



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Ezekiel, Part 1

Theme: Sin & Consequences

Overview: Ezekiel was a priest who became a prophet while living among the exiles in Babylon. God sent him to a rebellious people with a hard message about sin and its consequences. In this first part of our study of Ezekiel, students will learn to take in God's Word so they can speak up for him, to confess the sins in their own lives and in their families and churches, to repent and turn away from sin, and to keep the glory of the Lord at the center of their lives, families, and churches.

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.

INTRODUCTION

Author

The book records the visions and messages of Ezekiel son of Buzi, a priest (Ezekiel 1:3). Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry when he was 30 years old (1:1), and the book is written largely in the first person. His name means “God strengthens.” Like Jeremiah and Zechariah, he was both a priest and a prophet.

Audience

Ezekiel spoke to the Jewish exiles who had been carried off to Babylon with King Jehoiachin in 597 BC, as well as to the people who remained in Jerusalem. God called them “a rebellious nation” and warned the prophet that they might not listen (Ezekiel 2:3-7).

Date

Ezekiel received his call in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile, about 593 BC (Ezekiel 1:2). His ministry continued for more than 20 years, spanning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC; his last dated prophecy comes from about 571 BC (29:17).

Setting

Ezekiel lived among the exiles by the Kebar River, a canal of the Euphrates in Babylon. Back home in Judah, corrupt leaders, idolatry, and injustice filled Jerusalem, and even the temple had been defiled. In his visions, Ezekiel saw the city’s coming judgment and the glory of the Lord departing from the temple.

Theme

God is holy, and sin brings consequences. “The one who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:4). Yet God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked; he calls each person to repent and live (18:21-23). Throughout the book runs the refrain, “Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Why Study Ezekiel?

Ezekiel confronts us with the seriousness of sin—our own, our leaders’, and our community’s. This study calls believers to internalize God’s Word and speak it faithfully, to stand in the gap through confession and intercession, to take personal responsibility for sin, and to guard the presence and glory of God among his people.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1–3:3

WEEK 2: Ezekiel 22:1, 6-12, 25-31

WEEK 3: Ezekiel 18:1-18, 22

WEEK 4: Ezekiel 9:1-7; 10:1-5, 18-19; 11:22-23

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Take in God's Word so you do not rebel against him and so you can speak up for him.**

STUDY: Ezekiel, Part 1

THEME: Sin & Consequences

LESSON TEXT: Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1-3:3

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Revelation 10:2, 9-10; Matthew 10:24-33; 2 Timothy 2:15

SENT TO A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

BY MARK SCOTT

One of the toughest jobs in the Bible was being a prophet. Even though prophets brought God's Word to God's people, they were reviled, misunderstood, and persecuted. One did not go shopping for a prophetic mantle; it was given by the call of God.

Ezekiel suffered just like the other prophet-priests, Jeremiah and Zechariah. Ezekiel's message was inextricably linked to his person. Two facts about Ezekiel stand out in this regard: (1) three chapters are devoted to his call—more than any other prophet, and (2) his prophecy is written in first-person singular. For Ezekiel, the message was intensely personal.

The Setting of the Messenger*Ezekiel 1:1-3*

Ezekiel began his prophetic work by announcing his age. Ezekiel was 30 years old when he began his earthly ministry, just like Jesus. During that *thirtieth year*, Ezekiel was living among the *exiles* (captives). He had been hauled off to Babylonian captivity with King Jehoiachin in 597 BC. He was living near the *Kebar River* (a canal of the Euphrates River). He was identified as a *priest*, and his father (Buzi) was named.

Three things identified Ezekiel as a prophet of God: (1) *The heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God*. These phrases indicate divine inspiration. (2) *The word of the Lord came to him*. This phrase (so prominent in Jeremiah) indicates revelation. (3) *The hand of the Lord was on him*. This phrase indicates God's providence on his ministry (similar to that of Ezra and Nehemiah).

The Calling of the Messenger*Ezekiel 2:1-8a*

The passage missing from our lesson text is Ezekiel's first vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28, which actually is part of his calling). He had a vision of four living creatures (cf. Revelation 4) and four wheels. This vision took place in the contexts of a storm and angels and a throne. All of it served to underline the glory of the Lord. This glory would keep Ezekiel in the fight of his prophetic work, when otherwise he would have given up.

God addressed Ezekiel as *Son of man*. This phrase is used more than 90 times in Ezekiel and 6 times in this lesson text. It means "special human" (cf. Psalm 8) and would be Jesus' favorite self-designation. For Jesus it also became a divine title (Daniel 7:13-14). Ezekiel had

to stand up and give God his undivided attention. The Holy Spirit came into Ezekiel, which allowed him to speak God's message by divine inspiration.

