

# + THE LOOKOUT

SEPTEMBER 2022

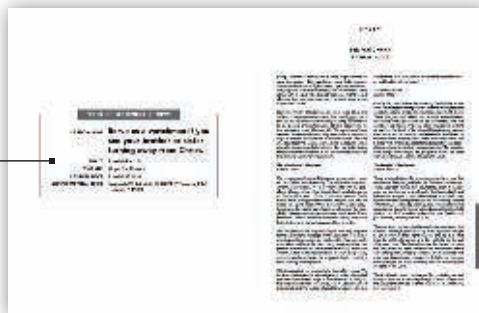
## Unit: Ezekiel (Part 2)

### Theme: Hope for Sinners

**Overview:** A Bible school class named themselves the HOPE Class. The acronym stood for “Hitched Or Patiently Engaged.” But that is not what *hope* stands for or means. *Hope* is the eager and very real anticipation of a world totally controlled by God. The major prophet Ezekiel marked out the consequences of sin (we focused on that last month), but he also marked out hope for sinners. This month students will learn of the tender care necessary to turn a sinner back to God, how having a new heart helps with that task, how people who have experienced the deadly nature of sin can breathe with new life, and how God’s nature can come afresh to once-weary sinners.

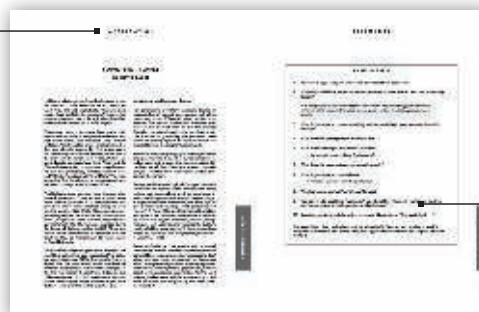
## HOW TO USE

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 SEPTEMBER 11, 2022**

**LESSON AIM:** **Pray for a new heart for you, your family, and your church for the glory of God's holy name.**

**UNIT:** Ezekiel (Part 2)

**THEME:** Hope for Sinners

**LESSON TEXT:** Ezekiel 36:16-32

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Ezekiel 18:30-32; Daniel 9:15-19;  
Hebrews 8:10-12

## STUDY

### NEW HEART

BY MARK SCOTT

The date 9/11 reminds people of the horror in evil hearts. Twenty-one years ago today certain hearts went bad and other lives were lost. “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). The answer is, “Only God.” And he also is the One who can give “new lives for old; warm hearts for cold” (lyrics of a Christian song by Wayne Watson).

Ezekiel continued to prepare the exiles in Babylon for the new days ahead. He addressed the shepherds (leaders) of Israel and spoke about them helping the people obey God’s covenant (chapter 34). He prophesied against Mount Seir (the Edomites) and Israel (Ezekiel 35; 36:1-15). Now it was time to paint a brighter picture for their future beyond Babylon (Jeremiah 29:10; Daniel 9:2).

#### Unclean Heart

*Ezekiel 36:16-21*

A diamond is placed on a black cloth to show its brilliance. A clean heart placed beside an unclean heart has the same effect. The *word of the Lord* came to this *son of man* (Ezekiel the prophet) to remind Israel of their previous heart condition. Israel had defiled (polluted) the land by their lifestyle (*conduct* and actions—mentioned twice in the paragraph). The metaphor to describe this pollution is that of a woman’s monthly period (Leviticus 15:19-23).

Three sins are specifically mentioned to underline Israel’s unclean heart. First, the people had *shed blood* (a reference to either murder or eating blood still in the meat). Second, the people had been idolatrous (a constant issue with Israel and the real reason for their exile). Third, the people *profaned* (defiled or wounded) God’s *holy name*. Much like Moses not treating God as holy before the people (Numbers 20:12), Israel did a horrible job of representing God to the nations. The nations could easily see that God’s people had no *concern for God’s holy name*. Their hearts were unclean.

#### Holy Heart

*Ezekiel 36:22-23*

The holy heart of God stood in contrast to the unclean hearts of the Israelites. The *Sovereign Lord* (Adonai Yahweh) always acted in relation to his own character and honor. His redemption of Israel from exile was not due to the Israelites’ nobility. God was at work to be true to his own nature and the glory of his name.

In the ancient world, someone’s name was a metonymy for the person’s character. So, even though his honor had been compromised among the nations, God would act to ensure that his name was above reproach. A major theme of the Bible is captured in the phrase, “*I will show the holiness of my great name.*” In Hebrew this is an interesting phrase; it heaps up the “holy” words to stress the point. Literally, “I will show the holiness of my holiness.” In doing this, God ensures his holy heart will be highly regarded by the nations.

#### New Heart

*Ezekiel 36:24-32*

Can God’s people ever achieve God’s heart? Can they acquire a new heart? The answer is, “Only with God’s assistance.” The promise of this paragraph is that after God fulfills his promise about bringing Israel out of exile and back to the Promised Land, he will give them a new heart.

