1717 BIBLE STUDIES

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

OVERVIEW

Study: Ezekiel, Part 2
Theme: Hope for Sinners

Overview: After announcing God's judgment on Jerusalem and the nations, the prophet Ezekiel turned to a message of hope for the exiles. The God who judges sin also restores sinners. In this second part of our study of Ezekiel, students will learn to serve as watchmen for those turning away from Christ, to pray for a new heart, to ask God to breathe new life into themselves, their families, and their churches, and to pray for God's glory to be seen in Christ's church.

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.

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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

News of Jerusalem's fall in 586 BC reached the exiles in Babylon (Ezekiel 33:21), and the people felt as though "our bones are dried up and our hope is gone" (37:11). From that point on, Ezekiel's messages turned from judgment to restoration—a new heart and spirit, a people brought back to life, and a renewed temple filled once more with God's glory.

Theme

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but wants them to "turn from their ways and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). For the sake of his holy name, he promised, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (36:26), and "I will put my Spirit in you and you will live" (37:14). The glory that departed would return (43:2-7).

Why Study Ezekiel?

Ezekiel shows that no situation is too hopeless for God. This study calls believers to warn and restore those who are drifting, to seek the heart transformation only God can give, to trust the Spirit to bring life to what is spiritually dead, and to live as holy temples where God's glory dwells.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Ezekiel 33:1-16

WEEK 2: Ezekiel 36:16-32

WEEK 3: Ezekiel 37:1-14

WEEK 4: Ezekiel 43:1-12

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Serve as a watchman if you see your brother or sister turning away from Christ.**

STUDY: Ezekiel, Part 2

THEME: Hope for Sinners

LESSON TEXT: Ezekiel 33:1-16

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Jeremiah 26:1-9; Acts 20:20-21; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; James 5:19-20

THE WATCHMAN

BY MARK SCOTT

Being a watchman comes with a price. Night watchmen must fight sleep. Day watchmen must fight crowds. Some watchmen must fight thieves. Spiritual watchmen, like prophets and church leaders, are no different. Risks come with the job. The task at first pass might sound glorious, but true watchmen carry around some angst about their "labor."

Ezekiel's ministry of judgment on fallen Israel (chapters 1–24) and judgment on Ammon, Tyre, and Egypt (chapters 25–32) has turned to a ministry of being a watchman to the people of Israel (chapter 33) and specifically to the leaders of Israel (chapter 34). The word *watchman* denoted someone who was fully aware of the surroundings. It referred to someone stationed on the city wall who could see the enemy approaching and sounded the alarm for the people. Failure in this duty carried a death sentence to the watchman. In the case of Israel, God was the ultimate watchman (Psalm 66:7).

The Watchman's Message

Ezekiel 33:1-9

The chosen watchman's duties were announced in verses 1-6. Ezekiel was chosen by God as Israel's prophetic watchman in verses 7-9. He is referred to with the prophetic title *son of man* (four times). God's revelation came to Ezekiel (*The word of the Lord came to me*). God's *sword* (knife or dagger) referred to Babylon that he had raised up against Israel. When the watchman saw Babylon coming, he was to *warn* (teach or admonish) the people by blowing the *trumpet* (shofar or ram's horn). Trumpets were used to summon soldiers to battle, announce festival days, and call various assemblies to order.

The people bear the responsibility of how they respond to the watchman's message. If the watchman sounds the warning and the people do not heed it, they have only themselves to blame for the coming judgment (thus the phrase, *their blood will be on their own head*). But if the watchman fails in his responsibility to warn the people, then the watchman bears the responsibility for the judgment coming on the people.

This is repeated for emphasis to Ezekiel in verses 7-9. He is to challenge the wicked person to be *dissuaded* (warned) from wicked ways. If Ezekiel failed in this job, the responsibility fell on Ezekiel, but if Ezekiel warned the wicked, and the wicked refused to turn away from the wickedness, then that person will suffer the consequences and Ezekiel will be saved.

The Lord's Heart

Ezekiel 33:10-11

Clearly the Lord did not like speaking this harshly. It burdens him to speak of the people's *offenses* (transgressions or rebellions) and *sins* (and the guilt associated with them). These things cause Ezekiel's people to be weighed down and *waste away* (pine away or be consumed). The text could not be clearer. The Lord takes no *pleasure* (delight or favor) in the death of the wicked. His righteousness demands that sin be punished. Otherwise he would not be true to himself. But the Lord's heart is churned within him (Hosea 11:8). The Lord pleads to his people through Ezekiel to *turn* (repent)—in fact, he says this twice. The question is haunting: "Why will you die, people of Israel?" Sin does more than break God's law; it breaks his heart.

