

*Ezekiel:*

In the Grasp of God

*Janice Gibson*



*To Suzanne*

*for showing me that I could fly*

# Ezekiel:

## In the Grasp of God

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# Prologue

**Untouchable.** The city of Jerusalem was renowned. Capital of the tiny kingdom of Judah, in the land of Israel, Jerusalem had consistently maintained its sovereignty in the face of overwhelming military threats. Her reputation was famous in the ancient world, for being unconquerable.

It wasn't that Jerusalem's walls were thicker than any other city, or her natural geography more imposing—it was because the LORD had placed His temple there. For this reason, the kingdom of Judah had held on to Jerusalem's majesty for 400 years. She had watched other kingdoms rise and fall, felt the pull of one powerful nation after another, and calmly stood her holy ground. Even the fierce world superpower, Assyria, had been no match for her. Jerusalem laughed in the face of any threat. (2 Samuel 5:6-7, Isaiah 37:22) No wonder—God Himself defended her from His temple. Jerusalem was untouchable.

**Unthinkable.** Confidence in the city's security was not exclusive to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The nations around her were also convinced that she was not to be messed with. Word had spread throughout the ancient world that she belonged to the God of heaven, and He would suffer no nation to humble her (Lamentations 4:12). No attack on Jerusalem could succeed; it was unthinkable. The city could not ever fall into the hands of enemies. Could it?

**Unspeakable.** God had been warning His people about what would happen if they forsook Him. Their city would fall to its enemies. The people refused to listen. Even as captives in a foreign land, even after two invasions, they maintained their confidence in Jerusalem's defensive capabilities. They were in denial—defeat was unspeakable. But the LORD had spoken it, and He would bring it to pass.

## **1.0 Bound by Time** (Listening Guide)

### **Ezekiel 1: 1-3      Our Resources**

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the LORD \_\_\_\_\_ to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 1:3a, Luke 24:27

This is the \_\_\_\_\_ resource.

2. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the LORD \_\_\_\_\_ Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 1:3b, John 10:27-30

This is a \_\_\_\_\_ resource.



3.The \_\_\_\_\_ of the LORD\_\_\_\_\_ Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 2:2, John 3:8

This is a \_\_\_\_\_ resource.

4.The \_\_\_\_\_ of the LORD\_\_\_\_\_ to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 1:28, John 1:14

This is a \_\_\_\_\_ resource.

Bound by time, \_\_\_\_\_ .

Colossians 3:3-4, Romans 8:18

## 1.1 The Thirtieth Year

**And it was in the \_\_\_\_\_ year in the fifth day of the fourth month, and I was within the captivity by the River \_\_\_\_\_, and the Heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God...**

**Ezekiel 1:1 (ABPE)<sup>1</sup>**

There is no 'once upon a time' for Ezekiel. This is not going to be a fairytale. He knew where he was—in enemy territory. He knew how long he had been there. He may have seen visions of God, but he had not lost his grip on reality. It was the thirtieth year, and he was beside the River Chebar.

**“And it was in the thirtieth year...”** Ezekiel does not start a brand-new story. He was continuing the story of God’s relationship with His people. He was writing the next chapter, after a thirty-year gap. He also records that it was the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s captivity (Ezekiel 1:2). By counting backwards through King Jehoiachin’s reign and the kings who reigned before him, we discover that Ezekiel dates his story from the momentous event that happened thirty years earlier, in the eighteenth year of King Josiah’s reign. That had been an epic year.<sup>2 3</sup>

~Find out what happened thirty years before Ezekiel’s prophecy in 2 Kings 22.

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<sup>1</sup> Perplexed by the unexplained reference to thirty years, many translators have supplied “my” thirtieth year. A few translations, such as ABPE, have maintained the integrity of the Hebrew text.

<sup>2</sup> E.W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1922), 1105-1106.

<sup>3</sup> Circa 513 BCE.

In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, a new era had dawned in Jerusalem. From the Fountain Gate to the Temple Mount, a massive clean-up project was underway. King Josiah had commanded the renovation of the temple in Jerusalem.

The far reaches of Judah and even beyond, had been purged by King Josiah. False gods were being toppled. Cult centers were being demolished. Money was flowing in to repair the dilapidated temple of the LORD. Broken beams and crumbled stones were replaced by smooth floors and solid walls. Jerusalem had begun to look like the holy city she had once been.

Secretary to the king, Shaphan, was actively involved with the restoration work. Leaving the palace, he mounted the steps to the temple in search of Hilkiah the priest. He had come to discuss funding for the construction projects on behalf of the king. But returning to the palace, he had a different priority.

Shaphan had news for the king. Making his way back down the flight of steps to the palace, his heart must have thumped in his chest. Picture this secretary to the king bowing low as he reentered the throne room, waiting respectfully until asked to step forward. He would give his progress report of the temple cleansing and then possibly clear his throat before he spoke again. "Ah sire, there is one other matter," he might bow, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a Book."

**They found the Book.** The only thing more startling is that somehow, they had lost the Book. The Book of the Law of Moses was the solution to their every problem. There should have been multiple copies of this Book lying around the palace and the temple by now. King Josiah should have had his own copy of the Book in his own handwriting (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Hilkiah, the priest, should have had a copy and been teaching from it. Shaphan, the king's secretary should have been making more copies. But they had lost the Book, and they didn't even know they had.

~Does it seem impossible to you that we also could lose the Book—the Bible?

**They read the Book.** Shaphan no sooner had his hands on that Book of the Law, than he read it. It is generally believed that they found a copy of Deuteronomy. Did Shaphan read it in just one sitting? Scripture does not say he began to read it, or he read part of it, he just read it (2 Kings 22:8). He knew it was important.

Shaphan told King Josiah. He reads from the Book again, this time out loud to the king. Shaphan's life would never be the same. You will meet this man, his children, and his grandchildren through the pages of Scripture. The legacy of this momentous day will be evident in their family for generations.<sup>4</sup>

~What does your commitment to read the Book, the whole Bible, look like?

~Would you say reading the Bible has shaped your life?

**They inquired of the LORD about the Book.** Hilkiah found the Book and Shaphan read the Book. King Josiah had questions about the Book. He wanted to know how this message would affect him personally. He ordered a delegation to the outskirts of Jerusalem.

Five men left the temple and palace precincts. They made their way through the streets of old Jerusalem. Down an alley way, through a gate, perhaps they heard a baby cry as they passed the home of little Ezekiel. At last, they arrived at the door of Huldah the Prophetess.

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Brand, "Josiah and Shaphan", *Parkview Street Gospel Hall Winter Ministry*, February 2, 2019, 23:26, <http://www.gospelhallwinnipeg.com/Listen%20to%20Download%20Ministry/winter%20Saturday%20ministry%20meetings/2018-2019/Stephen%20Brand%202019-02-02%20Josiah%20and%20Shaphan.mp3>.

The five men sent from King Josiah arrived on Huldah's doorstep with an attitude of humility. The situation was too critical to consider rank and status. They needed to know about the Book. What did it mean for them personally? For King Josiah? What did it mean for Jerusalem?

**Thus says the LORD, Behold I will bring \_\_\_\_\_ on this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the \_\_\_\_\_ that the king of Judah has read.**

**2 Kings 22:16 (ESV)**

The message was clear. They had read the Book correctly. God had promised judgment if they forsook Him, and judgment was coming to the city of Jerusalem. Time was running out. The very city they were standing in would soon be destroyed. Huldah continued:

**But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was penitent, and you \_\_\_\_\_ yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you declares the LORD. Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in \_\_\_\_\_, and your eyes shall not see all the \_\_\_\_\_ that I will bring upon this place.**

**2 Kings 22:18-20 (ESV)**

Huldah had a two-part message for King Josiah. There would be judgment on the city of Jerusalem, that was part one. Part two: King Josiah would not experience the judgment because of his repentant heart towards God.

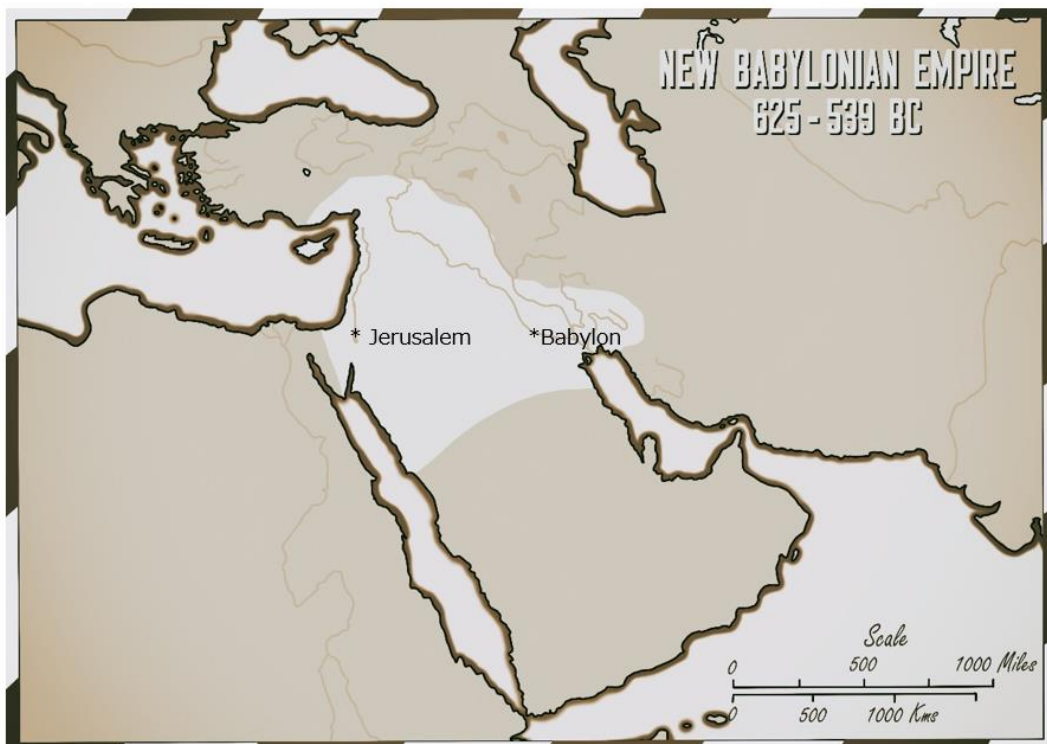
Ezekiel dated his prophecy from the rediscovery of the Book of the Law. The people of Jerusalem had received a warning of judgment and an offer of mercy.

~God also has a two-part message for us today. Judgment is coming upon this world, but there is an opportunity to escape the judgment through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Here is the two-part message for you and me:

**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

Shutterstock credit: Keith Tarrier



## 1.2 Among the Exiles

**In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the \_\_\_\_\_, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar canal, and the hand of the LORD was upon him there.**

**Ezekiel 1:1-3 (ESV)**

Thirty years brought dramatic changes for the tiny kingdom of Judah. Huldah had prophesied correctly. King Josiah had died in peace, and on his throne had sat his grandson, King Jehoiachin. Babylonians had invaded the capital city Jerusalem and plundered the temple of the Living God—twice. Thousands of people were forced to leave Jerusalem and travel many miles from home.

Daniel was carried off to Babylon, and later, Ezekiel and King Jehoiachin were taken too. The kingdom of Judah had a replacement king, Zedekiah, but everyone in Jerusalem knew his crown was only for show; it was Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who was really in charge.

Marched out of the royal city by his captors, Ezekiel's last glimpse of Jerusalem was one of defeat. The temple stood desecrated. All of the costly temple renovations were destroyed in a day. Nebuchadnezzar took furniture from God's own house as plunder, in addition to the prisoners.

Families were separated. The Babylonians had not bothered to take the weak citizens (2 Kings 24:14). They could be left behind without fear of a revolt. The

intelligent, the strong, those with potential, would add to the cultural dominance of Babylon and so they were ripped from their loved ones and their homes and forced to march to a foreign land.

The journey began. Mile after mile, the captives trudged, leaving behind all that was tender and beloved. Every step took them farther from their vulnerable relatives, farther from the Temple of God. Ezekiel, Daniel, and King Jehoiachin had to turn their backs on the legacy of a nation that had been chosen above all other nations to serve the LORD. Now these exiles were nothing but slaves to a pagan king. They must obey the whims of Nebuchadnezzar. They were obliged to embrace the customs of the Babylonians, so contrary to the righteous laws of God.

Babylon, with its shimmering gates, towering ziggurats, many idols, and majestic gardens, was to be their new home. The captives of Judah would have to start a new life, somehow clinging to a God, who appeared to have forsaken them.

It did not need to be this way. God could have fixed everything. An all-powerful God could have easily turned around the proud Babylonian army. He had done it magnificently, so many times before; the Egyptians at the Red Sea, the Assyrians right outside the city walls, the Philistines, the Midianites. There was hardly a nation that God had not displayed his power over. Why not now?

~Do you remember a time when you felt God had let you down?

~How do you handle disappointment with God or with His plans?



The exiles in Babylon needed encouragement there by the Chebar canal bank—a word from God.<sup>5</sup> There was so much confusion. Huldah's declaration of disaster thirty years earlier had come true—but now what? What should they do?

Back home in Jerusalem's temple court, stood a brave man crying out a warning. Another prophet, Jeremiah, had been persecuted by his fellow citizens just as Jerusalem had been violently attacked by Babylon. Yet unlike the city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah had withstood the attacks of his people, as though he himself were an impenetrable fortress.

God knew His people needed direction. They would have been feeling confused and forsaken in far off Babylon. Through the pen of Jeremiah, God sent word to the stunned captives that have found themselves without a temple or a homeland.

~Go ahead and read the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent to the exiles in Babylon: Jeremiah 29:1-14.

**These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from \_\_\_\_\_ to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the \_\_\_\_\_ , the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to \_\_\_\_\_.**  
**Jeremiah 29:1 (ESV)**

This letter from Jeremiah had a dramatic impact on many people who read it. Did Ezekiel read the letter? We are not told, but it was certainly written to him. Jeremiah wrote to the captive priests in Babylon along with others.

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>5</sup> Some translations spell the name for this river 'Chebar' and some 'Kebar', both are forms of the same Hebrew word.

This letter from the prophet Jeremiah was not his typical style during a crisis. Jeremiah was known for his dramatic poetic expressions. But this letter—it was shockingly simple. It was astonishingly uneventful. No mournful lamentations expressing the bitter emotions of deportation. No imminent victory predicted over the ruthless superpower of Babylon. No revolution urged for the frustrated captives. This was just down to earth, everyday, personal instruction.

God wanted the exiles to get on with the business of life where they were; settle in and put down roots. There would be no instant gratification of the miraculous rescue that they longed for. Here was solid, wise advice from the One who knew the end from the beginning.

~What was God asking them to do in this letter? (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

\_\_\_\_\_ houses, \_\_\_\_\_ in them

\_\_\_\_\_ gardens, \_\_\_\_\_ from them

\_\_\_\_\_ wives, \_\_\_\_\_ children, and grandchildren

\_\_\_\_\_ the city you are in.

God is the Originator of drama. He orchestrates elaborate rescue plans. His timing is beyond military precision. His flair for the impossible parades through the pages of Scripture. But He works according to His own agenda, not ours. All He requires from His children is patience, faith, and obedience.

~What is the next step God is asking from you? Does it seem too mundane?

~God sometimes works in an unexpected or controversial manner. Have you noticed this from Scripture or in your own life?