Ezekiel's calling would not be an easy walk. God sent him to a *rebellious nation* (a form of these two words occurs six times in this lesson text out of 25 times in the entire Old Testament). Ezekiel's audience would be like their forefathers—*obstinate* (impudent and stiff-necked) and *stubborn* (strong). They were figuratively spoken of as *briers* and *thorns* and *scorpions*. They just weren't nice people. But at least they would know that a *prophet [was] among them*.

Ezekiel's calling consisted of three challenges from the Sovereign Lord: (1) His audience would resist his message; most likely they would not even listen—mentioned twice in this text. (2) He was told three times in this section not to be afraid of them or their words. He was in no way to be *terrified* (dismayed) by them. (3) He was not to join in their rebellion. He would need to be sure he was influencing them and that they were not influencing him.

The Internalizing of the Message*Ezekiel 2:8b-3:3*

Another part of Ezekiel's call concerned a scroll. He had seen creatures and wheels, and now he saw a *hand* stretched out to him. No doubt this was the same hand of providence that was on him earlier (1:3)—the hand of God. In God's hand was a *scroll* (roll or book). The message on the scroll was full since it contained writing on both sides (Revelation 5:1).

The content of the message was depressing. The scroll contained words of *lament* (like a dirge or elegy) and *mourning and woe* (no doubt a reference to the judgments on Israel and the nations in Ezekiel 4-32). God told Ezekiel to consume the scroll (cf. Revelation 10:2, 9-10). Like a small child being spoon-fed, Ezekiel opened his mouth and God had him eat the scroll. The scroll was intended to make the prophet bloated. It would fill his stomach. Ezekiel noticed that it tasted as sweet as *honey* in his mouth. Even if God's Word is sometimes bitter to hear, it is likened to honey (Psalm 19:10).

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

THE MAN WHO LOOKED AWAY

BY DAVID FAUST

Are you a good listener in church? Do you focus on the preacher's message, or are you easily distracted? The author Wendell Berry observed, "Some of the best things I have ever thought of I have thought of during bad sermons." Maybe you can relate to the husband who said, "My wife tells me I have two major faults: I don't listen . . . and something else."

When I preach, I try my best to connect with the listeners and hold their attention. I want to help them engage with the life-giving relevance of God's Word. Scripture isn't boring. Adrian Rogers said, "There are two reasons I preach the Bible: (1) I am not smart enough to preach anything else, and (2) I am too smart to preach anything less."

Distractions and Disruptions

The apostle Paul asked, "How can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14), but Paul never had his sermon interrupted by a ringing cell phone. He never had to worry whether his microphone would work or the PowerPoint operator would fall asleep at the switch. The book of Acts contains no record of anyone complaining about the air conditioning or worrying that Sunday school would be off schedule if the sermon went too long.

Yet, first-century believers had to deal with distractions of their own. A fellow named Eutychus gave new meaning to the expression "fell asleep" when he literally fell out a window during Paul's late-night sermon. At Corinth, some of the worshippers interrupted their gatherings, quarreled about which preacher they liked best, and arrived at the Lord's table half-drunk.

In those days, the preacher's physical safety was at stake. When Paul spoke about Christ, he risked being beaten, imprisoned, or run out of town. Preaching is challenging when people aren't in the mood to listen, but the Lord told the prophet Ezekiel, "You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious" (Ezekiel 2:7).

Negative Body Language

Recently I led a difficult funeral for a young woman who had died of a drug overdose. The whole time I spoke, an older man seated in the front row—presumably a relative of the deceased—refused to look at me. Everything about the man's body language communicated discomfort and resistance. He scowled and folded his arms. He glared at the floor and looked away throughout the entire service, refusing to make eye contact with me.

His actions didn't make me angry; they made me curious. Anger often accompanies grief. I wondered: *Beneath his frown, is there a broken heart? Has he been wounded by churches and preachers? Might he be absorbing more of the message than his negative body language indicates? Is the Lord knocking on the door of his heart?*

Like Ezekiel, I must speak God's Word whether people accept it or not—but I earnestly want them to listen. Like Paul, I am called to preach "the whole will of God"—but I must do so "with great humility and with tears" (Acts 20:19, 27).

Jesus had compassion on the crowds "because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). It's natural to appreciate listeners who smile, nod, and offer encouraging feedback. But unfriendly listeners need to hear the gospel, too—even the silent, sullen strugglers who scowl and look away.

