

Sept 3-9

## **Week 36**

We are still in Act 2, scene 8, which deals with the exile of Judah in Babylon. Ezekiel the prophet is in Babylon, and two great themes dominate the remainder of the book:

1. God would judge the evil nations that had acted against Israel.
2. God would restore his people.

As you read this week, you will see a rich blend of communication devices used by the prophet. There are illustrations, drama, lament, visions, and direct messages. Here we have wonderfully graphic images like the valley of dry bones in chapter 37. Enjoy these word pictures as you would enjoy a good painting. Notice nuances. Look for threads, recurring themes. Hear Ezekiel's words as a profound, timeless message about the greatness of God and his vision of restoration for his people.

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**Day 1****Read Ezekiel 17-20****Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 17**

Chapter 17 begins with a parable about covenant breaking, God's judgment, and God's plan for restoring his people. In chapter 18 we find a theological shift from what had been previously taught among God's people. No longer would a child die for the sins of the father. Now each person would be responsible for his own sins. Notice the details of what God considers sinful and the details of God's response. For instance, Ezekiel 18:32 tells us God, though he judges, does not take pleasure in anyone's death.

Chapter 19, in two extended word pictures, laments the judgment brought against Jerusalem and Israel. Finally, chapter 20 offers an extensive explanation of why judgment had come. How are we to read these prophecies, with their extensive words of judgment and doom?

*Read for the details. Learn more about God. Notice his compassion and plans for restoration. Look for insights into human sinfulness. Examine your own life and attitudes toward God.*

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**Day 2**

**Read Ezekiel 21-24**

**Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 18**

Notice today the varied images used to communicate that judgment was falling on Jerusalem. God's judgment was like a sharpened, polished, slashing sword (see Ezekiel 21). His judgment was like a fire that melts metal, burning away impurities (see chapter 22). Jerusalem had been immoral like her sister Samaria (see chapter 23), so judgment was coming like a boiling pot (see chapter 24). Then Ezekiel himself, on the death of his much-loved wife, became a picture of those who groan in their mourning but are not allowed to mourn normally or openly; rather, they waste away in their grief (see 24:15-27).

God's judgment looms large in the biblical story. Christ has borne our punishment so that we can escape sin's deadly consequences. Yet judgment will come on the world at the end.

*Others need the gospel we have to share. Are you open in sharing the gospel?*

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**Day 3****Read Ezekiel 25-28****Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 19**

Ezekiel 25–32 presents words of judgment against the nations surrounding Judah. Chapter 25 focuses on historic enemies of Judah. These nations had become allies in a stand against Babylon, but they had abandoned Judah at the time of Babylon’s siege of Jerusalem.

The remainder of today’s reading focuses on Tyre, a small coastal island city northwest of Judah. Ezekiel 26–28 present three oracles of woe against Tyre, the first against the city of Tyre, the second lamenting Tyre’s destruction, and the third focusing on Tyre’s arrogant king.

As you can see from chapter 27, Tyre was a thriving business and trade center for that part of the world (think of New York or San Francisco), and God’s judgment fell in part because of Tyre’s arrogance over its accumulated wealth. In a parallel fashion Revelation 18 borrows heavily from Ezekiel 27 in describing the coming downfall of “Babylon” (the end-time system of evil).

*Do we have a false sense of security and arrogance over our wealth?*

*All nations are answerable to God. How do you understand God’s rightful sovereignty over the nations today?*

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**Day 4****Read Ezekiel 29-32****Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 20**

The extensive seventh oracle in this series of prophecies against the nations focuses on Egypt. Egypt had played major roles in the Bible's story. It was the powerful nation from which God delivered his people. Egypt had also been a major source of temptation for the Israelites, in terms of both idolatry and politics. Too often the Israelites had chosen to trust Egypt's power rather than the Lord's (see Ezekiel 29:6-7).

The prophecies of chapters 29–32 took place over a period of several years, beginning in 587 BC, at which point the siege against Jerusalem had been going on for about a year. As you read, notice the rich imagery used to describe Egypt and its fall. For instance, the king of Egypt, who arrogantly said he made and owned the Nile River, would be dragged out of that river like a big crocodile and killed.

*Notice that this passage calls God the Lord God, emphasizing his ultimate control over the nations. Worship the sovereign Lord today.*

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**Day 5****Read Ezekiel 33-36****Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 21**

Notice the rich imagery used in the readings today. Chapter 33 focuses on Ezekiel as Israel's watchman and the continued rebellion of the people. Chapter 34 calls the leaders of Israel self-centered shepherds. Jesus borrowed the imagery here to speak of the judgment (read Matthew 25:32-33 in light of Ezekiel 34:17). Jesus also fulfilled the vision of God as the good shepherd, who would care for his people (see John 10:7-18).

After a prophecy of judgment against Edom's Mount Seir, the central mountain of the nation that celebrated Israel's downfall (see Ezekiel 35), God spoke of the future restoration of Israel's mountains (see chapter 36). For the sake of his holy name, the Lord would restore his people and cleanse them, giving them a new heart and spirit. God would put his Spirit in them and turn their hearts to his ways. This was ultimately fulfilled in the giving of the Holy Spirit, who cleanses us from sin, transforms our hearts, and teaches us God's ways.

*Has God's Spirit restored your life from the devastation of sin? If so, rejoice. If not, cry out to God for salvation.*

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**Day 6****Read Ezekiel 37-40****Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 22**

The theme of restoration continues today: the restoration of God's people (see Ezekiel 37), the restoration of God's rule over his people (see chapters 38–39), and the restoration of the temple (see chapter 40). Notice the wonderful, unique vision of the dry bones in chapter 37. God brings life from death. Then Ezekiel carved words on two sticks, held the sticks together, and presented them as a picture of God's people being brought back together (remember that the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel had been split since 922 BC—about 3½ centuries). When Ezekiel spoke of a new king and a new covenant, the words anticipated the coming of Jesus.

Gog and Magog, in chapters 38–39, represented the nations of the world who opposed God. Gog and Magog are echoed in Revelation 20:7-9, in the climactic battle at the end of the age when Satan will suffer his final defeat. So Gog and Magog were an international coalition of nations from all over the world. Yet they were no match for God, who would defend his people.

Finally, chapter 40 deals with the rebuilding of the temple. Don't get lost in the exact measurements, which point to the care God was taking in the building and the grandeur of the new temple. This will lead to a focus on God's renewed presence among his people in our next reading.

*Celebrate today that God brings renewal from hardship and devastation.*

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**Day 7**

**Reading Summary for Week 36**

As we've continued in Ezekiel, we've observed three main topics. Through chapter 24, we've read prophecies against the rebellious people of Judah. In chapters 25–32, we've seen prophecies against other nations. Then beginning in chapter 33, the focus shifted to future blessing for God's people. Two chapters are especially famous. Chapter 18 emphasized personal responsibility ("The person who sins is the one who will die," Ezekiel 18:4). And chapter 37 described the valley of dry bones that lived again.

**Prayer/Meditation**

Lord, help me never to dodge the responsibility I have for my own moral actions. Thank you for Ezekiel 18, showing that each individual stands personally accountable before you. I cannot blame my parents or my background for my sins. Thank you that when any sinner truly repents, you graciously grant forgiveness and life. May I always walk humbly before you, and never let me arrogantly suppose that I can drift along in my relationship with you. Amen.

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