The People's Obedience

Ezekiel 33:12-16

There is no substitute for uncompromised and heartfelt obedience. Few things delight the Father more than that. This paragraph makes that abundantly clear. If a *righteous person* (someone who lives by God's standards and holiness) starts practicing disobedience, then his former righteousness is *disregarded* (counts for nothing). On the other hand, if a wicked person gives evidence of genuine repentance, then his former wickedness will not be held against him. This standard makes clear that God is both just and the justifier (Romans 3:26).

This may sound at first pass like works righteousness, but Ezekiel's message goes on to say that if righteous people begin to trust in their righteousness and do evil, what they did will be forgotten and they will die for the evil they have done. The flip side is true for the wicked person who turns his heart toward God. His wicked deeds will be forgotten. Three specific sins are mentioned that may have been issues during this Babylonian occupation—pledges for loans, thievery, and not following the decrees of the Lord.

The Lord could never be charged for not being fair and loving. A watchman has the privilege of announcing both the judgments of God and the love of God. Either way, it is hard work.

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SOUND THE TRUMPET

BY DAVID FAUST

I told my grade school music teacher I wanted to play the trumpet, but she looked at me and shook her head. "No," she said emphatically. "You have a big mouth. You should play the trombone." I used my big mouth to play trombone in the high school band, but secretly I always envied the trumpet players.

Throughout history, trumpets have made their mark—and not only in symphony orchestras and high school bands. Jazz innovators Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong had unique singing voices, but they also played trumpets. In 1964, at the age of 63, Armstrong knocked The Beatles off the top of the chart with his rendition of "Hello, Dolly." That same decade, trumpet player Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass cranked out popular songs listeners still hum along with today, including "Spanish Flea" and "This Guy's in Love with You." Many TV viewers remember Doc Severinsen, the trumpeter and band leader for Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*.

The Bible mentions trumpets more than any other musical instrument. Some ancient trumpets were made of silver (Numbers 10:2), but most were hollowed-out rams' horns (shofars). Trumpets were used to worship God (Psalm 98:6), announce approaching festivals (Leviticus 23:24), call troops into battle (Judges 3:27; 6:34), and alert people to danger (Nehemiah 4:18-20). Trumpets sounded during the battle of Jericho (Joshua 6:4-20). There was even a Jewish festival called the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25; Numbers 29:1-6)—today known as Rosh Hashanah.

When the final judgment approaches, the Lord "will send his angels with a loud trumpet call" to gather his people (Matthew 24:31). The apostle Paul predicted that "the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" at the final resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52; see also 1 Thessalonians 4:16). John's vision of the future includes seven angels whose trumpets signal woes that will come upon the earth (Revelation 8:2).

Unwelcome but Necessary Sounds

For generations of military members, bugles or trumpets literally served as a wake-up call when the rousing notes of "Reveille" stirred soldiers from slumber. This kind of trumpet call illustrates what the Lord had in mind when he told the prophet Ezekiel to be a watchman for the people of Israel. Like a soldier on guard duty, the watchman "sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people" (Ezekiel 33:3).

How does this principle apply to us today? Parents and grandparents, it is part of our responsibility to wake, warn, and prepare the next generation for battles they will face. Preachers, it is our responsibility to sound the alarm when we see spiritual dangers on the horizon.

Being a watchman is a tough job. Trumpet blasts are unwelcome sounds in a culture where no one wants to hear bad news—where a call to repentance or even a mild suggestion of wrongdoing can trigger a negative response. Remember, the Bible says to give the reasons for our hope "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15), speaking truth with wisdom and grace. If we call others to repentance, we must do so with humility, self-awareness, and tact, recognizing our own weakness and vulnerability. But let's not be afraid to speak up, for "if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8).

Personal Challenge:

Has anyone ever "sounded the trumpet" to warn you about impending spiritual danger? Have you ever done that for someone else? When you see others threatened by dangerous ideas, what prevents you from speaking up—fear of rejection, unwillingness to get involved, caution about coming across as judgmental? Ask the Lord to give you boldness and discernment so you will know when and how to speak up and when to remain silent.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How well did you carry out your "I will" statement from last week?