Personal Challenge:

Think of individuals you know—neighbors, coworkers, friends, or family members—whose hearts seem closed to the Lord. Pray for their hurts to be healed and their hearts to be open to the good news of Christ. Ask the Lord how you can be an ambassador of hope to them this week.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When recently were you able to share good news with someone? Who did you tell? What was the news?
2. Last week, we closed our discussion of Thessalonians by pledging to be diligent. How did you practice diligence this week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1-3:3** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly restate the passage in your own words.

3. Scan the passage and find all the times *rebel*, *rebellious*, or similar words are used. How many total uses do you count? What are some reasonable conclusions you might draw for why these words are used so frequently?
4. Consider Ezekiel 2:7. How is God measuring success? How is that similar or different from the ways we often measure success?
5. Look specifically at Ezekiel 2:9-3:3; how do these verses go against your expectations?
 - What do you think this image signifies?
 - Imagine you were Ezekiel. What would be your reaction to this vision?
6. What does this passage show you about God?
 - What does it show you about humanity?
7. If God were looking for another Ezekiel to take a message to his people, would you be a good choice? Why or why not?
8. To whom could you be an ambassador of hope this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 22:1, 6-12, 25-31**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

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

STUDY: 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

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 *oppressed* (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 *deseccrated* (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?

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

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.

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).

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.

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.

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.

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 all 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.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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?
 - 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?)
6. 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?
7. What does this passage teach you about God?
 - What does it teach you about yourself and the groups you are in?
8. 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?
9. 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.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Repent and turn away
from your sins.**

STUDY: Ezekiel, Part 1

THEME: Sin & Consequences

LESSON TEXT: Ezekiel 18:1-18, 22

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:10; Psalm 18:20-27; 2 Peter 2:4-9

THE SOUL THAT SINS

BY MARK SCOTT

There is certainly some mystery in the Bible about family life. Many a parent has leaned into Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (*English Standard Version*). They read a proverb like a promise. Then, when junior becomes a prodigal son, the parent goes into a spiritual funk. In the Bible good kings sometimes had bad sons (2 Kings 23:25; 23:36-37), and bad kings sometimes had good sons (2 Kings 16:2; 18:3).

“Generational sin” is real. Who would doubt that the effects of systemic sin can be passed from one generation to the next—at least in terms of its results (Exodus 20:5; 34:7)? While parents can be intentional and cut their losses by working hard to pass their faith along to their children (Psalm 78:2-4), the sins of the fathers can be “visited” on the generations that follow. In this lesson text, however, the exilic prophet Ezekiel taught that the soul that sins is the one in trouble—the refrain in verses 4, 13, and 17 make that clear. Ultimately a child cannot pass the buck of blame for sin to mom or dad. Each individual must stand before God personally.

The Righteous Man*Ezekiel 18:1-9*

Righteousness can best be passed along through family commitments. But so can unrighteousness. The word of the Lord that came to Ezekiel concerned a well-worn *proverb* (a short, pithy statement almost like a riddle). If parents eat *sour grapes* you would expect the tartness to affect them. But, no—the *children’s teeth are set on edge*. In other words, the parents’ activities did impact the children. But that is only half true. Since everyone (*all souls*) belongs to God (which of course included parents and children), then everyone has to stand before God—on their own merit.

The *righteous man* (labeled such in the bracket verses of 5 and 9) will stay to God’s standards. This person will do what is *just and right*. This person follows God’s *decrees* and *faithfully* (truthfully) keeps God’s *laws*. Righteousness partially consists of what one does positively. But righteousness can also consist of what one does not do.

Ezekiel listed at least six couplets that describe what the righteous man does not do. (1) He does not act idolatrously. This would include not bowing down to mountain shrines. (2) He does not engage in sexual misconduct. This would include not “polluting” his neighbor’s wife and having intercourse with a woman during her period. (3) He does not financially oppress

(vex or destroy) anyone; instead, he returns items taken as pledges for loans. (4) He does not rob people by being stingy with food or clothing. (5) He does not charge exorbitant usury and then make an ungodly profit. (6) He does not make unfair judgments between two parties (man to man). We are defined by what we do and what we do not do.

The Violent Son*Ezekiel 18:10-13*

A righteous man could have a *violent son* (robber or destroyer) who commits all of the above. Even though the father set a good example, it does not mean the son will follow in his father’s steps. The list is almost identical to what the father did not do. But this violent son embraced all of these wicked things. The list is a bit abbreviated due to being fleshed out in the previous paragraph.

Ezekiel asked the rhetorical question, “Will such a man live?” Heaven’s answer is no. The violent son committed these *detestable* (abominable) things. Without Christ’s anointing death on the cross, the unrighteous man’s *blood will be on his own head*. He will only have himself to blame for his eternal destiny.