**For thus says the LORD: When \_\_\_\_\_ years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.**

**Jeremiah 29:10 (ESV)**

That was the plan—seventy years. Seventy years is a lifetime. Most captives old enough to understand the letter would not live long enough to see the promise fulfilled. They would all be dead. By then, Ezekiel would likely not be strong enough to make the journey back to Jerusalem. Even if he had the strength to make the journey home, he would then be too old to fulfill his role as priest in Jerusalem. The prime of his life was to be spent in enemy territory.

Ezekiel's prophecy recounts the story of an extraordinary plan. God stepped in and worked contrary to his expectations. Ezekiel begins by resisting, and even resenting God's agenda. But Ezekiel comes to see the beauty of this new plan, and the wisdom of the One whose ways and thoughts are always higher.

**For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.**

**Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)**

## 1.3 The Fifth Day

**In the \_\_\_\_\_ year, in the \_\_\_\_\_ month, on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. On the \_\_\_\_\_ day of the month (it was the \_\_\_\_\_ year of the exile of King Jehoiachin)...**

**Ezekiel 1:1-2 (ESV)**

It was hard to believe how quickly life could change. Only thirty years earlier a great revival had been underway in Jerusalem, during the reign of King Josiah. They had found the Book! Only twenty-five years later, many of the citizens of Jerusalem had been deported to Babylon. For five long years, King Jehoiachin had languished in a Babylonian prison. For five long years, Ezekiel had attempted to make a home along the banks of the Chebar.

God's plan was for his people to return home after seventy years of exile, according to Jeremiah's prophecy. There were still sixty-five years left to wait in Babylon before they would be able to travel back to Jerusalem.

Had Jeremiah been right? Had the prophetess Huldah been right? Huldah had declared disaster for the city, but Jerusalem was still standing. Although most of its citizens had been displaced and resettled in Babylon, the city of Jerusalem had not been destroyed—at least not as Ezekiel began to write his book.

More importantly, within Jerusalem's city walls, the temple of the LORD was still intact. Plundered yes, but the temple was not flattened. Surely God would preserve His own temple no matter how disobedient the people had been. Disaster could never befall the house of the LORD, could it?

While Ezekiel endured the prophesied years of captivity, he kept meticulous track of time. He recorded the date during his years of service more than any other prophet. He recorded the date almost more than any other book of the Bible. Ezekiel tried to keep the record straight.<sup>6</sup> In his introduction alone, he mentions five date references.

~It was the \_\_\_\_\_ year (since the Book of the Law was found).

~It was the \_\_\_\_\_ month.

~It was the \_\_\_\_\_ day of the month.

~It was the \_\_\_\_\_ day of the month.

~It was the \_\_\_\_\_ year of King Jehoiachin's exile.

Most of Ezekiel's date references are helpful. We get a sense that the clock keeps ticking (or the shadow of the sundial keeps shifting). It helps us to stay alert to the changes happening in Babylon and in Jerusalem. Strangely however, in the opening two verses, Ezekiel records that it was the fifth day twice. Was he confused? Disoriented? Didn't he realize that he had already mentioned that it was the fifth day?

Ezekiel was about to describe the magnificent vision of Glory which he saw while in Babylon. He wanted us to know that this was not a product of his imagination. He remembered exactly where he was and what day it was when he received the vision. And I think he was intrigued by the fact that this magnificent vision of glory came to him on the fifth day.

Did you get that? The fifth day.

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>6</sup>Chronologically: Ezekiel 1:1; 1:2; 3:16; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 29:1; 26:1; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1; 32:17; 33:21; 40:1; 29:17.

~ Here are some of the reasons why I think Ezekiel's repetitive date reference to the fifth day is worth noticing:

~Place a check mark beside any of the following principles of Biblical Interpretation that you agree with.

1. The Bible is inspired by God's Holy Spirit so the things it says are important even if I do not immediately understand why they are important.
2. The Bible has been around for a long time—longer than me—so I give the author the benefit of any doubt when I wonder if a mistake has been made.
3. I am willing to look at multiple translations to understand what is said, realizing that the original language was probably difficult to precisely translate. The original words in the original language are the most important factors to determine any meaning.
4. The opening verses lay the foundation for any book of the Bible, so they are crucial for understanding the framework of a given book.
5. One of the main ways that the Bible emphasizes an idea is through repetition. The scribes and translators may have used different scripts on varying sizes of parchments with different inks, but they would all have been able to repeat a word or phrase to convey emphasis.
6. Scripture is best understood through other parts of Scripture. The best interpretation of a difficult text is the one that corresponds with other texts. Eventually the Bible explains itself.
7. It is best to try and imagine what the author and his immediate audience would have understood rather than try to interpret a meaning through my own modern context.
8. The Bible is a story of God's love for His human creatures. The best way of understanding this love is through Jesus Christ, God's only, well-beloved Son. If we read the Bible without being reminded of Jesus, we are missing out on the best part.

9. The New Testament offers many examples of how to understand and interpret the Old Testament. Following these New Testament examples of interpretation, we should discover continuity and corroboration between the Old and New Testaments.<sup>7</sup>

~For all these reasons, we should be curious about why Ezekiel needs us to know (twice) that his vision came on the fifth day. We can still carry on with the story, tucking that detail away. Maybe we can figure out why Ezekiel was so impressed that his vision came on the fifth day.

~ Here are a few more reasons to hang on to every detail in Scripture:

**My child, listen to what I say, and \_\_\_\_\_ my commands.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_your ears to wisdom and \_\_\_\_\_  
understanding. \_\_\_\_\_ out for insight and \_\_\_\_\_ for  
understanding. \_\_\_\_\_ for them as you would for silver;  
\_\_\_\_\_ for them like hidden treasures. \_\_\_\_\_ you will  
understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge  
of God. For the LORD grants wisdom! From His mouth come knowledge  
and understanding. He grants a wealth of common sense to the honest.  
He is a \_\_\_\_\_ to those who walk with integrity. He  
\_\_\_\_\_ the path of the just and \_\_\_\_\_ those who are  
faithful to him.**

**Proverbs 2:1-8 (NLT)**

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<sup>7</sup> David Gooding, *The Riches of Divine Wisdom: The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament*, (Coleraine, N. Ireland: The Myrtlefield Trust, 2013), 1-86,

## 1.4 Ezekiel, the Priest

**The word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the \_\_\_\_\_, the son of \_\_\_\_\_ by the Kebar River in the land of the \_\_\_\_\_. There the hand of the LORD was on him.**

**Ezekiel 1:3 (NIV)**

Ezekiel, the priest, had been in exile from Jerusalem for the last five years. Jeremiah the prophet had directed the exiles, through a letter, to settle into life in Babylon. This was particularly difficult for a man of Ezekiel's profession. He could build a house and plant a garden but there was no temple to serve in as a priest.

For many of the exiles moving to Babylon, there would be opportunities to transition into their new lives. The potters from Jerusalem could still make the same style of pottery beside the Chebar River. Herdsman could still tend flocks. Goldsmiths could still practice their craft. But not Ezekiel—he was a priest of the LORD. Without access to the temple of the LORD, there was no way for him to follow his vocation. It was against the law of God to offer sacrifices in any other place but the chosen center of Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:4-7).

Offering his services at one of the Babylonian temples was unthinkable for Ezekiel. He could not switch from the Living God to a false god, like others had done. He would not serve in the Babylonian temples of Marduk or Ishtar.

Ezekiel had not chosen the occupation of priest of the LORD. He had been born to it. His destiny was to be a priest like his father before him. It had not always been an easy job. Now it was impossible.

Not only was Ezekiel's livelihood gone, but he was bound to be the object of mockery from the Babylonians. He tells us that he was "the son of Buzi... in the land



of the Babylonians.” His father’s name, Buzi, comes from a Hebrew word that sounds a lot like the Hebrew word for contempt.<sup>8</sup>

The Babylonians were the conquerors. In their eyes, their gods had won, and the deity of Ezekiel had lost. One of the major themes of God’s message to Ezekiel concerns the scorn, mockery, and contempt that all the other nations had for His people because He had to punish them.

~Take this opportunity to read Psalm 137.

**By the rivers of \_\_\_\_\_ we sat and wept when we remembered Zion... For there our captors asked us for \_\_\_\_\_, our tormentors demanded \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”**

**Psalm 137:1,3 (NIV)**

I doubt the Babylonians were interested in learning about the culture of the Hebrew people they had captured. They were ruthless conquerors. They knew exactly how to insult the exiles from Jerusalem. They were having fun at the expense of the Hebrew people. The writer of Psalm 137 calls them tormentors.

The Babylonians had not just asked for any old song. They had requested a song of triumphant joy. They were effectively asking, “Sing us one of your hymns about how your God always wins.”—and they were asking to hear it from the people that they had defeated.

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>8</sup> Compare (*Buzi*) with (*buzah*)- [biblehub.com/hebrew/941.htm](http://biblehub.com/hebrew/941.htm) and [biblehub.com/hebrew/939.htm](http://biblehub.com/hebrew/939.htm)

Perhaps the exiles could have joined hands and woefully sung a lamentation, there by the Chebar canal. They may have been inclined to sing a song pleading with God to save them, calling down His angel armies for a last-minute rescue. Or they may not have minded singing an imprecatory psalm—pleading with God to judge their enemies. But that was not what the Babylonians asked for. They wanted to hear a song of victory.

**How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? If I  
\_\_\_\_\_ you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.  
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not  
\_\_\_\_\_ you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.  
Psalm 137:4-6 (NIV)**

No author has attached their name to Psalm 137, and no date is given. The writer, however, was determined not to forget Jerusalem. This author used the city of Jerusalem to represent God's place of blessing and rest, believing that God would return and bless His people.

**Remember, LORD, what the \_\_\_\_\_ did on the day  
Jerusalem \_\_\_\_\_. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it  
down to its foundations!"  
Psalm 137:7 (NIV)**

The Edomites had enjoyed the spectacle of disaster. They were cheering on the sidelines as Jerusalem was plundered. These were the Israelites closest cousins (Genesis 25:30). The Edomites did not care about the temple of the LORD or the people

who served Him. They rejoiced when God's earthly dwelling place was toppled. The writer of Psalm 137 begs God to remember their glee in the face of devastation.

**Daughter \_\_\_\_\_, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. \_\_\_\_\_ is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.**

**Psalm 137:8-9 (NIV)**

This is a shocking promise on the part of the song writer: Babylon would be conquered and destroyed one day too. Their unnamed enemies would also be delighted when they destroyed Babylon. Then the Babylonians would know the same sickening feeling of defeat—of not being able to protect their little ones. They would also experience the devastation of being at the mercy of their joyous opponents. They would know the feeling of being held in contempt while they were suffering.

~Have you ever endured someone else's enjoyment of your suffering?

~Have you ever had to stop yourself from enjoying the suffering of others?

**This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

**Romans 3:22-23 (NIV)**

## 1.5 Visions of God

Ezekiel's prophecy is structured around three incredible visions. The first vision appeared to him by the River Chebar. He records a second, harrowing vision when he was taken by the Spirit back to view the temple in Jerusalem. His prophecy ended with a final vision of the magnificent, future God had prepared.

**In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the \_\_\_\_\_, the heavens were opened, and I saw \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Ezekiel 1:1 (ESV)**

**He stretched out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair of my head. The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ he took me to \_\_\_\_\_, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the idol that provokes to jealousy stood.**

**Ezekiel 8:3 (NIV)**

**In \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ he took me to the land of \_\_\_\_\_ and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city.**

**Ezekiel 40:2 (NIV)**

Ezekiel's three visions all centered around revelations of God sitting on His throne. Each time, God revealed Himself in a different setting. Ezekiel discovered that God has not lost to the Babylonians nor abandoned His people—He had planned something better.

Ezekiel saw more of God's royal dwelling while stuck in Babylon than he had ever seen in Jerusalem. No one was allowed unrestricted access to God's throne room—the Most Holy Place. In Jerusalem Ezekiel had only had regular access to the temple courtyard.

Both the inner rooms of the temple, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place required special authorization to enter. Yet here in enemy territory, the very heavens had opened to him. He had a vision of God seated on the throne, exalted in the heavens—all while he was standing on Babylonian soil.

~Do you feel you have to be in a specific place to talk to God?

The first vision Ezekiel saw was of **God's Heavenly Throne Room**. He looked straight into God's exalted dwelling place. He saw more detail than anyone else had ever seen—more than Abraham, Moses or Isaiah. People expected to die if they looked directly at God. Ezekiel was overwhelmed by this first vision. (Ezekiel 1)

The second vision Ezekiel saw was of **God's Earthly Throne Room**—the temple at Jerusalem. It was not as sacred as Ezekiel remembered it being. Such a holy God residing on earth was a tremendously powerful and dangerous force. The people were not allowed to approach God any way they wanted to. That is what the priests like Ezekiel were for. They showed the people how to come near to God in the acceptable way.

Over the years, the people who looked after God's house on earth had gotten careless. They stopped following the precise rules for being so near to God. They forgot about God's holiness and power. They took for granted God's graciousness in coming to live among them. They assumed that His throne room in the Most Holy Place was only there to protect them and disregarded the commands to be holy.

~When you approach God are you more aware of His holiness or His love?

Ezekiel, King Jehoiachin, and the exiles were not forced to leave Jerusalem but not because the Babylonians were stronger than the LORD. The truth is that they were forced to move because God was moving too. His house was not being looked after. He no longer intended to remain at His address in Jerusalem. (Ezekiel 8-11)

The third vision Ezekiel saw was of **God's New Throne Room**. He was taken on a tour of the new house God had planned. It was grander than Ezekiel could have imagined. He had thought nothing could be more beautiful than the temple at Jerusalem—but the new throne room he saw was unbelievable. It more than surpassed any of his expectations. (Ezekiel 40-48)

~Are you aware that God is trying to do something new in your life? Do you have any ideas about what that might look like?

**Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

**Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)**

<https://dia.pitts.emory.edu/woodcuts/1579Bibl/00012677.jpg>

**Author:** Pagnini, Sante, b. 1470, tr.

**Image Title:** Ezekiel's Vision

This image is made available by the generous contribution of Mr. Gene & Mrs. Linda M. Wilken



## 2.0 When Time Met Eternity (Listening Guide)

### **Ezekiel 1:1-28      Our Glory**

The supreme glory of God is a \_\_\_\_\_.

Colossians 1:27, James 2:1

1. The Glory is \_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 1:5, 2 Corinthians 3:7-11

The glory of righteousness \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_ all other glories.

2. The Glory is \_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 1:8, 2 Corinthians 3:12-18, Proverbs 4:18

The glory of righteousness \_\_\_\_\_ us and  
\_\_\_\_\_ our righteousness by God's Spirit.



3.The Glory is \_\_\_\_\_ .

Ezekiel 1:10, 2 Corinthians 4:1-15

The glory of righteousness \_\_\_\_\_ itself  
and \_\_\_\_\_ to others.

4.The Glory is \_\_\_\_\_ .

Ezekiel 1:26, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

The glory of righteousness \_\_\_\_\_ us and  
\_\_\_\_\_ us for difficult circumstances.

When time met eternity \_\_\_\_\_ .

John 17: 9-10

## 2.1 The Likeness of the Glory

~Take a deep breath and immerse yourself in Ezekiel 1.

This is a description of Ezekiel's first vision—God's heavenly throne room. On display is the most shimmering, shining, glinting, gleaming, glowing, flashing, flickering, radiant of all light shows. Blazing fires, flaming torches, sparkling lamps, and smoldering coals, this dazzling spectacle presents the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the LORD.