2. When in your life have you either warned someone or been warned about an impending danger?

   Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 33:1-16** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly restate the passage in your own words.

3. What do you learn about accountability and responsibility for one's actions from this passage?

4. What does this passage teach you about God?
   - What does it teach you about God's holiness?
   - What does it teach about God's grace?

5. What does the passage teach you about humanity?
   - What do you learn about obedience?
   - What do you learn about repentance?

6. Who has been a spiritual "watchman" for you?
   - How can you be a spiritual "watchman" for others? For whom will you "sound the trumpet" to warn them about impending spiritual danger?

7. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 36:16-32**. 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: **Pray for a new heart for you, your family, and your church for the glory of God's holy name.**

STUDY: 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

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.

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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.*
>
> *[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.*
>
> *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.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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.
   - Why does God say he will take the actions he has planned?
   - How would you summarize God's promises for the future (vv. 24-30)?
4. What does this passage teach you about God?
   - What does it teach you about yourself?
5. What do we need so we are able to obey God (to follow his decrees and keep his laws)?
6. With whom will you share the good news that God "will save you from all your uncleanness"?
7. 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.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Ask God to breathe new life for his glory into you, your family, and your church.**

STUDY: Ezekiel, Part 2

THEME: Hope for Sinners

LESSON TEXT: Ezekiel 37:1-14

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Genesis 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 52-54

DRY BONES

BY MARK SCOTT

Ancient philosophers—such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—who probed the elements of the universe (e.g., fire, water, and wind) may have actually found their way to God (Acts 17:27; Jeremiah 29:13). The Bible likens these basic elements to God himself. God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). The Holy Spirit in us is like water (John 7:38-39). And Jesus told the woman at the well that God was Spirit ("breath," John 4:24).

Every scientist knows that water is necessary for life—but so is breath. In the beginning God breathed into man (i.e., blew with his Spirit), and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). For true abundant life (John 10:10) people need the breath of God. That is especially true if your life situation has stolen all the breath out of you. The Israelites living in exile in Babylon felt breathless. The wind had been knocked out of them. Could God make them breathe again?

The Valley

Ezekiel 37:1-3

God had promised Israel a new heart (last week's lesson). Now the Israelites would need a new Spirit. The vision of the valley of dry bones that Ezekiel was given pictured this new life and restoration of Israel to their homeland. The setting of this vision was a *valley* (plain—like the plains in Babylon). The year of the vision was sometime after 586 BC.

That it was a vision from God is not in question. The phrases *the hand of the Lord* and *brought me out by the Spirit* ensure that this was a vision. Ezekiel noticed that this valley was filled with *bones* (the result of a battle?). This would indicate death, decomposition, and lack of burial. God gave Ezekiel a tour of this valley. Ezekiel noticed that the bones were *very dry*. They had been exposed long enough to be bleached and baked by the sun. God engaged the prophet by asking him, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel "pleaded the Fifth." Only Adonai Yahweh knew.

The Bones

Ezekiel 37:4-8

After Ezekiel toured the valley, God called him to *prophesy* to these bones. He was not told to organize the bones, hold a seminar for the bones, or even equip the bones. He was told to give God's inspired message to the bones. He was commanded to speak to these seemingly inanimate objects. (Previously God had asked Ezekiel to speak to the mountains [6:2; 36:1] and forests [20:47].) God would use Ezekiel's preaching to bring *breath* into the bones. The Hebrew word for wind, breath, or Spirit is *ruach* (pronounced "ROO-akh"). It is a word that originally meant something pulsating like a lung.

God promised Ezekiel that if he prophesied to these bones they would *come to life* (a symbol of God restoring life to the beaten-down exiles). *Tendons* and *flesh/skin* would attach themselves to these bones. This would indicate God's restorative hand exercised on Israel. When Ezekiel obeyed this command, he heard a *rattling* (earthquake or rushing). Bones, tendons, and flesh came together to form human beings again.

The Breath

Ezekiel 37:9-10

A body needs breath to exist. Ezekiel's second task was to prophesy to the breath so it would enter these bodies. The war that had taken place in the valley sucked the breath out of the soldiers. So, God's breath was brought from the *four winds* (a symbol referring to his complete process of bringing life to these dead bodies—as in the expression "the four corners of the earth"). Once the bodies had breath, they *stood up on their feet*.