The Good Grandson*Ezekiel 18:14-18, 22*

Now the violent son sees the way his father acted and decided not to do such things. More than one child of an alcoholic determined never to even taste alcohol because of the carnage it caused in their home. The list of sins remained the same. This grandson followed God’s laws and decrees. The result he receives is life. He is not about to repeat his father’s *extortion* (oppression), *robbery*, and doing what was wrong among the people.

The last verse of our text (v. 22) held out the possibility that if a wicked person turned to the Lord and repented, then his *offenses* (transgressions) will not be remembered. God will regard righteous things (and certainly righteous things as reckoned in Christ in the new covenant) as a guarantee of life. To a group of people so oriented to communal living, this call to individual righteousness must have seemed strange.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

I AM WHO BY DAVID FAUST

When I was a boy, my older brother, John, and I were playing catch in the yard and a softball crashed through our house's dining room window. I blamed John and said, "He threw it too high." John blamed me and told Dad, "He should have caught it." Frowning as he replaced the broken glass, Dad wasn't happy with either of us.

People have tried to avoid responsibility ever since the Garden of Eden. Adam blamed his wife and told God, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Genesis 3:12). Eve basically said, "The devil made me do it." ("The serpent deceived me, and I ate"—Genesis 3:13.) It's human nature to make excuses and shift the blame. But the fact is, even in a perfect environment, Adam and Eve made poor decisions that got them into trouble.

Stop Passing the Buck

God's prophet wrote, "The one who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4). It doesn't help to play the blame game. Yes, prior generations of parents and grandparents have passed along their own habits, hang-ups, and hurts, but eventually we must stop blaming others and take responsibility for our own actions.

At the Last Supper, Jesus announced that one of his disciples was going to betray him. "They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, 'Surely you don't mean me, Lord?'" (Matthew 26:22). How terrible it was to realize that one of Jesus' closest followers was on the verge of betraying him—even while the disciples' feet were still moist from Jesus washing them! Yet, if we're honest, we all know the answer to the question, "Is it I, Lord?" Yes, it is I. Like Judas, I have betrayed innocent blood, and so have you. Like Peter, I've had my own moments of bitter failure when I have denied Christ by word and deed. And so have you.

Who is a sinner? I am who, that's who. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Keep Receiving God's Grace

Thankfully, the Bible's very next verse offers relief. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We must accept responsibility for our own actions and admit our sins to God. We all need to repent, respond to God's grace with personal faith, and be baptized in response to the gospel (Acts 2:38). Neither our parents, our friends, nor any minister at church can make that decision for us; we must decide for ourselves.

Who is a sinner saved by God's grace? I am who, that's who.

Joshua said, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Every day we must make that choice anew. After we are forgiven and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we have an ongoing responsibility to use the gifts and opportunities God bestows. Who will wash others' feet? Who will serve those in need? Who will spread the good news of Christ? Who will support the Lord's work with time, talent, and treasure?

Will you dare to say, "I am who, that's who"?

Personal Challenge:

Offer to the Lord this two-part prayer: (1) "Father, I am sorry for my sin of [blank]." (2) "Father, in gratitude for your mercy and grace, I want to serve you by [blank]."

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever gotten in trouble for something someone else did wrong? What about the reverse?
2. What's something you admired about your parents that you've tried to emulate?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 18:1-18, 22** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly restate the passage in your own words.

3. This passage has three versions of what's essentially the same list, with minor (but instructive) differences. Work your way down the list, comparing the first entry in each (mountain shrines), the second entry in each (neighbor's wife), and so on. What similarities or differences do you see?
4. Do you see all the entries in this list as carrying equal weight? Which ones seem especially bad to you? Which ones seem less bad?
 - Is our ranking of "really bad sins" and "not so bad sins" supported by the text, or are we more likely to excuse things we're comfortable with? What examples do you see?
5. Ignore the specifics of the list for a moment. What larger principle is God teaching in this passage?
6. What do you think of the punishments here? What would it be like to live under the Old Covenant instead of the New Covenant?
7. What does this passage teach you about God?
 - What does it teach you about yourself?
8. Where in your life are you taking credit for someone else's right actions?
 - Where in your life are you beating yourself up for someone else's mistakes?
9. With whom can you share this lesson?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 9:1-7; 10:1-5, 18-19; 11:22-23**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

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

STUDY: 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.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

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)?

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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?
 - What's your reaction to 9:1-7?
4. What action is taking place throughout the remainder of the reading? What is the progression?
5. 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?
6. Now ask someone to read Jeremiah 31:31-34 aloud.
 - What is the relationship between this passage and what we read from Ezekiel 9-11?
7. Taken collectively, what do these passages tell us about the nature of God?
 - What do we learn about humanity from all these passages?
8. Who needs to hear what we've learned today?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.