell us about the nature of God?
9. What do we learn about humanity from all these passages?
10. Who needs to hear what we've learned today?
11. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 33:1-16** as we continue studying Ezekiel in a new unit titled "Hope for Sinners." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **1**