The People

Ezekiel 37:11-14

This vision of the valley of dry bones referred to the *people* (house or family) of Israel. Captivity had taken the life out of them. They felt dried up, as if their hope were gone. They felt *cut off* (an expression in the Old Testament that meant rejected or excommunicated).

But Ezekiel gave the people hope by using a second metaphor. Not only did God have the power to resurrect bodies, he could also open *graves*. So, the metaphor of a cemetery is enjoined. While this could refer to some kind of "end-time" resurrection of the nation of Israel, it more likely was used metaphorically for God bringing Israel back to their homeland. If they get home, they would know that God did it. Death Valley and cemeteries are no problem for the God of creation.

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CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

BY DAVID FAUST

Have you ever been in a situation where everything looked hopeless and you felt overwhelmed?

During a mission trip to Romania last spring, I visited Ukrainian refugees who had fled from their war-torn country. As a group of refugees gathered to meet our American team, our translator Sergei told me, "75 percent of the people at this camp are not believers in God. Please tell them the gospel."

I gazed at my weary listeners—mothers with young children, a scared-looking teenage boy, and some tired-looking old men and women with despair on their faces. How could I possibly help them? My normal sermon preparation steps didn't apply in that moment. Using John 3:16 as my text, I told them about God's love and assured them that Christians throughout the world were praying for them.

Later that week, our mission team visited a transition center where we met a group of parentless teens who had recently come off the street. Eventually they would be placed in an orphanage or a foster home, but for now these Romanian teenagers sat on a bench staring at me. One girl sat alone with her head down. Before entering the room, we were instructed, "Don't hug them. They have lice." We brought candy bars to share, but a few bites of chocolate wouldn't solve the grim problems these young people faced.

The translator asked me to speak. Again, I didn't have a well-prepared message to deliver, but I prayed for God's help and told them, "This is my first time to visit your country. Driving across Romania, I noticed a large field filled with sheep." I shared Jesus' story about a shepherd who had 100 sheep, and when one was lost, the shepherd searched and found it, then joyfully carried it home on his shoulders. "Think of the heavenly Father as your good shepherd," I encouraged the teens. We prayed for them and handed out candy before we left. I gave the girl who sat alone two candy bars. She managed a smile of thanks and then walked over and hugged my wife.

Dry Bones

God confronted Ezekiel with a desperate-looking situation—a ghastly Death Valley filled with skeletal remains. Bones filled the valley, and they were dry bones, indicating the bodies had been dead a long time.

When the Lord asked, "Can these bones live?" the prophet gave an honest answer: "Sovereign Lord, you alone know" (Ezekiel 37:3). Some situations are so desperate and complicated, only God himself can resolve them. The people of Israel said, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone," but God promised, "I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them" (vv. 11-12). What looks impossible to us is possible for the Creator of life.

Could spiritually dead Israel ever be restored? God said, "Prophesy to these bones" (v. 4), and after Ezekiel preached, God transformed the bones into a living army filled with his Spirit.

My Bones

What did our little group of American visitors accomplish in Romania? Our short visit couldn't fix all the problems. When we left, those Ukrainian refugees and lonely teens still faced an uncertain future. Did we plant any seeds of hope in their hearts? Only God knows.

But this I know: Over time, God can bring new life to desperate souls. A young man who picked us up at the airport in Romania was abandoned in a train station when he was 4 years old, but thanks to caring Christians, he grew up in a big family and now he's a capable 23-year-old studying at a local university. We met a young woman who was sex trafficked at age 7. Only the Lord knows the full extent of her trauma. But her adoptive family gave her a chance, and now she is a confident looking 19-year-old with hope for the future.

By God's grace, even in desperate situations, people can be reborn and life can be restored. Someday I will trade my own dry bones for a new resurrection body. I don't know exactly how this will happen, but God knows! That's why there is still hope for Ukraine and Romania—and anywhere else in the world where human hearts receive the life-giving breath of God.

Personal Challenge:

Where do you see death and despair in the world? Pray that God will restore life and hope in the ways that only he can do.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. With whom over the last week did you share the good news that God "will save you from all your uncleanness"?

2. When have you faced what appeared to be a hopeless circumstance? What happened?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 37:1-14** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to retell the passage as creatively and picturesquely as possible (in three minutes or less).