This will require nothing short of conversion and cleansing. This is metaphorically spoken of as being sprinkled with *clean water* (Leviticus 15:21-22; Numbers 19:17-19). This conversion process would allow God to cleanse the Israelites from *impurities* (ethical filthiness) and idolatry. But Israel would need more than acquittal. They would also need some equipment to live differently. So God would need to give them a *new heart*. This would demand internal transformation by the Spirit of God. Ezekiel distinguished a *heart of stone* from a *heart of flesh*. What ultimately is in view here is nothing less than the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39; Acts 2:1-4, 17-21). This would supersede coming out of the exile from Babylon. It would be a coming out of the exile of sin (John 8:34).

With a new heart and Spirit, God’s people would be enabled to *follow* his decrees (*ways*) and *laws* (judgments). They would have internal motivation as opposed to external constraints. God would once again identify himself with his people and save them from all their *uncleanness*. The blessings of obedience would then be poured out (like a bountiful harvest instead of *famine*). The people would look back on their former life of sin and be appalled. God reminded them one final time that he was acting thusly for the sake of his own name.

It is still true that others view God by what they see in us. God is consistent in giving justice for sin and grace and faithfulness for restoration. ■

## AMAZING GRACE OR A BLAZING PACE?

BY DAVID FAUST

A friend recommended a book by John Mark Comer called *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*. Ironically, I put off reading it because I was too busy. When I finally made time to read the book, I found helpful insights like these:

For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it.

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[W]hat you fill your mind with will shape the trajectory of your character. In the end, your life is no more than the sum of what you gave your attention to. That bodes well for those apprentices of Jesus who give the bulk of their attention to him and to all that is good, beautiful, and true in his world. But not for those who give their attention to the 24-7 news cycle of outrage and anxiety and emotion-charged drama or the nonstop feed of celebrity gossip, titillation, and cultural drivel.

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Ultimately, nothing in this life, apart from God, can satisfy our desires. Tragically, we continue to chase after our desires ad infinitum. The result? A chronic state of restlessness or, worse, angst, anger, anxiety, disillusionment, depression—all of which lead to a life of hurry, a life of busyness, overload, shopping, materialism, careerism . . . which in turn makes us even more restless.

### Burned-Out Believers

Corrie ten Boom said, “If the devil can’t make you sin, he’ll make you busy.” A lot of Christ followers are stressed out. We’ve exchanged amazing grace for a blazing pace.

Church leaders estimate that 20 percent of the congregation does 80 percent of the work, and the pandemic intensified the problem as once-reliable members stayed

away (and marginal members strayed away) resulting in volunteer shortages in vital areas like children’s ministry. Carrying even more responsibility than before, the faithful few are wearing down.

It’s not a sin to be tired, but chronic weariness is a warning sign, and exhaustion makes us more vulnerable to temptation. Serving God can be difficult, but it shouldn’t leave us bitter and resentful.

God promised, “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” (Ezekiel 36:26). Along with a new heart, why not ask the Lord to give you a healthier, more sustainable pace? If you are growing weary in well-doing, here are three choices to consider.

- **Resist, or Rest?** It’s OK to take a break. Even God took a sabbath. Jesus told his disciples, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31). Will you receive that gracious invitation or resist it and slip deeper into burnout?

- **Resign, or Re-Sign?** Instead of quitting, maybe it’s time for a change. Instead of saying, “I resign,” why not “re-sign”? Sign up for a different kind of ministry that rejuvenates your soul.

- **Resent, or Re-Sent?** Alone in the wilderness, Elijah felt so dejected he prayed he would die. But after he slept, ate, drank, and heard anew the Lord’s still, small voice, Elijah was ready to serve again (1 Kings 19:1-18). If you’re worn out, ask the Lord to refresh your body and renew your heart so that instead of being resentful, you can be “re-sent” full of renewed vigor from the Holy Spirit.

**Personal Challenge:** In *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, Comer says, “Love, joy, and peace are at the heart of all Jesus is trying to grow in the soil of your life. And all three are incompatible with hurry.” He suggests, “The solution to an overbusy life is not more time. It’s to slow down and simplify our lives around what really matters.” This week, slow down and rest in God’s presence, asking the Lord to refresh your zeal and renew your heart for ministry. ■

# DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How were you a spiritual “watchman” for others last week?
2. How do memories from your past help you to live more faithfully today?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 36:16-32** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to retell the story from the passage in their own words.

3. Describe the people’s previous heart condition and conduct?
4. Why does God say he will take the actions he has planned?
5. How would you summarize God’s promises for the future (vv. 24-30)?
6. What does this passage teach you about God?
7. What does it teach you about yourself?
8. What do we need so we are able to obey God (to follow his decrees and keep his laws)?
9. With whom will you share the good news that God “will save you from all your uncleanness”?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: “This week, I will . . . ”

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 37:1-14**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