Ezekiel was careful to explain that this was only an appearance of a likeness of Glory. After all, God is Spirit, and no one can see Him. Symbols and visions help reveal His nature, and one of the primary symbols of God's Glory is shining radiance.

The apostle John saw the same glory that Ezekiel saw, not in symbols, but in the Person of Jesus Christ. He had the privilege of leaning on Jesus, the Glory of God, during supper and walking with Him along the beach. The Holy Spirit inspired John to take the simple approach:

**God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.**

**1 John 1:5b (ESV)**

As the vision unfolded, a whirlwind from the north burst into Ezekiel's view (Ezekiel 1:4). A fiery cloud, or maybe a cloudy fire. It was a great cloud, and a fire swirling together, not fueled by natural sources. It was not the first time God had showed up this way. Long before, when Ezekiel's forefathers had traveled through the wilderness, God had led them and protected them. During the day, this protective presence appeared as a pillar of cloud, at night it became a pillar of fire. As day turned

to evening, or as night gave way to morning, the pillar of fiery cloud would have been quite breathtaking (Exodus 13:21-22).

Out of the vaguely familiar fiery cloud emerged something that was unfamiliar. Four “living ones” appeared to Ezekiel in this vision. Most translations supply “creature”, to try and make sense of what Ezekiel described. But these are not created beings, they were a symbolic vision of something greater than a created being. They are described as “Living Ones” according to the Hebrew text (Ezekiel 1:5).

**All four of them had faces and wings, and the wings of one touched the wings of another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved. Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a \_\_\_\_\_, and on the right side each had the face of a \_\_\_\_\_, and on the left the face of an \_\_\_\_\_; each also had the face of an \_\_\_\_\_. Such were their faces. They each had two wings spreading out upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and each had two other wings covering its body.**

**Ezekiel 1:8b-11 (NIV)**

~What were the wings doing in the verses above? Were they flying?

\_\_\_\_\_ing, \_\_\_\_\_ing, \_\_\_\_\_ing

~We are often quick to associate wings with flying angels, but more often in Scripture, God is described as having His own wings for protection. Can you think of any examples where this is expressed? (Consider Ruth 2:12, Psalm 17:8, Psalm 36:7, Matthew 23:37.)

Four stands out as the number of this Living One(s). There were four of them. Each of the four Living Ones had four wings and four faces. God was revealing His Glory to Ezekiel from all four sides. So too, when Jesus Christ, the Glory of God, came to earth, God chose four writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—to give a fuller picture of His lovely Living One. Each writer viewed Jesus from a different vantage point. They describe the same subject from different points of view.

One writer put it this way: “...Matthew presented Him as the King of Israel; Mark, as the faithful Servant of the LORD; Luke, as the perfect Son of Man; John as the eternal Son of God.”<sup>9</sup>

In Matthew’s first chapter, Jesus is presented as a Man who came from a long line of kings and is the royal heir to a throne. Matthew ends his gospel with Jesus claiming all power and authority in heaven and on earth—the king of kings. To put it symbolically, we could give the gospel of Matthew the royal crest of a **lion**.

Mark introduces Jesus without a list of His ancestors. Servants were not required to give details of their family heritage. They just get to work. In Mark’s gospel, Jesus immediately begins His faithful service as good servants do, with energy and activity. He continues in obedient service to His Father moving promptly to perform miracle after miracle throughout the book. This gospel could be represented by the symbol of a strong, hardworking **ox**.

Luke begins his story with Jesus’ relatives: aunt, uncle, cousin, mother, and father, tracing Jesus’ family tree back to the very first human, Adam. Luke tells a tale of birth, growth and relationship. He ends with Jesus carrying humanity back into heaven. No symbolism is necessary for this gospel, we see so many **human** faces.

John goes back to the beginning, to describe the eternal Son of God. There is no genealogy given and no human connections. Even Jesus’ cousin, John, is described,

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<sup>9</sup> Louis Talbot, *Why Four Gospels?* (1944), 15.

not as a family member, but “a man sent from God” (John 1:6). His gospel is quite different from the other three. Only John records the sacred prayer of Jesus to His Father God (John 17). This gospel seems to soar above the earthly vantage point and sees things from a heavenly perspective. It could be symbolized by an **eagle**.

~ Can you supply the face from Ezekiel’s vision in chapter one that best represents each gospel’s theme (Ezekiel 1:10)?

Matthew- \_\_\_\_\_, a symbol of royalty

Mark- \_\_\_\_\_, a symbol of strength

Luke- \_\_\_\_\_, a symbol of humanity (empathy)

John- \_\_\_\_\_, a symbol of divinity

Did Ezekiel understand all this? Possibly not. That did not stop him from leaving us with a preview of the Glory of Jesus that would be revealed. His vision causes him to fall face down in awe. He does not fully understand all that this magnificent Living One had in store for him. As his relationship grew with God, Ezekiel’s understanding of the Glory of God increased too.

~Do you find it easier to worship God as you understand Him better?

**I am the Living One**

**Revelation 1:18a (NIV)**

## 2.2 One Wheel Upon the Earth

~Refresh your memory with Ezekiel 1:15-21.

Ezekiel stood mesmerized by the Living Ones, that looked like a human. As he watched this magnificent Being, his gaze was arrested by a wheel. Upon closer inspection, the wheel was seen to be four wheels—a wheel within a wheel.

We have no choice but to accept Ezekiel's tendency to change from singular to plural for both the Living One and the Wheel. It makes for awkward English grammar. It is also harder to visualize. Our human minds beg for definite dimensions. But this vision does not easily bend itself into what we can understand.

~ The wheel was described as singular, but other times as plural: the wheels. Does this remind you of an attribute of God?

God interchanges His own Being from singular to plural. This is hard to see in English translations. It is more obvious in Hebrew. God emphasized His plurality and His singularity when he created human beings:

**Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness**

(plural)···**So God created mankind in his own image, (singular)**

**Genesis 1:26a,27a (NIV)**

The heavens opened wide to unveil the glory of God. Winged beings and lightning bolts do not seem out of place—but a wheel?

~To better understand this symbol, we look to the clues in the text.

1. The wheel's **location**- Most of this vision seems to float across the sky: fiery cloud, winged beings, the vaulted throne room. But the wheel is rolling along the earth.
2. The wheel's **material**- like a beryl (topaz in some translations). To a priest like Ezekiel, this is a great clue. He would have often seen this gemstone on the high priest's breastplate, and it had this word engraved in it: "JUDGE".<sup>10</sup> (Exodus 28)
3. The wheel's **purpose** as seen in the book of Proverbs:

**A wise king separates out the wicked and drives the threshing  
\_\_\_\_\_ over them.**

**Proverbs 20:26 (HCSB)**

Putting these clues together, we discover that this great wheel(s) has come to judge wickedness on the earth. Chariot wheels could travel at great speed, but they were also fearsome for another reason: they could crush an enemy who found himself on the earth without protection.

Chariot wheels had a further purpose in ancient times: they were also used as executioner's wheels. Used as a form of capital punishment, otherwise known as the "breaking wheel," wheels were used to punish hardened criminals. God is revealing to Ezekiel that judgment is coming against the wicked. The time had come for the wise

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<sup>10</sup> Henry W. Soltau, *The Tabernacle, the Priesthood, and the Offerings*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1972), 230.

King of Heaven to separate out the wicked. He was going to drive His chariot, like a threshing wheel, over the inhabitants of the earth.

The wheel turns out to be four wheels, and each one is a wheel within a wheel. As Ezekiel's prophecy unfolded, judgment that began with Jerusalem did not end there. The Ammonites, Moabites, Philistines, Edomites, and Egyptians all had God's wrath coming to them. When God was finished using Babylon to judge Jerusalem, He would then judge Babylon.

God does not delight in judgment, but He knows it is necessary to get rid of evil. What He really wants is our friendship—our understanding. He took the time to explain to His servant Ezekiel why He must punish wickedness.

Ezekiel stood before this vision unscathed. This fearful rolling wheel had not flattened him. The rims of the wheel were dreadfully high and intimidating, but they were full of eyes (Ezekiel 1:18). They could see who turned to God in repentance and faith and who did not. They roll with precision, exactly where they are directed to.

~This wheel is under the complete control of the Living One. Notice the comprehensive description in Ezekiel 1:19-21:

When the Living One went \_\_\_\_\_ (v19)

When the Living One rose from the earth \_\_\_\_\_ (v19)

Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, and \_\_\_\_\_ (v20)

The spirit of the Living One was \_\_\_\_\_ (v20)

When those went \_\_\_\_\_ (v21)

When those stood \_\_\_\_\_ (v21)

When those rose from the earth \_\_\_\_\_ (v21)



This was no runaway wheel. God's wrath was not out-of-control anger raging in every direction. This judgment came precisely directed by the Living One(s).

Breath-taking as the scene of God's glory had been, the view widened. The fiery cloud, the fearful wheel and the glorious Living One were not all. Above and beyond the Living One, stretched across the sky was a glittering expanse.

Ezekiel discovered he was standing beneath a Crystal Sky. But even the awesomeness of this vaulted grandeur could not distract him from the Living One. He already described this Living One, with its faces and its wings. Now all of heaven was opened to him, but he continued to be enthralled by the four-fold, four-faced Being, the visual representation of Jesus, the Son of God.

~Would you still be interested in heaven if Jesus were not there? Explain.

Heaven will not be heaven unless Jesus is there. He belongs to heaven. Heaven belongs to Him. We want to be in heaven because there will be no more death, sorrow or crying (Revelation 21:4). Those are good reasons, but those things are gone because Jesus is there. He conquered death. He has the power to heal disease. Tears are His to wipe away or bottle up. All our future bliss is wrapped up in Him.

~It might be possible to imagine we want heaven without Jesus, but He does not want heaven without us. Listen to His prayer to God the Father:

**Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.**

**John 17:24 (ESV)**

## 2.3 Son of Man

~Hear Him speaking in Ezekiel 2.

**And he said to me, “\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, stand on your feet, and \_\_\_\_\_ will speak with you.” And as he spoke to me the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.**

**Ezekiel 2:1-2 (ESV)**

Stunned by the vision of Glory, face down on the earth, Ezekiel was summoned into a conversation with the Sovereign LORD. From the banks of the river in Babylon, this exiled priest found himself in a conversation with the God of Heaven to discuss the wickedness unfolding in Jerusalem, the coming judgment for the people of that city, the judgment of other surrounding nations, and the glorious future beyond.

God demanded Ezekiel’s attention by addressing him directly. But to do this, He did not call Ezekiel by name. He could have—it is a natural way to gain someone’s attention in a conversation and it would have suited the personal nature of the book. God could have consistently said, “Ezekiel, …”. He had spoken to other servants in this way before: “Abraham, Abraham…” and “Moses, Moses…”<sup>11</sup>

In fact, God could have chosen a variety of terms to get this man’s attention. Yet consistently, God uses this phrase “son of man”—or literally “son of Adam” to call to Ezekiel. “Son of man” refers to someone who is part of humanity.

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<sup>11</sup> Genesis 22:10, Exodus 3:4

“Son of man” is a term so generic that it could be used of nearly half of Adam’s descendants. The rest of us are “daughters of man”. On the surface it seems empty and nondescript. We could almost read Ezekiel’s entire book and not be struck by it, although the Sovereign LORD used it to call to him nearly one hundred times.

While Ezekiel is consistently referred to as “son of man”, God is also referred to by a consistent title. Over two hundred times in Ezekiel’s prophecy God is called ‘*Adonai Yahweh*’. The first title, ‘*Adonai*’ is sometimes translated ‘Master’ or ‘Sovereign’ while ‘*Yahweh*’ is the name that God introduced himself by to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14).<sup>12</sup>

~Which of the following does your version of the Bible use to translate this divine title ‘*Adonai Yahweh*’? (Check Ezekiel 3:11,27)

Sovereign LORD

Lord GOD (pay close attention to capitalization, LORD God is a different title)

Lord Yahweh

Lord Jehovah

Lord YHWH

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

The Sovereign LORD had always intended to have an intimate connection with His prized creation—human beings. He had always wanted a relationship with those whom He had made in His own image. It was the reason He had made the earth and everything in it—to facilitate a relationship with human beings.

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Jukes, *The Names of God: Discovering God as He Desires to be Known*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1967), 111.

This heart-to-heart between the Sovereign LORD and Ezekiel, a son of man, couldn't take place by the refreshing river in Eden. Gone was the beauty of innocence when the world was new. Instead, this conversation occurred by the Chebar River— in enemy territory. The grim realities of disobedience and captivity had pushed the discussion far beyond Eden. The background had changed but God had not changed. He wanted fellowship with Ezekiel and He still wants fellowship with us today.

~As a human being, you were created for communion with God. Are you aware of God's voice trying to have an intimate conversation with you?

~Have you ever known God to speak personally to you through His word? Were you terrified or thrilled?

**And you, \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are with you and you sit on \_\_\_\_\_. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.**

**Ezekiel 2:6 (ESV)**

We were all created by God in His image (Genesis 1:27). We were all made for communion with Him. We were all intended for positions of dignity and responsibility that have been distorted by the curse of sin. Adam was cursed with literal thorns and thistles. Ezekiel's thorns and thistles were symbolic of the difficulties he would face.

Ezekiel may have thought of the Babylonians as causing trouble in his life. It seemed like they were the thorns and thistles he had to contend with. He felt a deep connection with the other exiles of Jerusalem. God was telling him that the problems he faced were not the fault of Babylonian soldiers. The problems of the exiles were more internal than external. This son of man was going to face difficulties everywhere.

~What are some difficulties that could be considered evidence of the original curse upon humanity—thorns and thistles—in your life?

It would be a dismal story if it ended there. Adam's history was bleak. Ezekiel's life was a struggle. But the Sovereign LORD is not One to let His plans be thrown off track. He had a solution: God Himself took part in humanity. He became a son of man (Luke 3). He enjoyed the fellowship with God the Father that humanity was created for. He bore the curse placed upon humanity. He was not just a son of man like Ezekiel—He is *the* Son of Man. Jesus is the ultimate human being who always enjoys the presence of God the Father and yet still bore the curse.

Now seated on the throne of heaven, Jesus holds many titles. He is not only the Sovereign LORD, '*Adonai*' (Matthew 22:41-46), and '*Yahweh*' the great 'I AM' (John 8:58) but He is also the Son of Man. He is the fulness of all things.

~Of all the titles that Jesus used for Himself, there is one title that He used more frequently than all the others. Can you guess which title He emphasized? (Hint: Consider the verse below.)

**When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples saying, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"**

**Matthew 16:13 (NKJV)**

## 2.4 The Strong Hand of the LORD

~Try to “swallow” Ezekiel 3:1-15.

**The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in \_\_\_\_\_ and in the \_\_\_\_\_ of my spirit, with the \_\_\_\_\_ hand of the LORD on me. I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Aviv near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days—deeply \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Ezekiel 3:14-15 (NIV)**

The Glory of the LORD had appeared to Ezekiel. The Word of the LORD had come to him. The Spirit of the LORD had lifted him up to take him on a mission—but Ezekiel did not want to go. He was outraged.

It was bad enough that God was not going to save His people and their city. It was devastating that the temple had been desecrated. It was too much already that Ezekiel could no longer function as a priest and plead for his people. Now God wanted to send him as a prophet against his own people—against God’s own people.