3. What methods did God use to teach Ezekiel about God's restorative power?

4. Looking at the entire passage (including vv. 11-14), what does the valley of dry bones and their reanimation represent . . . for Israel? For God's church today?

5. What did Ezekiel learn about God?
   - What do you learn about God from this passage?
   - What does this passage teach you about yourself?

6. What significance is there to God breaking the reanimation process into two stages (restoration of flesh and breath)?

7. Look again at God's question and Ezekiel's response in verse 3. In his "Application" for this study, David Faust said, "Some situations are so desperate and complicated, only God himself can resolve them." What does this teach you about ministering to others?

8. God gave Ezekiel a seemingly ridiculous, impossible task, yet Ezekiel obeyed. What does this teach you about obeying God?

9. How will you team with God this week to "preach" to "dry bones" (those who are spiritually dead) with the aim of seeing God bring new life to them?

10. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 43:1-12**. 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: **Pray for God's glory to be seen in Christ's church.**

STUDY: Ezekiel, Part 2

THEME: Hope for Sinners

LESSON TEXT: Ezekiel 43:1-12

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Luke 2:8-20, 25-33; John 1:14; 17:1-5; Revelation 15:5-8

GOD'S GLORY RETURNS

BY MARK SCOTT

"Temple" is a big deal in the Bible. Some scholars believe in the temple inauguration theory of creation (described by John H. Walton in *The Lost World of Genesis One*). That is, Genesis 1 might not be so much about the creation of the physical world but rather God taking up residence in his creation (temple).

When the patriarchs died, they left behind rock altars where they set off sacred space (temples). The tabernacle was a portable temple wherein God's glory dwelt (Exodus 40). The temple of Solomon was so glorious that when it was dedicated, the priests could not perform their duties because God's glory so filled the temple (1 Kings 8:11). The second temple lacked the glory of the first, but it was still nothing short of amazing (Ezra 3:12).

The temple was always more than a building. It was the reality of the presence of God. That is why when Jesus came and the church began, it could be referred to theologically as the "third temple." When the new heaven and new earth is revealed, there will be no need for a physical temple, because the Lord is the temple (Revelation 21:22).

In the lesson for August 28, God's glory departed from the people (left the temple) due to their sin. Now God's enemies (those who enticed Israel to sin) are defeated (Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38–39). Therefore, the temple can be cleansed and restored (chapters 41–42). God's glory can return to the temple, and the people can enjoy the new Promised Land (chapters 43–48).

Glorious Temple

Ezekiel 43:1-5

The man probably is this strange figure we know as the "angel of the Lord." He appeared first in this ongoing temple vision in Ezekiel 40:3. Now he spiritually transports (cf. 3:14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 37:1) Ezekiel to the gate facing east of the rebuilt temple. Ezekiel saw the *glory of the God of Israel* coming toward the gate.

Linguistically *glory* means the shining brilliance and weighty presence of God. Theologically *glory* can refer to the return of the exiles from captivity (this passage) to Jesus' incarnation (John 1:14), to the church (Colossians 1:27), and to the return of Christ to earth (Revelation 21:23). The voice of the glorious One is described as *rushing waters* (a symbol of power, Revelation 1:15). The whole land lights up when God's glory invades. Ezekiel likened what he saw this time with what he had seen originally (chapters 10–11). God's glory filled the temple.

Eternal Temple

Ezekiel 43:6-9

In this paragraph, God promised twice to live among his people *forever*. In the Bible, *forever* can mean time unending or it can mean a long time. Depending on one's interpretation of what is being described here (the return from exile, the coming of Christ and the church, or the second coming) will determine the meaning of *forever* in this passage. We know one thing for sure: God is speaking in this vision (not the angel standing next to Ezekiel). God claimed his territory. His *throne* is there. His *feet* are there.

Since God is in the temple, nothing unclean can be there. There can be no *defiling* (polluting) of God's holy name. The kings of Israel, who so often led the people into idolatry, can no longer prostitute the land with idols. They cannot place an idol in the holy place like some kings did (2 Kings 21:1-6). They could no longer give themselves to *detestable practices*. These things cause God to *destroy* the people in [his] anger.

Holy Temple

Ezekiel 43:10-12

God's perfection, evident in the temple, causes the people to see their unholiness. His mere presence in the temple compelled the people to be *ashamed* of their sins. His "otherliness" caused the people to sense their sinfulness. Everything about the temple portrayed holiness—from the *design*, to its *arrangement*, its *exits*, and *entrances*.