Ezekiel did not like this plan at all. Not only was he being sent to prophesy against his own fellow Israelites, but God had told him that this mission was going to be a failure. No one was going to listen to him. What kind of plan was this? What kind of God was this? Where was the compassion and mercy of the Sovereign LORD?

~Has God ever caused circumstances in your life that made you angry with Him?

~Have you ever looked back on a time when you were angry with God and realized that it had all been for the best?

Ezekiel was not willing to fall into step with this plan of God's. He did not appreciate being singled out like this. He did not understand what was going on. He had been willing to cooperate up until this point, but now God had gone too far.

Ezekiel discovered that he was no match for the powerful hand of God. He was carried away even though he did not want to go. The hand of the LORD was upon him—the strong hand of the LORD was upon him.

God has granted us the capacity to make our own decisions.<sup>13</sup> We almost always get to choose whether we want to obey Him or not. Rarely does He force us to comply. Occasionally however, God steps in and insists that His children obey His will. Instead of gently leading us by the hand, He brings down His heavy hand upon us. He catches us in a vice-grip, and He won't let go.

On six other occasions, Ezekiel tells us that "the hand of the LORD was upon him." This is the only occasion where Ezekiel tells us what the hand felt like. He was firmly caught in the "strong" grasp of God.

This was a defining moment in his life. There was something specific about this occasion that caused the Sovereign LORD to exert more pressure than usual. God had called Ezekiel, and he must respond. This was not volunteer work; he was being conscripted. Ezekiel was destined for this mission.

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Gilbert, *God Never Meant for Us to Die: The Emergence of Evil in the Light of the Genesis Creation Account*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 164.

~There is a layer of irony to this occasion where the strong hand of the LORD holds Ezekiel. Ezekiel's name is formed from three parts: E-zeki-el.

1. The first part of Ezekiel's name, "E" comes from the Hebrew letter yod. The shape of a yod resembles a hand.<sup>14</sup> 'Yad' is also the Hebrew word for 'hand'. Fill in 'hand' in the first blank.<sup>15</sup>
2. The second part of Ezekiel's name, "zeki", is a Hebrew word 'hzq'. This word means 'to be ... strong, strengthen.'<sup>16</sup> Fill the meaning in the second blank.
3. The third part of his name is 'El', a Hebrew name for God. Fill in the last blank below and you will have the meaning of Ezekiel's name.<sup>17</sup>

# E-zeki-el

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When this man was caught in the strong grasp of God's hand, he was exactly where he was meant to be. The man whose name meant "hand strength of God" was being firmly held in the grasp of God. Ezekiel was being "Ezekieled".

Ezekiel was being forced to fulfill his own destiny. He was furious at the time, but there was no way God was going to let him miss this. Ezekiel had been born to preach this message. It seemed wrong at the time, but God knew that Ezekiel would be thanking Him later.

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<sup>14</sup> Hebrew4Christians, [www.hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit-One/Aleph-Bet/Yod/yod.html](http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit-One/Aleph-Bet/Yod/yod.html)

<sup>15</sup> [biblehub.com/hebrew/3027.htm](http://biblehub.com/hebrew/3027.htm)

<sup>16</sup> [biblehub.com/hebrew/2388.htm](http://biblehub.com/hebrew/2388.htm)

<sup>17</sup> [biblehub.com/hebrew/410.htm](http://biblehub.com/hebrew/410.htm)



We have a gracious loving God who is committed to letting us have the freedom to make our own choices. Occasionally however, He insists on His way instead of ours.

God used this same strong grasp to insist that Pharaoh let the Hebrew slaves go (Exodus 6:1). He also used this vice-grip to drag Lot and his family out of Sodom (Genesis 19:16). He reserves the right to step into our lives and force us to do something when we are about to miss out on an important opportunity or make a terrible mistake.

~Has God's strong hand ever taken you in a direction you did not want to go?

~Has God's hand ever gently nudged you towards an opportunity and you did not take it? Do you wish He had insisted?

**Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.**

**1 Peter 5:6 (NIV)**

## 2.5 A Watchman

~ “Listen carefully and take to heart” Ezekiel 3.

Ezekiel loved the LORD, and he loved the words of the LORD. He knew that it had been a critical moment when the Book of the Law had been rediscovered. He knew the priestly regulations from the book of Leviticus. Even though it was uncomfortable sometimes, it was still an honor that God was speaking to him.

Ezekiel also loved his people. He cherished memories of Jerusalem and the priesthood. He did not want to serve as a prophet against his own people who were already suffering in exile. If the strong hand of the LORD had not insisted...

God was pleased that Ezekiel had a tender heart towards the other exiles. It may have been why God chose him. But Ezekiel had remembered only to have empathy for the sinners. He had forgotten the misery of those who were still being sinned against.

He was tenderhearted, that was true. But perhaps Ezekiel had mistaken his own apathy towards sin as compassion for the sinner. He had certainly mistaken God's desire for justice towards vulnerable victims as a lack of feeling for sinners.

**But I will make you as unyielding and \_\_\_\_\_ as they are.  
I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, \_\_\_\_\_  
than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are  
a rebellious people.**

**Ezekiel 3:8-9 (NIV)**

Ezekiel thought of the disaster that was coming their way and brooded over the future awaiting His people. He felt forced to make an impossible choice between his love for the LORD and his love for his fellow citizens. He was angry and bitter that this was his mission (Ezekiel 3:14).

As he approached the other exiles to tell them the message of doom from the LORD, Ezekiel was heartsick. He dropped down to the ground and sat with the captives by the riverbank. For an entire week he sat there, deeply distressed. He was mourning with them (Ezekiel 3:15).

~Have you ever heard someone doubt God's love or wonder if they had more compassion than He has?

**At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, I have made you a \_\_\_\_\_ for the people of Israel: so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me."**

**Ezekiel 3:16-17 (NIV)**

God was asking Ezekiel to preach judgment to His people, but He was not asking him to stop caring for them. Just as a watchman stands guard over a city and warns if an attacker is approaching, so Ezekiel must warn his people. As a watchman, Ezekiel could maintain his compassion and still be realistic about God's need to judge sin. God wasn't asking him to diminish his love for the exiles. Ezekiel didn't need to become callous and unfeeling to serve. He would be responsible for raising the alarm that God's judgment was on the way and urging people to repent.

Ezekiel was free to both love the sinners and remember the grief of those who had been sinned against. There was no reason for Ezekiel to have an inner conflict.

The Sovereign LORD was not asking him to stop being tenderhearted—but it was time he started being hardheaded.

~Do you think sometimes God’s desire to see justice for victims of sin is mistaken for a lack of compassion towards the sinner?

~By setting Ezekiel as a watchman, do you think God was acting in judgment or compassion towards the exiles?

For the second time in just over a week, the hand of the LORD came upon Ezekiel. This time, instead of a vice-grip compelling his obedience, he hears an invitation. The LORD wants to share some further distressing news with his servant.

**Then the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet. He spoke to me and said: “Go, shut yourself inside your house. And you, son of man, \_\_\_\_\_ will tie with ropes, you will be \_\_\_\_\_ so that you cannot go out among the people. I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be \_\_\_\_\_ and unable to rebuke them, for they are a rebellious people. But when I speak to you, I will \_\_\_\_\_ your mouth and you shall say to them, ‘This is what the \_\_\_\_\_ says.’ Whoever will listen let them listen, and whoever will refuse let them refuse; for they are a rebellious people.”**

**Ezekiel 3:24-27 (NIV)**

Although Ezekiel had affection for the people he was sent to, his message wouldn't be well received. Nor would his love be returned. The Sovereign LORD warned him that his prophecy would be rejected and that he would be mistreated.

Determined to disregard the warning from God, the people Ezekiel preached to would tie him up with ropes. But God was determined too. He would strike Ezekiel mute for years, as a further sign to the exiles.

The watchman who was responsible for warning the people, would lose the ability to make a sound. Ezekiel had sat in grief for a week, deeply distressed over the fate of Jerusalem's exiles. Now he would be stifled for years, unable to shout the warning they needed to hear.

Before the people came to tie him with ropes, Ezekiel got busy. He acted out many charades to try and explain the news from God. He lay on his side and ate rations of bread to illustrate the desperate siege happening in Jerusalem. He played siege with a toy city and trampled it down to convey the message of what was going on back home. He shaved his hair and distributed it in various ways symbolizing the varied fates of the other captives. He packed his belongings as if to move out and go on a journey, indicating further displacement and exile. (Ezekiel 4-12)

These charades performed by Ezekiel did raise the curiosity of the exiles in Babylon, but it became too much for them. They couldn't silence him because he was already silent, so they tied him with ropes. Hopefully they would be ready to listen to the message from the LORD when He opened Ezekiel's mouth again.

**Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.**

**Matthew 10:16 (ESV)**

## **3.0 The Time Had Come** (Listening Guide)

### **Ezekiel 7:5-9 Our Worship**

1. "This is what the Sovereign LORD says..."

The wrath of God is \_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 7:5, Revelation 5:9

2. "Unheard of disaster"

The wrath of God is \_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 7:5, Revelation 6:16-17

3. "See, it comes!"

The wrath of God is \_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 7:6, Revelation 1:1-3

4. "The time has come."

The wrath of God is \_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 7:7, Revelation 14:18b, 19:15b

5. "Spend my anger"

The wrath of God is \_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 7:8, Revelation 15:1

6. "Then you will know that it is I the LORD"

The wrath of God is \_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 7:9, Revelation 19:1-4

The time had come \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 7:9

## 3.1 Do You See?

The exiled leaders of Judah had come to visit Ezekiel at his home in Babylon. They claimed that they were ready to hear from the LORD, but God had a different itinerary for Ezekiel. He would not be hosting visitors; he was going on a sightseeing trip. Ezekiel's second vision had begun—the vision of God's earthly throne room.

~Take a tour of Ezekiel 8.

Ezekiel was taken by the Spirit for a rendezvous in Jerusalem. Relentlessly caught up by his hair, Ezekiel was forced to a new vantage point of his beloved city. He had to face the depravity of those who called themselves worshippers of the LORD.

God painstakingly guided Ezekiel through this exhibition of evil. He led him step by step on this circuit of the temple. Earnestly, God wanted Ezekiel to understand His position. "Look at this! Do you see that?" God asked. The tour through the desecrated temple was not over. The Sovereign LORD declared, "I will show you worse."

Jerusalem was once the epicenter for fellowship with God. Now it had become a hub for obscenities. Every corner of the temple harbored idolatry and wickedness. No sincere worshippers served the LORD in His temple. It was time for Him to leave.

**And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing—the utterly detestable things the Israelites are doing here, things that will \_\_\_\_\_ me far from my sanctuary? But you will see things that are even \_\_\_\_\_ detestable."**

**Ezekiel 8:6 (NIV)**



Digging through a hole in the wall Ezekiel scrambled over the rubble to discover a door. He didn't know what was going on behind that door, but God did. Commanded to enter the temple chamber, Ezekiel peered through the smoky darkness. The secluded room revealed seventy leaders of Israel. In the center of the group stood a man Ezekiel recognized.

~Who is the man Ezekiel spots in the temple chamber? (Ezekiel 8:11)

\_\_\_\_\_ the son of \_\_\_\_\_

Ezekiel recognized Jaazaniah, the son of Shaphan. This man's father, Shaphan, had read the rediscovered the Book of the Law thirty years earlier under King Josiah. His three brothers had protected the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:24; 29:3; 36:10). Jaazaniah had every opportunity to follow the LORD, but he chose not to.

Through the haze of incense in the darkened room, Jaazaniah took the lead among his important acquaintances. Influential people with the same values he had surrounded him. Beyond this prestigious group, across the walls portrayed in dazzling splendor, were images to exhilarate the senses. God had asked them not to make images like these, but they were so beautiful.

How gratifying for Jaazaniah to be at the center of this crowd, enjoying these pleasures. He lifted his censer solemnly in the murky darkness as the ritual began. Perhaps Jaazaniah considered the meaning of his own name: 'the LORD hears.'<sup>18</sup>

How ironic, he may have thought, 'The LORD hears' indeed! The LORD does not hear, He does not even see. We can worship however we want to here. The LORD has forsaken the earth." (Ezekiel 9:9)

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>18</sup> Bible Hub, Strong's Concordance #2970. <https://biblehub.com/Hebrew/2970.htm>.

Jaazaniah was unaware of it, but the LORD had both seen and heard him. Ezekiel saw him, and he was told to take notes. Jaazaniah did not realize that for the rest of time and through eternity, he would be burned onto the pages of Holy Scripture. Anyone could see him. There is no hiding in the dark from God.

~Was there ever a time in your life that you wondered if God could see you?

This excursion was not over. Ezekiel passed through the chambers, the court and back to the north gate. This time, a group of women were causing a spectacle. They were weeping for Tammuz, a Mesopotamian deity. In ancient Babylon, such cult practices were common, but here in the LORD's temple in Jerusalem, in the sacred precincts of the divine throne room, it was outrageous.

The tour was almost complete. God led Ezekiel back into the temple grounds. One last time through the outer court, and back into the inner court. There was something a little strange about this tour. If the tour guide had been anyone other than God, it might be called haphazard. Outer gate, inner chambers, outer gate again, inner court, what was going on?

But God had not guided this tour in a geographical order. He had conducted this tour in order of ascending outrage. At each destination Ezekiel is told that the next would be worse.

Ezekiel hit the last stop on this shocking tour. He stood in the inner court, on the very doorstep of God's private residence—restricted access. Only priests are allowed here. Ezekiel's heart must have ached. He was so close to what might have been. If only God would have mercy and let him come home to Jerusalem, he could have helped clean things up. He could be offering sacrifices in this very court.

Standing near the threshold of God's house, just outside the Holy Place, Ezekiel's gaze was arrested by twenty-five men. Something was seriously wrong. The men all had their backs turned on God's presence and were bowing down to the sun. Was this a calculated insult? Sun worship is possible from any spot on the entire planet; nothing is hidden from its heat (Psalm 19:6). These men chose to flout God at His own front door.

~Where exactly in the inner court are the twenty-five men? (Ezekiel 8:16)

Between the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_

These men were as close to the presence of the Glory of God as it was possible to come without a sacrifice and not be struck dead. They held a responsibility towards God's presence. Instead of guarding God's holiness as they were required to, they were the ones defiling it. This was the most offensive to God.

**He said to me, "Have you seen this, son of man? Is it a trivial matter for the people of Judah to do the detestable things they are doing**

**\_\_\_\_\_? Must they also \_\_\_\_\_ the land with \_\_\_\_\_ and continually arouse my anger?**

**Ezekiel 8:17a (NIV)**

The temple tour of outrages was not an isolated problem. Perhaps if the wickedness had stopped here, God could have left quietly. The reality was that the disordered, scandalous worship in Jerusalem only exposed the corrupt hearts of the people and pointed to a bigger problem—the exploitation and violence towards

innocent victims throughout the entire land. Their corrupt religious life indicated corruption in their personal lives.

God does not require our worship and obedience for His sake. He asks us to worship Him and keep His commands for our own benefit (Proverbs 4:20-22). He knows that we will naturally imitate the characteristics of whatever or whomever we worship (2 Kings 17:15). The only way to have peace is to worship the God of Peace. When we worship the God of Mercy, we start to show mercy. When we understand that God is Love, we can begin to love.

~Do you consider your worship of God to be for His benefit or for your own?

**Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.**

### **1 Corinthians 10:14-15 (NIV)**

The temple of King Solomon at Jerusalem



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## 3.2 Begin at My Sanctuary

Ezekiel had not tried to enter the temple building on this outrageous tour. He had seen enough from the courtyard. Besides, he was not properly dressed for it. That would have required the clean linen garments that all Hebrew priests wore.

If he had been prepared with the appropriate clothes, it still would have been useless for Ezekiel to enter. There was no work for him to do. He had access to the temple's first room, the Holy Place, but it was empty. The Babylonians had come and plundered what was left of the temple furniture (2 Kings 24:12-13).

The second, inner room, the Most Holy Place, Ezekiel did not have access to. It was the throne room of God. Once a year the high priest could carefully enter, if he brought blood and if he was veiled by a cloud of incense to protect him from death.

That special inner room, the Most Holy Place contained four cherubim. Carved from wood, and covered with gold, two cherubim had stood with their wings stretched across the room from wall to wall. Beneath these two guardian cherubim, two more solid gold cherubim had stretched their wings upon the lid of ark of the covenant. This lid was the known as the Atonement Cover or the Mercy Seat, the throne of the Sovereign LORD. These four guardians of God's holiness were gone.

Temple service had been rendered obsolete. But no one was expecting priestly work from Ezekiel today. God had dragged him to Jerusalem to watch, not to work. The tour of temple atrocities was over, and now Ezekiel must observe a further distressing turn of events.

~ Brace yourself for Ezekiel 9, a continuation of Ezekiel's second vision.

A shout rang out for six executioners to present themselves within the temple grounds. Six men arrived, weapons in hand. A seventh man joined them, but he did not carry a weapon for slaughter. He was dressed in linen, as if he were a priest but he did not carry a golden censer. He arrived with writing utensils.

God was about to move out of His earthly house. He had already arranged to have His sacred furniture put into storage in Babylon. The Babylonian army took care of that for Him when they plundered the temple. Before God left, He had one more task. God wanted to ensure that the violent oppressors were stopped—especially the criminals who were using the temple in Jerusalem as a safehouse.

The man in linen received instructions first. He went through the streets of Jerusalem and marked anyone who had repented or who was disgusted by the wickedness taking place. He did not rigorously interview each citizen. All they needed to do to escape the judgment was to breathe a sigh. The Sovereign LORD wanted to protect anyone who was not involved in criminal activity or who had repented.

The six executioners received their instructions next. They were to follow the man clothed in linen and kill anyone who had not received his mark. Anyone left in Jerusalem was engaged in oppression. The executioners were to show no mercy and no partiality. In case they felt reluctant to kill inside the temple grounds, the command was repeated with greater clarity and urgency:

**Then he said to them, “Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. \_\_\_\_\_!” So they went out and began killing throughout the city.**

**Ezekiel 9:7 (NIV)**

This was a strange command. The God of mercy was commanding his servants to show no mercy. He was also giving instructions to defile His own house. Ezekiel understood that the LORD had no intention of keeping this throne room in Jerusalem.

Once a meticulously clean place, the inner court was now littered with the dead bodies of Ezekiel's fellow priests. The bronze wash basins stood in pools of blood. In the outer court, no temple choir sang psalms. As the executioners made their way through the city, the howls of the people of Jerusalem faded to silence. The tour of the temple had been uncomfortable—but witnessing executions, here in the sacred court was excruciating. Crushed by the stillness, Ezekiel can bare it no longer. He protests.

~Paraphrase Ezekiel's protest in Ezekiel 9:8.

~Do you agree with Ezekiel that God should have had more compassion? Would it have been better for God to let the violence in Jerusalem continue?

**Then the man in linen with the writing kit at his side brought back word, saying, "I have \_\_\_\_\_ as you commanded."**

**Ezekiel 9:11 (NIV)**

The mysterious man in linen has returned to the inner court, still carrying his writing utensils. He seemed to be a priest, but Ezekiel did not recognize his face. This was a vision, so maybe he was symbolic of someone else.

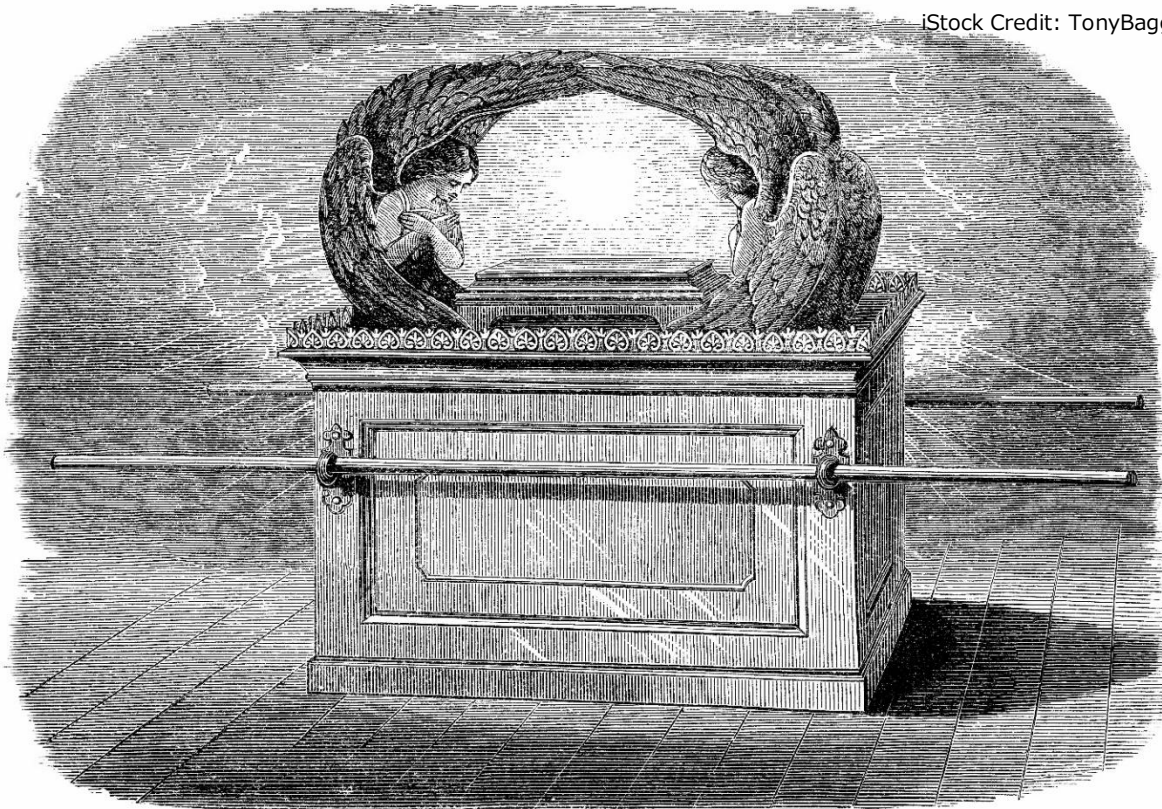
The man in linen was summoned for judgment, but he arrived to show mercy. He protected anyone who was willing to repent. He never uttered a protest—he obeyed the instructions he was given. He accepted the display of unapologetic judgment so he must have understood the seriousness of sin. He returned to the temple to report that he had completed the job he was given.

~In the paragraph above, underline all the characteristics of the man in linen from Ezekiel's second vision that remind you of Jesus Christ.

**I have brought you glory on earth  
by finishing the work you gave me to do.**

**John 17:4 (NIV)**

The Ark of the Covenant





### 3.3 I Realized that They Were Cherubim

~Wonder at Ezekiel 10, a continuation of Ezekiel's second vision.

Ezekiel continued to watch as the horrific scene unfolded. The Holy Places of Jerusalem's temple had become irrelevant. They were empty and defiled. The Sovereign LORD was finished here. No one was paying attention to the old temple protocols because they no longer mattered. The living Cherubim had arrived.

In the bloody inner court, the Man clothed in linen had priestly work to do—but he did not enter the inner rooms of the temple. He did not approach the bronze pool to clean himself or the bronze altar in the outer court to offer a sacrifice. Instead, Ezekiel stared in amazement, as the Man in Linen entered somewhere else.

**And he said to the man clothed in linen, “Go in among the whirling wheels underneath the \_\_\_\_\_. Fill your hands with burning coals from between the \_\_\_\_\_ and scatter them over the city.” And he went in before my eyes.**

**Ezekiel 10:2 (ESV)**

Obedient to the command, the Man in Linen boldly entered between the whirling wheels of the living Cherubim of Glory. Wings beating, the Cherubim rose. The wheels spun round the man. A fire burned inside the holy chariot. The Living Cherubim stretched out a hand filled with burning coals from within itself. The shining cloud of God's glory flooded the inner court. It filled the temple. The life force radiated out. Ezekiel could hear the wings of the Cherubim all the way to the outer court.

The lifeless wooden cherubim carved into the temple doors had become impossible to see. The abandoned bronze altar and contaminated wash basins were invisible. The wicked priests lay dead on the ground. Outside of the Holy Place, Ezekiel stood, unshielded, in the majestic glory of God's presence. He began to realize that the Glory of God did not need to be enshrined within the temple at Jerusalem. The real Glory of God was alive and on the move!

Ezekiel was stunned. He had another realization as he gazed upon the living Cherubim. Those wooden cherubim, within the Most Holy Place, covered with gold and the solid gold Cherubim that formed the lid of the ark of the covenant had only been symbols of the Glory of God and the divine presence of God.

Here were the true Living Cherubim right before his eyes. He had been so concerned about losing the symbols. He had not realized that the things he had thought were essential, were only pointing to more vital and indestructible realities.

Maybe he—Ezekiel—was only the symbol of a priest. He had no power to cancel sin, he knew that. Neither did the blood of the lambs or goats he had helped sacrifice, pay for an offense against God. He had been looking at things backwards. The things he thought were realities, they were only the symbols. The things he had been viewing as symbolic, they were more vivid realities than he had realized.

**These were the living creatures I had seen beneath the God of Israel by  
the Kebar River, and I \_\_\_\_\_ that  
\_\_\_\_\_ were cherubim.**

**Ezekiel 10:20 (NIV)**

Ezekiel had described the Glory as having four faces: a human being, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ezekiel 1:10). Now he saw that the face that had resembled an ox

was in fact a cherub. The cherub had not replaced the ox, it had explained it. The ox, a symbol of service, served as the cherubim served by guarding the holiness of God. It's not that God's holiness needed to be protected; cherubim are not bodyguards. They ensure that God's throne is respected, and his longsuffering kindness is not taken advantage of. They ensure God's mercy extends only as His holiness is satisfied.

It is a tremendous responsibility to guard God's holiness. Our universe relies on God's righteous character. While God loves to be merciful to sinners, He cannot be careless with sin. That would allow sin to take over. Ezekiel recalled a less dependable guardian cherub who had failed to protect God's standard of perfect holiness:

**You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones.**

**Ezekiel 28:14-16 (NIV)**

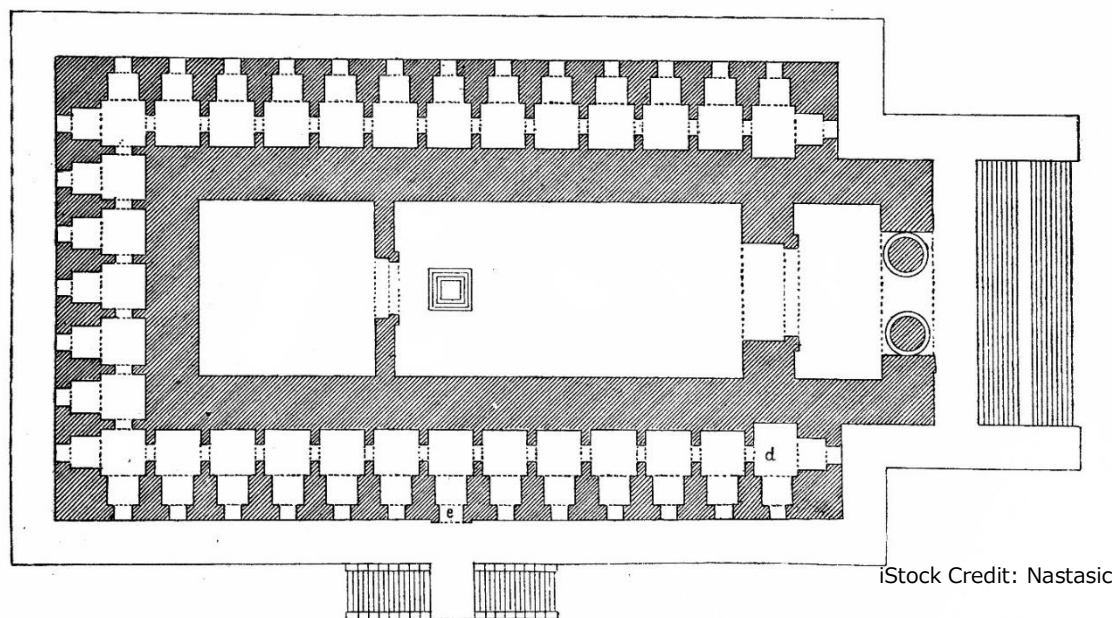
This responsibility of guarding God's holiness had been violated by that first guardian cherub. It could only be safely handed over to the Son of God. He is the Cherubim that guards the holiness of God by His righteous character.<sup>19</sup> He will never allow God's holiness to be violated when the mercy of God is extended to sinners. He is also the Man in Linen who entered between the wheels of judgment –he paid with His life to ensure that God's justice and kindness could both work in harmony.

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<sup>19</sup> Henry W. Soltau, *The Holy Vessels and Furniture of the Tabernacle*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1971), 25.

~When the Man in Linen (a picture of Christ's atoning work) entered between the wheels below the Cherubim (a picture of Christ's Righteous Character), what happened? (Ezekiel 10:3-4)

~In the floor plan of the temple below, can you locate and label the Holy Place (the square golden altar stands inside) and the inner Most Holy Place where the ark of the covenant belonged?



**Therefore brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is , his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.**

**Hebrews 10:19-22 (NIV)**

### 3.4 The Glory of the LORD Went Up

~Wrap up Ezekiel's second vision by reading Ezekiel 11.

While he could revel in the glory of the Cherubim, Ezekiel had seen enough of this vision of destruction. He did not want to witness another minute of judgment and wrath. The tour of the temple and the idolatrous worship had been extremely unpleasant. Listening to the clamor from the city, as the executioners had passed through had been traumatic. He was trying to cooperate, but he could hardly keep up with the judgements God was dishing out.

Even though Ezekiel had seen enough, the Sovereign LORD was not finished. Ezekiel arrived back at the door of God's house. It was hard to believe, but after all the uproar, the twenty-five men were still there. These men refused to escape the judgment. They insisted that they had done nothing wrong. These men were determined to stay in Jerusalem and recklessly persist in violating God's holiness. They were confident nothing bad could happen to them in the LORD's temple.

**They say, 'Haven't our houses been recently \_\_\_\_\_? This city is a \_\_\_\_\_, and we are the meat in it.'**

**Ezekiel 11:3 (NIV)**

Completely ignoring the word of the LORD, these men were trusting in their privilege. They had rejected Huldah's message of disaster. They had refused to surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar and move to Babylon like they were told to do by Jeremiah the prophet. They insisted on making their own decisions.

Jerusalem was like an iron pot, these men claimed, protecting them even though it hung over the fire. If they were safely inside the pot, they could not be burned.<sup>20</sup> But they were counting on God's protection without obeying His word.