Part of what made the temple portray the holiness and glory of God were the *regulations* and *laws*. In other words, the law of the temple embodied the character, judgment, and love of God. These qualities live in perfect harmony in his presence. Just as Moses designed the tabernacle "according to the pattern shown to him on the mountain," so the renewed temple will bear witness to God's holiness. "Second temple" Judaism would give way to the "third temple" Christianity.

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FINALLY!

BY DAVID FAUST

I settled into my seat on the plane, thinking, *Finally, we're headed home.* Returning from a mission trip to Romania, Candy and I spent an uncomfortable night sleeping on a bench at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago. After 30 straight hours in cars, planes, and airports, we were disappointed when heavy storms canceled the last leg of our flight home.

The long night in the airport, however, gave us the opportunity to meet other passengers stranded along with us. Larissa, a university student from Germany and first-time visitor to the United States said, "My biggest fear about coming to America is tornadoes, and the first thing that happens is a bad storm!" She and my wife became fast friends. Greg, another stranded traveler, bought me a breakfast sandwich in the morning. He was returning to the U.S. after training ministers in Uganda. A French-speaking woman from Africa, two couples returning from vacation in Ireland, and a fellow worried about his diabetes—for one long night at O'Hare, this little band of travelers was united by a common dilemma. We all wanted to go home.

Detours and Delays

Before leaving on the mission trip, Candy and I wrote a list of goals: "Trust God. Love well. Encourage others. Be flexible and available. Be positive. Listen well to others' stories." We should have added another goal: "Watch for what God teaches in unexpected ways."

In Romania we met dozens of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. One woman gave us a handmade cloth angel—yellow and blue like Ukraine's flag. Others told harrowing stories about children whose frostbitten fingers had to be amputated after fleeing in the freezing cold, and about drivers who hadn't been behind the wheel of a car in 25 years hauling their children to safety on unfamiliar roads.

One mom showed us a photo of an unexploded Russian missile that landed three feet from her house near Kyiv. We met a 25-year-old mother who is fighting breast cancer; she couldn't get her scheduled surgery in Ukraine because the hospital was now for military use only. (Romanian Christians arranged for her to have the surgery free of charge in their country.)

The Ukrainians' sad faces put our minor frustrations into perspective. Temporary detours and flight delays are nothing compared to what these displaced people are enduring as they deal with situations out of their control, not knowing if or when they will ever go home.

When the Glory Comes Back

For a prolonged season the Jews lived in exile and God's glory left the temple. But eventually God would be with them again, the land would be "radiant with his glory" (Ezekiel 43:2), and the Lord would say, "This is where I will live among the Israelites forever" (v. 7). Ezekiel's words echo another biblical prediction that stirs our hope for heaven: "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them" (Revelation 21:3).

Our world is marred by sin and scarred by war, but when we arrive at our destination, we'll finally be at home with the Lord. Finally, our frustrations will end. Finally, our exile will be over. God's glory will be obvious, his people will be at peace, and finally . . . finally! . . . we will be at home.

Personal Challenge:

What have you learned from the detours and delays you have encountered in life? How have you seen God's glory displayed in unexpected or painful situations?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you team with God last week to "preach" to "dry bones" (those who are spiritually dead) with the aim to see God bring his life to them?

2. If you had your choice, which would you rather design: a building, a car, a website, a dress or suit, or something else?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 43:1-12** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly retell the passage in your own words.

3. What did Ezekiel see and hear?
   - What did God call Ezekiel and the people to do?

4. Imagine you are Ezekiel as you witness all this. He had earlier seen God's glory leave the temple (10:18; 11:23). What emotions would you be feeling as the events of this passage take place?

5. What does this passage teach you about the nature of God?
   - What do you learn about humanity from this passage?

6. We live under the New Covenant, in which our bodies are now God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). How would you apply Ezekiel's prophetic vision today?
   - How do we defile what is holy by bringing what is detestable and worldly into our temples?
   - What function does feeling shame for our sins play in helping us to repent, confess, and then grow in intimacy with, faithfulness to, and obedience to God?

7. God promised that when we put away what is unholy from his temple, he will live among us forever. How can we encourage one another to live holy lives?

8. 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.