~Have you ever heard someone claim God's protection while they were acting in opposition to His will?

~Do you have any ideas as to why people sometimes feel comfortable treating God this way?

Ezekiel was starting to see how stubborn these people were. Maybe God had a point. So, he prophesied as he had been commanded.

**Now as I was \_\_\_\_\_, Pelatiah son of Benaiah  
\_\_\_\_\_. Then I fell face down and cried out in a loud  
voice, "Alas, Sovereign LORD! Will you \_\_\_\_\_ destroy the  
remnant of Israel?"**

**Ezekiel 11:13 (NIV)**

Yes, these citizens were arrogant and hypocritical. But this was too much—it was going too far for Ezekiel. Of course, it was only a vision—Pelatiah dropping dead at his feet. But although the vision was not literal, it was certainly true. The vision was

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<sup>20</sup>Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: the Glory of the Lord*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 63.

illustrating a greater reality: Ezekiel's friends, family members, and colleagues in Jerusalem were doomed. God was making Himself very clear.

Ezekiel understood that these men were rebels, but they were his community. These were the relationships that Ezekiel had valued. He had overlooked the sin of his fellow priests to get along with them. He had minimized the harm that their wickedness had caused. He had also underestimated the penalty that they had brought upon themselves.

**Son of man, the people of Jerusalem have said of your fellow \_\_\_\_\_ and all the other Israelites, " \_\_\_\_\_ are far away from the LORD; this land was given to \_\_\_\_\_ as our possession."**

**Ezekiel 11: 15 (NIV)**

Those people who refused to leave Jerusalem had sealed their own doom. If they had been obedient, they would have escaped the judgment. They did not realize that they had exposed their rebellious hearts. On the contrary, they thought that by remaining in Jerusalem they had proved that they were more holy than the other Israelites that had gone into exile.

It was almost unbelievable that anyone could be so wrong. They were not just wicked, they were wicked, religious, and blind. They stubbornly refused to accept God's verdict. They would rather starve. They must have had hearts of stone.

God knew these rebels would not change. He knew that planning to keep His throne room so near them would only ever end in disaster. He wanted their fellowship, but a more drastic solution was required. He could not rely on them to guard His holiness.

Reluctantly, and in stages, the Glory of God left the temple at Jerusalem. God had shown Ezekiel why He had to abandon His earthly throne room. All the wickedness had been exhibited; all the stubbornness had been exposed. The tour was over; the vision was complete.

Ezekiel was left in Babylon with a clearer understanding of the inevitable destruction ahead for Jerusalem. This first vision had shown him the brilliance of the Glory of God, but the second vision had taught him that God's Glory must be respected. The Sovereign LORD cannot dwell amid such wickedness. But although God was leaving, but He had a better plan to enjoy fellowship with His people without the destructiveness of their sin.

**And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of \_\_\_\_\_ from their flesh and give them a heart of \_\_\_\_\_, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.**

**Ezekiel 11:19-20 (ESV)**

The reality of captivity in enemy territory and the destruction of Jerusalem could no longer be ignored. Judgment was inevitable. But even as he had witnessed the Glory of God departing, Ezekiel had also received words of comfort from God: a promise that the Sovereign LORD would return.

**And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**

**John 14:3 (NIV)**



## 3.5 The Way of the LORD is Not Just

The exiles from Jerusalem who were living in Babylon had a lot to say about the events that were happening to them and to their loved ones who had remained behind. They believed that their perilous situation was due to God's inadequacy, not theirs. They had abandoned any reverence for God.

Far from taking responsibility for their own actions or acknowledging their failure to keep the agreed covenant terms, the exiles blamed their predicament on God. Ezekiel tells us of many complaints they had against the Sovereign LORD: "The LORD does not see us," "The LORD has forsaken us," (Ezekiel 8:12) "The way of the LORD is not just" (Ezekiel 18:29).

~Can you think of a recent situation where you suffered the consequences of your own poor choices? Did you blame God?

God was open to the discussion of who was to blame. He recognized a difference between people complaining to Him and complaining against Him. He wanted them to bring their troubles and questions to Him. He was willing to discuss the situation. He could handle their anger and doubt. But criticizing Him behind His back was different. That negativity and lack of communication inhibited the relationship He wanted with His people. He preferred to take complaints to His face.

~Do you tend to be honest with God when you think He has let you down, or do you vent your frustration to others?

Ezekiel had his own doubts about the Sovereign LORD's justice. Would God's requirement for holiness only ever end in wrath? Did He not claim to be a God of mercy? Ezekiel, however, was willing to take those questions to God. This meant that that God could defend His own character and Ezekiel's faith would increase.

Now Ezekiel's task was to challenge the narrative of the people around him. God had been showing Ezekiel and the exiles that His plan was just, that His mercy had been rejected. They must be punished.

~ Explore the LORD's defense of His justice in Ezekiel 18.

God had many reasons to dispute the claim that He was acting unfairly. The first and most obvious reason was that He had created these people for Himself. He did not owe them an explanation, even if He had been unjust. The debate itself—the fact that they were able to complain without being struck dead—proved He was more than fair (Ezekiel 18:3-4).

Not only had God created each person, but He also knew each of them individually. He knew their attitudes. He was not judging them from a distance. He was judging with the maximum amount of information possible. He knows everything and He knew these people better than they knew themselves (Ezekiel 18:5-9).

God was also willing to acknowledge obedience across multiple criteria. He looked at various facets of a person's life to determine whether they acknowledged Him as the Sovereign LORD. The tenor of their lives was being assessed, not one isolated mistake (Ezekiel 18:10-13).

~Notice the criteria by which the Sovereign LORD was judging these people, repeated three times in Ezekiel 18:5-9, 11-13 and 15-17. Is there more emphasis placed on their religious obedience or on social justice?

To further defend His justice, God reminded His critics that He had given each of them the freedom to choose whether to obey or not. No one was bound to the course of action that their parents had taken. In this regard He was more generous than they were in judging each other. They routinely held children accountable for their parents' choices (Ezekiel 18:14-18).

Beyond even justice, or mercy, God was gracious. He allowed any individual to change their own mind and their actions. If they repented, He would clear the record against them. His grace even extended so far as to allow them to turn away from Him again if they chose to. He was committed to their utter freedom (Ezekiel 18:21-24).

If all these reasons were not enough to convince the complainers of the Sovereign LORD's justice, they needed to consider His love. He did not watch them hoping to find fault. Nor did He stand aloof with arms folded, not caring if they lived or died. He was on their side.

The Sovereign LORD had sent them Ezekiel as a watchman to warn them of judgment. He actively encouraged them to do what was right. He was willing to have a discussion with them about His decisions. He wanted no one to perish.

~Do you have any lingering questions about God's justice or His mercy? Does it make sense to you that He must punish sin?

**Graciousness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace  
have kissed each other.**

**Psalm 85:10 (NASB)**



## 4.0 A Time to be Remembered (Listening Guide)

### Ezekiel 24:1-2, Our Certainty

Jeremiah's mission was to \_\_\_\_\_  
the course of Judah's \_\_\_\_\_  
history.

Daniel's mission was to \_\_\_\_\_  
the course of Judah's \_\_\_\_\_  
history.

Ezekiel's mission was to \_\_\_\_\_  
the course of Judah's \_\_\_\_\_  
history.<sup>21</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Block, *By the River Chebar*, (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), 77.

In the \_\_\_\_\_ year, in the \_\_\_\_\_  
month, on the \_\_\_\_\_ day...

1. Because of King Zedekiah's \_\_\_\_\_,  
Jeremiah could not \_\_\_\_\_ this day.  
Jeremiah 52:3-4

2. Despite King Nebuchadnezzar's \_\_\_\_\_,  
Daniel could not \_\_\_\_\_ this day.  
2 Kings 25:1-2, Ezekiel 14:14,20

3. Despite King Jehoiachin's \_\_\_\_\_,  
Ezekiel could not \_\_\_\_\_ this day.  
Ezekiel 24:1-2

It was a time to be remembered when

\_\_\_\_\_.

Deuteronomy 30:17-18, Romans 9:22-24

## 4.1 Ezekiel Will Be a Sign

The tenth day of the tenth month, in the ninth year of Ezekiel's captivity, was a crucial day. After years of hearing it prophesied, after months of dreading it, the siege of his beloved city had finally begun. Jerusalem was officially under lockdown. Stockpiles of food had to be strictly rationed. Huldah's prophecy was unfolding.

That morning, Ezekiel alerted the exiles that the assault had begun. There on the banks of the Chebar River in Babylon, he explained what they could not have known otherwise: that the Babylonian army had begun the work of breaching Jerusalem's defenses—that very day.

Announcing the destruction of their favored city, Ezekiel did not hold back any of the LORD's message to the Judaeans captives. He gave the news to them unfiltered. When he had finished, he looked up to see how the crowd around him was taking the message. The entire mob were looking directly at him, and every one of them had a blank stare.

They had not comprehended the awfulness of what he was expressing. They looked at him, and then at each other. A vacant expression, a shrug of the shoulders, the people nodded as though they had understood, but there was no further reaction.

This was not a normal response. Why had no one wailed aloud? Why had no one torn their clothes to express their grief? Didn't they understand? The unthinkable had happened: Jerusalem's final destruction had begun.

The temple of the LORD was about to be not only defiled but flattened. They were about to lose their place as God's favored nation and light to the world. Their friends and families were about to starve or be violently slaughtered.

It was no longer a question of when the exiles would be going home. There would be no home to go back to. Yet not one of the captives had moaned in sorrow. Not one of them displayed a shred of remorse. They were unaffected.

~ Prepare yourself emotionally for Ezekiel 24.

That evening, Ezekiel's wife died. Barely a warning, and she was gone. Her lovely face would never beam up at Ezekiel again. She had been his heart's delight. The following morning, Ezekiel got up and went about his normal routine. He got dressed and carried on with his day. Acting as though nothing had happened was not easy but this was what the Sovereign LORD had asked of him.

When neighbors came to offer him condolences, Ezekiel just shrugged his shoulders with a hollow look in his eyes. He did not sit down in the dust, prepared to accept their comfort. He did not wait to hear their expressions of sympathy for the loss of his beloved wife. He just acted oblivious. It looked to the people, as though he lacked proper feeling. Did he have a heart of stone?

**Then the people asked me, "Won't you tell us what these things have to do \_\_\_\_\_? Why are you acting like this?"**

**Ezekiel 24:19 (NIV)**

The self-absorbed crowd realized that something was off. Ezekiel was acting so strangely. There was no way he could move on so easily from the death of his wife. It was not natural. He had not even gone through the motions of grieving for her. They knew he had loved his wife, yet he was pretending to be utterly devoid of feeling. He was displaying a lack of empathy and even a lack of understanding.

~Have you ever been in a situation where you noticed that your emotional reaction was not what other people expected of you?

~Healthy spirituality requires both emotional expression (John 11:35; 1 Corinthians 5:2) and emotional regulation (Proverbs 16:32). Which do you find easier, emotional expression or emotional regulation?

**So I said to them, “The word of the LORD came to me: Say to the people of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to desecrate my \_\_\_\_\_—the stronghold in which you take pride, the \_\_\_\_\_of your affection.**

**Ezekiel 24:21a-22a (NIV)**

God had spoken to Ezekiel directly, calling him, “son of man,” over ninety times throughout his career as a prophet and a watchman. On this single occasion, speaking to the exiles, God named his faithful servant. ‘Ezekiel’—meaning ‘In the grasp of God.’ Ezekiel could obey the command not to grieve only because he was firmly held by the grasp of God. On this day he was sharing in the grief of God Himself.

**“Ezekiel will be a sign to you;”**

**Ezekiel 24:24a (NIV)**

Ezekiel was a sign to the exiles of their insensitivity. They should have been mourning their beloved homeland and the family they had left behind, just as Ezekiel should have been mourning his beloved wife.



**“And you, son of man, on the day I take away their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes, their heart’s desire, and their sons and daughters as well— \_\_\_\_\_ a fugitive will come to tell you the news. \_\_\_\_\_ your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.”**

**Ezekiel 24:25-27 (NIV)**

Ezekiel was speechless, not because he had no empathy, but because he was rendered physically unable. God had caused him to be mute as a sign to the people. They had refused God’s message over and over—there was no more to say.

His wife had died the day the siege had begun, and Ezekiel would remain silent during the entire ordeal. He would not weep and wail. His internal grief would weigh him down; he would find no relief through sharing his loss.

When the siege ended and the Babylonian army had entered within the walls of Jerusalem, he would know the city had been conquered because God would open his mouth. Until then he would prophesy silently, until the ultimate prediction of Jerusalem’s destruction was fulfilled.

Eventually, a fugitive from the destroyed city would arrive to tell him that the city had fallen. On that day he would be able to speak again—if he had not wasted away through repressed sorrow by then.

**Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.**

**Hebrews 10:33 (NIV)**

## 4.2 How Then Can We Live?

Throughout the captivity, the displaced citizens of Jerusalem had tried to stay positive. It had been unfortunate that they had been forced to leave their homes, but the Babylonian territory they had settled in could have been worse. To picture the crisis taking place back home was quite uncomfortable—better not to think about it.

The exiles had a few different strategies to avoid facing what was going on. They had tried to minimize the negative messages they were getting:

- Likely this judgment was not really directed at them but was pointing to some distant future (Ezekiel 12:27).

- Rather than be dragged down by all the doom and gloom they had preferred to focus on the prophets with a more positive outlook (Ezekiel 13:10).

- They had done their best—at least, better than their parents (Ezekiel 18:2).

- It was better not to overthink the situation and read too much into things. They tried to just get on with their lives (Ezekiel 20:49).

~ Which of the above strategies to avoid the reality of judgment have you encountered? Are there other tactics we use to avoid the problem of sin?

Ezekiel had not spoken to the exiles for years. His silence seemed to speak louder than any pronouncement of admonition ever had. They were beginning to get the message: judgment was universal and unavoidable. God had also outlined the punishment for the surrounding nations as well as Jerusalem. Ammon, Moab, Edom,

Philistia, Tyre, and Egypt all faced judgment (Ezekiel 25-32). Assyria had not survived; Egypt would not succeed.

No one would escape the consequences of their actions no matter how powerful they had become or how outwardly religious they managed to present themselves. In every direction, every group of people could expect discipline. Judgment may have been hard to face but it was impossible to avoid.

The exiles had one burning question for the Sovereign LORD: How were they supposed to survive in the face of this outpoured wrath?

~ Join the question-and-answer session in Ezekiel 33:10-20.

**Son of man, say to the Israelites, ‘This is what you are saying: “Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can \_\_\_\_\_?”’**

**Ezekiel 33:10 (NIV)**

How could they live? How could they hold their heads up and keep moving forward? Their ritual service was not enough. Religious observance and outward ceremony could not save them. God demanded personal holiness—an impossible standard to keep. They stood condemned.

~What are some acts of religious (outward) service we may try to do to impress God?

**Say to them, ‘As surely as \_\_\_\_\_, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will \_\_\_\_\_, people of Israel?’**

**Ezekiel 33:11 (NIV)**

“I live!” answered the Sovereign LORD. That was the only hope the exiles had of living. God never expected them to keep His standard of perfection on their own. He is the Source of Life. He knew they could not live apart from Him. He breathed life into the first people He created, and He could breathe life into their dead spirits even then.

Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah, Huldah, and King Josiah had faced the necessity of judgment and turned to God. God was eager for each of them to escape the consequences of their sin through repentance and faith. Ezekiel had not won God’s grace by his own righteousness. He had accepted God’s righteousness.

The question of the exiles had been, “How then can we live?” It felt impossible to meet God’s standard. God answered their question with His own question, “Why will you die?” His solution was so simple and readily available. It had only seemed difficult because they had been trying to achieve it through their own strength. The solution was to repent and turn to Him in faith.

~Have you turned to God in repentance and faith so that He can give you eternal life?

**For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”**

**Romans 1:17 (NIV)**

## 4.3 The City Has Fallen!

For years Ezekiel had not uttered a sound—not even the day his wife had died. One evening, after years of silence, the hand of the LORD came upon Ezekiel. The Sovereign LORD had given back his voice. That could only mean one thing: the siege was over. Jerusalem had at last fallen to her enemies.

Ezekiel remembered what the LORD had promised on that dreadful day three years back and he knew who would be there by morning: the fugitive that was coming to tell him the news that Jerusalem had fallen.

**...on that day a fugitive will come to tell you the news. At that time your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.**

**Ezekiel 24:26-27 (NIV)**

~Catch up with Ezekiel as he regains his voice in Ezekiel 33:21-33.

**In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from \_\_\_\_\_ came to me and said, "The city has \_\_\_\_\_!" Now the evening \_\_\_\_\_ the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was on me, and he opened my mouth \_\_\_\_\_ the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.**

**Ezekiel 33:21-22 (NIV)**

For twelve years of captivity, Ezekiel had dreaded the destruction of his city. He had trudged out of Jerusalem and into exile, not knowing what would happen. He recalled the awful temple vision he had seen six years earlier—a premonition of the destruction that had occurred (Ezekiel 8-11). For so long he had anticipated it. Now it had finally happened.

The fear had been stifling. Dread had seized him when he had been forced, even in a vision, to face the sacrilegious misdeeds taking place in the temple grounds. He had been furious with God (Ezekiel 3:14). He had protested (Ezekiel 11:13). He had been sure that the Sovereign LORD needed to have more compassion. Now he was able to take the news calmly. The hand of the LORD was upon him.

**In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, “The city has fallen!” Now the evening before the man arrived, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ was on me, and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.**

**Ezekiel 33:21-22 (NIV)**

The hand of the LORD had been there all along really. When he had been first called to serve God as a prophet instead of a priest, Ezekiel remembered that relentless grasp pressing him into service. He remembered how that hand had challenged him and resisted him; it had carried him and led him. Now the hand of the LORD was there steadying him through this crisis.

It was not that Ezekiel was glad that the temple had finally been destroyed, or thankful that he and his fellow captives had been hauled off to Babylon like cattle. It was still a terrible calamity. Yet, there had been something about the whole ordeal

that was precious. He had experienced the Sovereign LORD by the river in Babylon in ways he had never imagined possible in Jerusalem.

He could no longer serve as a priest, but the word of the LORD came to him directly. He could no longer enter the temple, but the Spirit of the LORD moved him powerfully. He could not enter the Holy Place, but he had seen the real Cherubim.

There was something so peaceful about accepting the plan of God—aligning to His agenda instead of insisting on Ezekiel's own personal goals. It was a relief in fact, to know that the treachery and murder that had been taking place in Jerusalem would not be able to continue. It was comforting to know that even if the golden cherubim had been plundered from the temple, the Living Cherubim were alive and well.

~Have you ever been angry with God for allowing an event to take place in your life, only to realize later that it had unexpectedly been for the best?

Ezekiel had attained another milestone besides regaining his voice. He had passed the test of a prophet. He had made a bold statement about the destruction of Jerusalem from far off Babylon. He was correct, down to the very day on the calendar. After years of solitude and silence, he was proven right. He joined the ranks of other prophets who had proven themselves true servants of God, along with Huldah and Jeremiah (Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

Now the people must believe him. There could no longer be a denial of his credentials. Yes, his message was unpopular, but it was true. He had even suffered personally to prove it. Now he could count his prophetic mission a success because his fellow captives would acknowledge his authority. Now surely the exiles would accept his message as God's word. Wouldn't they?

**As for you, son of man, your people are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.' My people come to you, as they usually do come, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice. Their \_\_\_\_\_ speak of love, but their \_\_\_\_\_ are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.**

**Ezekiel 33:30-32 (NIV)**

There was no heartfelt acceptance of Ezekiel's message. It made no difference whether he spoke or mimed. He served for twenty-one years as a prophet without a single convert recorded. He was not an influencer. He had zero followers. But God measures success, not by number of followers but by obedience. Ezekiel's mission was a success because he followed God, not because others followed him.

~For me, success means \_\_\_\_\_.

~Today will be successful if \_\_\_\_\_.

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

**Romans 8:28 (NIV)**



## 4.4 I Will Shepherd the Flock

As the rubble settled in Jerusalem and the dust blew away, it became clear that the city's devastation had not been a disaster for God's people. This had been the Sovereign LORD's rescue mission. He had sheltered His people in Babylon while He punished the wicked rulers who remained in that city.

The Sovereign LORD was accused of failing to take care of His people. He had appointed caregivers to help guide them, but these leaders had ended up doing more harm than good. They were the ones who had failed, not God.

~Follow the Good Shepherd through Ezekiel 34.

God often describes His people as a flock of sheep. Sheep have no defense capabilities; they need a shepherd to survive. The Sovereign LORD knew that His people could not survive without being cared for. He had given them prophets, priests, and rulers to protect them. The LORD wanted leaders with the heart of a shepherd.

**He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.**

**Psalms 78:70-72 (NIV)**

~In the verse above, underline "integrity of heart" and "skillful hands."

Priests and prophets, princes and elders had been designated by God to serve His people. They had been entrusted with the responsibility of guiding the young and the vulnerable. Instead of fulfilling their duty, these wicked men had maximized their privileges and minimized their responsibilities. They had focused on increasing their own power, wealth, and reputations rather than faithfully discharging their duties to protect and guide others.

The Sovereign LORD was disgusted with this type of selfish leadership. It was as though the shepherds who should have been saving the flock from wild animals, had the sheep between their own teeth. The LORD was enraged by this abuse of power. No longer would He rely on an intermediary to care for His people. God Himself would shepherd them.

**For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: \_\_\_\_\_**

**\_\_\_\_\_ will search for my sheep and look after them.**

**Ezekiel 34:11 (NIV)**

**\_\_\_\_\_ will tend my sheep and have them  
lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD.**

**Ezekiel 34:15 (NIV)**

God continued to use the word picture to further explain the problem. Instead of acting as dutiful shepherds, the rulers in Jerusalem had denied their responsibility. They had behaved as sheep themselves.

Worse still, instead of simply following as sheep, these leaders had pushed and shoved like greedy sheep, to get in front to drink the still water first. If that had not been bad enough, the LORD compared them to thoughtless sheep, standing in the

water and leaving it filthy so others could not drink. It was like these rulers had gobbled up the greenest grass and trampled the rest so it could not be eaten. The Sovereign LORD deplored the leaders' clamor for status and reward at the expense of the community they were supposed to be serving.

~Can you think of an example, either privately or publicized, of this type of religious abuse of power?

~Do you understand the seriousness of serving God on behalf of others, realizing that you will be held to a higher standard when you claim a position of authority? (James 3:1)

The rulers in Jerusalem had utterly failed. They had failed in their mission to radiate the bright glory of God's goodness to the nations around them. They had not even managed to shine a feeble ray of light in their own communities (Ezekiel 11-19).

Not only had they performed no good, but these leaders had done much evil. The priests had become extortioners. The prophets told lies. The elders committed violence. The princes were predators.

These leaders were guilty of serious crimes, but they presented themselves as being morally superior to everyone else. They prided themselves on their religiosity and their supposed nearness to God (Ezekiel 11:15).

These wicked shepherds would no longer be free to abuse their power. The Sovereign LORD had seen every injustice and every exploitation. He was holding the leaders accountable.

~Which of the following do you think is the most outrageous to God?

- Exploiting others
- Exploiting others God has entrusted to our care
- Exploiting others God has entrusted to our care, claiming God's authority to do so

No longer would God's people have to rely on priests and prophets executing their duties faithfully. God Himself would care for them. They would have direct access to a Shepherd who would never exploit them. One who would lead—not for His own benefit but for that of the sheep.

We have a Shepherd who rather than exploit us, protects us with His own life. He shepherds with "integrity of heart" and leads with "skillful hands." (Psalm 78:72). Jesus cares so much about us that He gave up His life to shield us from the consequences of sin. He is the Good Shepherd who has given his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Scripture teaches us that not only is Jesus the Good Shepherd who gave His life, but He is also the Great Shepherd who lives in the power of an endless life. He died for us, but He also came back from the dead, never to die again. His resurrection power has been poured out on us through His Spirit.

**Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

**Hebrews 13:20-21 (NIV)**

## 4.5 Heart of Stone

The citizens of Jerusalem had claimed to be the people of the Sovereign LORD. They claimed to have special protection from Him. When they suffered deportation, it became obvious that there was a problem—either with God or with them.

The accusation of the exiles was that the Sovereign LORD had forsaken His people. They blamed Him for this breach of promise as though He was hard-hearted. They criticized Him for being cold and unresponsive (Ezekiel 9:9). The message of Ezekiel's prophecy was that the people had it backwards. They were the ones who had broken their promise. They were the ones who had cold, unyielding hearts of stone.

The citizens of Jerusalem had enjoyed the privilege of being in a special relationship with the Living God. They had promised to obey Him. He had promised that if they did, He would take care of them. He had also promised that if they did not obey Him, they would be punished (Deuteronomy 28).

~Have you noticed the human tendency to accuse God of the faults that we have ourselves— for example, a lack of love, not paying attention or not keeping promises?

God had revealed his expectations to His people through the Ten Commandments. These basic instructions guided His people to live in harmony with each other. Every person was held responsible for their own actions. God commanded every person to love Him. Every person was expected to treat others the way they wished to be treated. Every person was responsible to ensure the rights of others

were upheld. It was radically fair. God's people had promised that they would obey these commands.

Carved in stone, these Ten Commandments were a reminder of the conditions God required if He was going to be in relationship with His people. The rules were uncompromising and unchanging, so it was fitting that they had been etched in stone.

Perhaps it was also appropriate that the rules were carved in stone for another reason—the people had hearts of stone. They needed to be commanded to do what was only in everyone's best interests.

~Find relief in Ezekiel 36:16-38.

**And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; and I will remove the heart of \_\_\_\_\_ from your flesh and give you a heart of \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Ezekiel 36:26 (ESV)**

~The first time the word "heart" is mentioned in Scripture, it occurs twice, describing both the human heart and the LORD's heart:

**The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.**

**Genesis 6:5-6 (NIV)**

~How does Genesis 6:5 describe human hearts?

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~How does Genesis 6:6 describe the LORD's heart?

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Ezekiel was learning that he did not have more compassion than the Sovereign LORD. He was not more tenderhearted than God. He only had a greater tolerance for sin. He had been content to look at outward appearances. He had protested God's judgment against evildoers. He had thought God was being too harsh—but God looked on the heart.

Sinners don't need outward ceremonial cleansing from an earthly priest. They need inward transformation. These people had broken the covenant etched on tables of stone because their hearts of stone were even harder. They had lost the protection of the Sovereign LORD and were facing His wrath. They needed a new covenant—a transformative covenant. They needed a new covenant etched into new hearts.

**This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.**

**Hebrews 8:10 (NIV)**



## 5.0 The Time Will Come (Listening Guide)

### Ezekiel 37:26-28, Our Covenant

1. I will make a covenant of peace with them.

The old covenant was \_\_\_\_\_.

The new covenant is \_\_\_\_\_.

A Change in Responsibility: Ezekiel 37:26, John 4:4-12

2. It will be an everlasting covenant with them.

The old covenant was \_\_\_\_\_.

The new covenant is \_\_\_\_\_.

A Change in Proximity: Ezekiel 37:26, John 4:13-14

3. I will establish them and increase them.

The old covenant brought \_\_\_\_\_.

The new covenant gives \_\_\_\_\_.

A Change in Vitality: Ezekiel 37:26, John 4:14



4.I will put my sanctuary within them forever.

The old covenant was \_\_\_\_\_.

The new covenant is \_\_\_\_\_.

A Change in Contingency: Ezekiel 37:26, John 4:15-17

5.My dwelling place will be upon them.

The old covenant was \_\_\_\_\_.

The new covenant is \_\_\_\_\_.

A Change in Locality: Ezekiel 37:27, John 4:19-24

6.I will be their God and they will be my people.

The old covenant was \_\_\_\_\_.

The new covenant is \_\_\_\_\_.

A Change in Community: Ezekiel 37:27, John 4:25-26

7. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD.

The old covenant was \_\_\_\_\_.

The new covenant is \_\_\_\_\_.

A Change in Testimony: Ezekiel 37:28, John 4:27-42

The time will come \_\_\_\_\_ it's \_\_\_\_\_ . John 4:23

## 5.1 Can These Bones Live?

~Triumph in Ezekiel 37:1-14.

The sun shone high above the valley. Ezekiel trudged along, forging himself a path. This grim walk revealed nothing but bones, bones, and more bones—human bones baking in the sun. These people had been dead for a long time, and they had not been properly buried.

It was eerie, standing on the abandoned battlefield. A violent struggle had taken place, that was obvious. Jumbled heaps of forgotten corpses lay in every direction. The valley revealed the gruesome evidence of the deadly fight. These were the losers, and there were a lot of them. The winner on this battlefield was Death.

This tour Ezekiel was on was different from the last one. Earlier, God had taken him to the temple at Jerusalem and forced him to watch a preview of the destruction of that city. He had heard the shouts of the executioners and cries of the people.

Here, there was silence. There was no opportunity to plead for the people or intervene as a priest. It was too late to cry out a warning, though he was the appointed watchman. These people were all dead. It was impossible to recognize a familiar face among the decomposed bodies. Death had utterly triumphed here.

The LORD's hand was upon Ezekiel. He had carried him here. He had caused him to walk around in the valley to view this devastation. Then God asked a question.

**He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones \_\_\_\_\_?"**

**Ezekiel 37:3a (NIV)**

Ezekiel hardly knew how to answer. Death had won so much already. His own wife had died suddenly. Death had ravaged Jerusalem. Reports had reached him of diseases that had swept through that starving city. Brutal Babylonian soldiers had conquered everyone who had survived the hardships of the siege. God had not protected them. Now God asked if this great army could live. Now?

~Has God ever shown up and given you a victory that you had given up on?

Ezekiel knew the previous tour of Jerusalem's destruction had only been a vision, but God was revealing a literal event through that vision and it had happened. Three years and four months later, Jerusalem fell, not in a vision, but in a pile of burning rubble. The vision of prophecy had become a fact of history.

Now Ezekiel toured this valley in the Spirit. By this great army of bones, God was revealing another literal event. He has plans to raise the dead—not in a dream, but through the literal, bodily resurrection of people who have died and decomposed.

God wanted Ezekiel to have confidence that the dead would be raised. He went to the trouble of carrying Ezekiel in the Spirit and setting him down in this valley. He instructed him to walk around and see how impossible the situation was. God questioned Ezekiel to test his faith, "Can these bones live?"

Ezekiel recorded what he had seen and heard, but he was about to get more involved. God was determined that this man understand His power to resurrect.

Belief in the resurrection is what empowered a few fishermen to turn the world upside down. Confidence in the resurrection stole the venom from the heart of Saul of Tarsus and turned him into Paul the Apostle. This is the faith that dried Mary's eyes and restored Lazarus to his sisters. This is the spark that ignites our lives ablaze.

~Place yourself along the following scales:

How confident are you in the literal bodily resurrection of believers?

Not Confident-----Extremely Confident

~How much does your confidence in the resurrection affect your daily life?

Does not affect my life-----Affects my entire life

**Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, ‘Dry bones, \_\_\_\_\_ the word of the LORD!’”**

**Ezekiel 37:4 (NIV)**

Maybe Ezekiel found this ironic. No one had paid attention while he had prophesied to the living. No one had listened—to the extent that he had resorted to miming and charades. Now he stood before a heap of lifeless bones, commanding them to listen. There was nothing he could do for this army. But Ezekiel obeyed.

Rattling commotion began, as every bone in the valley clattered against one another in a race to position. Femurs clambered to meet pelvic bones. Vertebrae snapped into line. Shoulder blades clapped on to clavicles. Skulls thudded into place. Arm bones, wrists and knuckles swirled past toe and ankle bones to assemble. Each jumbled pile surged to form a distinct human frame. Reorganizing themselves, the bones settled back down. Not a single rib lay loose in the valley.

Tendons and ligaments began to wrap around each skeleton. Ezekiel stared as flesh filled out each form. Foreheads, eye lids and cheeks filled out over the head of each skeleton. Miraculous, but it was still not enough. The army lay quietly again on the valley floor. They had faces now, but they were pale and still.

Prophecy to the wind? He had just prophesied to an old pile of bones, and they had listened. Now he was going to tell the wind how to behave? Ezekiel prophesied as he was commanded. The wind swept over the army. The heavenly breeze filled their lungs. They were revived. The overthrown army was back from the dead. Standing on their feet, they were ready to fight again. The arrogant enemy Death should be afraid.

**Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open  
\_\_\_\_\_ graves and bring \_\_\_\_\_ up from them.**

**Ezekiel 37:13 (NIV)**

~Although it seems out of character for Ezekiel, he has given no time stamp or date reference to this vision of resurrection. Do you find it interesting, or do you have any theories about why he did not? (Consider 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2)

Someday soon, the Commander's trumpet will sound a final call. The army of believers on earth, whether alive or sleeping in Jesus—all will be called to assemble. Even those who have been long dead, whether their bodies had been buried or unburied, whether they had been martyrs or lukewarm disciples—all who have turned to God in faith will respond to the summons to rise.

**In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.**

**I Corinthians 15:52 (ESV)**

## 5.2 He Took Me There

By the time Ezekiel received his final vision, fifty years had passed since the Book of the Law had been rediscovered and Huldah had warned the citizens of Jerusalem of their doom. King Jehoiachin had been locked in a Babylonian dungeon for half of that time and the city of Jerusalem lay in a heap.

With no temple to return to, the priesthood had disbanded. The elders of Judah had become weary and disappointed. Ezekiel had been serving as a prophet in enemy territory for more than twenty years.

Ezekiel had seen some difficult days during his career as a prophet. He had been reduced at times to communicating God's message of judgment only through charades. He had struggled over loyalty to the LORD and his love for his people. He had witnessed the mayhem of the temple vision and judgment upon his colleagues.

There had been a lot of socially awkward, boundary-pushing messages from God that he had been forced to share publicly with others. There had been uncomfortable restrictions and many hardships. And then there was the day his wife had died...

Although the years had been difficult, there were radiant visions of Glory along the way. The Cherubim and the heavenly throne room framed by the vaulted crystal sky; nothing really compared to that. Getting his voice back and knowing that he was participating in the divine program had been reassuring. The sight of the valley of dry bones coming back to life, while the wind rushed against his face—these were experiences he could not have had while safely home in Jerusalem.

~You have arrived at Ezekiel 40:1-4.

**In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the fall of the city—on that very day, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ was on me and he took me there.**

**Ezekiel 40:1 (NIV)**

This was the hand of the LORD that had held Ezekiel from the beginning of his prophetic service until now. This powerful grasp had prevented him from making poor choices; it had helped him surmount obstacles and find his way through the messy, painful experiences of his life. Through tragedy and disaster, this hand had sustained him. In the face of the overwhelming Glory of God, this hand had strengthened and comforted him. It had steadied him. The hand of the LORD had kept him on course, and it had brought him here.

~Have another look at the first three verses of Ezekiel 40:

**In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the fall of the city—on that very day the hand of the LORD was on me and \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. In visions of God \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, and I saw a man whose appearance was like bronze; he was standing in the gateway with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand.**

**Ezekiel 40:1-3 (NIV)**

Ezekiel knew exactly how he had arrived at this breathtaking city. He was conscious that he could never have found this place on his own. It was not a place he was familiar with. Hand in hand, he had been brought here by the LORD.

~Can you remember experiences or times in your life when you knew the hand of the LORD was holding you?

~Have yet one more look at the first verse of this stunning chapter.

**In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the fall of the city—  
\_\_\_\_\_ the hand  
of the LORD was on me and he took me there.**

**Ezekiel 40:1 (NIV)**

Ezekiel had a habit of marking the date. It was helpful to know when things happened; it kept an orderly chronology and provided a frame of reference. This is the last time he would record a time stamp, and Ezekiel found this occasion remarkable.

This was the very day—the anniversary—that Joshua had led the people of God across the Jordan river into the Promised Land. Joshua and the Israelite army's entrance into the glorious new territory is a riveting story which you can read about in Joshua 3-4. (The date stamp is given in Joshua 4:19).

Arriving at this new place, on the very anniversary of the entry into the Promised Land, Ezekiel had a magnificent view from the peak of a towering mountain.



This tour of this new territory was not going to be vague and ill defined. God was not transporting him to some misty, floating, heavenly vision. This new Promised Land was a high definition, solid, tangible place—a city.

~Revelation 21-22 describes heaven as a “Holy City”. Do you have any impressions or expectations of what that city will be like?

Visions were symbolic, Ezekiel knew that by now. He had lost his beloved city, but God was showing him a new city where people would live and worship together. If this was a city, then it must have been a place that shared a fellowship center and a common defense. The grand metropolis stretched out ahead, waiting to be explored.

**Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.  
Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has  
prepared a city for them.**

**Hebrews 11:16 (NIV)**



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## 5.3 Standing in the Gateway

Ezekiel had arrived in the land of Israel, but it looked nothing like the home he remembered. A magnificent city stood on the tallest of mountains. Standing in the gateway, his tour guide was waiting to guide him through a tour of God's new city and new sanctuary. This Man, standing in the gateway as He was, clearly controlled access to this magnificent place. He was ready to take Ezekiel on the final vision-tour.

~ "Look carefully, listen closely and pay attention to everything" in Ezekiel 40.

**He took me there, and behold, *there was* a man whose appearance was like the appearance of \_\_\_\_\_. He had a line of flax and a \_\_\_\_\_ rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway.**

**Ezekiel 40:3 (NKJV)**

Ezekiel stopped and stared at the Man in front of him. This was the Sovereign LORD whose voice he had heard when he first saw the vision of Glory. This majestic Man had been seated upon a throne in the first vision by the banks of the Chebar River. On fire from the waist up and on fire from the waist down, this Man had terrified Ezekiel when he had first spoken to him (Ezekiel 1:27).

The second time Ezekiel had seen this Man, there had been a slight difference. He was still on fire from the waist down, but He had glowed like molten metal from the waist up (Ezekiel 8:2). On that occasion, He had dragged Ezekiel by the hair to witness the violations in the temple at Jerusalem.

Now standing before Ezekiel, this Man who had spoken to him was no longer so terrifying. The intense heat of the flames had died down and the molten metal had cooled. Now Ezekiel could see that the Man gleamed like polished bronze. This was the same Man who had instructed him and whose hand had held him.

Ezekiel might have expected that when the flames died down, the Man of molten metal would have cooled to reveal a solid gold. This Man was clearly supreme in this city—He had occupied the throne in the first vision and now here He stood in the gateway of this new city (Ezekiel 1:26-27). This visual representation of the Sovereign LORD would have suited a royal display of glittering gold.

Silver was another metal that the subsiding flames could have revealed. The fierce presence of the Sovereign LORD could have cooled to a gleaming silver. Silver was the currency of the sanctuary and of redemption (Numbers 3:50). Ezekiel's own prophecy had mentioned the purity of silver (Ezekiel 22:18-22). But the Sovereign LORD did not appear like silver, to conduct Ezekiel through this new city.

Strangely, the Man who stood in the gateway did not appear as gold or silver, but as polished bronze. Bronze was a metal that was valued for its strength and its ability to withstand heat. This Man's appearance resembled burnished bronze, like the altar that had stood in the temple court and bore the flames of sacrifice night and day. Bronze like the serpent that Moses had raised up on a pole in the wilderness. Bronze like the pillars of strength that had stood at the temple's entrance in Jerusalem. (Exodus 27:1-2; Numbers 21:9, 1 Kings 7:41-47)

Now that the fire had died out, Ezekiel could see that the Sovereign LORD had not consisted of fire—a symbol of God's wrath. Rather, this Man had been the One to endure the fierce heat of the fire of God's wrath. This Man had, like bronze, withstood the heat. Now that the flames had gone out, He stood before Ezekiel as though He was made of glowing bronze.

~Would you be able to explain to Ezekiel why the Sovereign LORD appeared as this bronze Man who had withstood the heat of the flames? What would you tell him about Jesus?

This bronze Man had not arrived empty handed to conduct Ezekiel on the final tour. He was holding a rope for measuring longer distances and a measuring rod for measuring shorter ones. Instead of exhibiting any wickedness taking place in this new city, the bronze Man was intent on showing Ezekiel how perfect everything was built. Everything measured up precisely to the rod in the Man's hand.

It was a good thing that this Man was measuring everything Himself, and that He was content with what He measured. He was measuring a lot. He was measuring more than anyone else in Scripture had ever measured. He was measuring more than everyone else in Scripture had ever measured all put together. And everything He measured was measuring up perfectly. Everything was coming out equal, with "the same measurements." The bronze Man must have built this perfect place Himself.

Ezekiel noticed that the measuring rod the bronze Man held was not the standard size. It was a six-cubit measuring rod, yes, but the cubits were longer than a standard human cubit. A cubit is a measurement based on the human body taken from the elbow to the tip of the tallest finger.

A standard cubit is equal to six handbreadths—another measurement based on the human body—the distance across the base of all four fingers when held together. (If you measure the base of your four fingers against your forearm from elbow to fingertip, you will likely find it fits six times.) But this measuring rod was six *long* cubits—seven handbreadths each. The bronze Man's measuring rod was longer than anyone else's would have been. No ordinary person—on their own—would be able to measure up against this Man's rod.

~ Ephesians 4 tells us that the Sovereign LORD has been building the new sanctuary, the church (His body), and how it will come out measured perfectly:

**And it was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for works of ministry and to \_\_\_\_\_ up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, as we mature to the full \_\_\_\_\_ of the stature of Christ.**

**Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)**

~Which preview of God's Son in Ezekiel's prophecy (listed) appeals to you the most? Why?

The Cherubim/The Living One(s)—the righteous character of Jesus of Nazareth

The Man in Linen—Jesus, our Great High Priest who intercedes for us

The Watchman—who takes responsibility to warn us of judgment to come

The Bronze Man—the triumphant Savior who bore the heat of God's wrath

The Good/Great Shepherd—who tenderly cares for the flock Himself

The Sovereign LORD—Jesus, the King of Heaven and the great "I AM"

The Son of Man—Jesus, the obedient, fully human, suffering Servant

**His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.**

**Revelation 1:15 (NIV)**

## 5.4 The Place of My Throne

In and out, all over the courts of the sanctuary, Ezekiel explored the grandeur of this visionary temple. The walls surrounding the complex were so thick, no enemy could possibly penetrate them. With multiple checkpoints, no unauthorized visitors would ever gain access. This new city was a magnificent fortress.

Ezekiel had learned that there would be priests once more, and sacrifices. There would be festivals again—celebrations! The people of God would worship in freedom. The land of inheritance would be restored, larger than before. Everything would be safe and secure. Everything would be better than it had been.

~He's coming! He's coming! Go ahead and read Ezekiel 43:1-12.

The Glory of the God of Israel descended upon the new city. It was the Living One that Ezekiel had first seen by the bank of the Chebar River, the same Cherubim that departed from the rebellious city. He was back.

Drumroll not required; His voice was like the noise of many waters. Fireworks would be irrelevant; the whole earth was alight with His glory. The Glory of the Living God arrived to take His place in the new temple.

**The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of the LORD \_\_\_\_\_ the temple.**

**Ezekiel 43:4-5 (NIV)**

The captivating beauty of the Glory of the LORD that had appeared to him by the River Chebar had returned. Ezekiel had been forced to behold the same Glory departing from Jerusalem, departing from the temple. It had been a painful sight, but God's presence could not remain in such a wicked environment (Ezekiel 8-11).

Ezekiel had been learning that God had better plans for His Glory to dwell with His people. He was planning something better than resting in a portable tent or a crumbling city, better than to be worshipped by people who were subject to death and sin. The Sovereign LORD's worship would be perfectly restored, and Ezekiel was getting a preview. This was the new place for God's presence to reside among His people in holiness forever.

**While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my \_\_\_\_\_ and the place for the soles of my \_\_\_\_\_. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.**

**Ezekiel 43:6-7a (NIV)**

~This new place was not only God's throne, but it was also His footstool. Using the following references, fill in the place of God's throne and the place of his footstool: Isaiah 66:1, Psalm 99:5; Psalm 132:7.

~ \_\_\_\_\_ is God's throne.

~ \_\_\_\_\_ is His footstool.

If this place was both the throne of God and His footstool, then it must be heaven and earth at the same time—heaven on earth. The two spheres of heaven and

earth had always been separated. They had to be. Humans could not just live freely with a holy God.<sup>22</sup>

Ezekiel knew well that sacred spaces had to be approached with care. It had been his job as priest, showing people how to approach God's footstool at Jerusalem. From this final vision, Ezekiel learned that this new Promised Land would no longer require a link between the two spheres. The new heavens and the new earth would be one united place—a beautiful, heavenly city.

**This is the law of the temple: \_\_\_\_\_ the surrounding area on top of the mountain will be \_\_\_\_\_. Such is the law of the temple.**

**Ezekiel 43:12 (NIV)**

Ezekiel was standing inside the exclusive Most Holy Place? But what about that inaccessible throne room of God? Wasn't the Most Holy Place forbidden without strict attention to protocol? How had Ezekiel not been struck dead? He had not brought a sacrifice or incense. He was not the High Priest.

So, this was the meaning of the spectacular city—the whole mountaintop, the entire place was Most Holy. It was the place where humans could enjoy direct access to God forever. Would the exiles ever believe him? He could hardly blame them if they thought he was crazy when he explained it all.

It was undeserved; that was for sure. God's people had forfeited His presence, even with the restraints provided by the priesthood, the blood of bulls and lambs, and all the fragrant, burning incense. Ritual observances had not been enough to maintain

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<sup>22</sup> G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 218.



God's presence, even in a limited way. Yet, here was the Glory of God, the Living Cherubim, guardian of God's Glory, out here, visible—accessible to anyone.

God did not change. Yet something was different. Somehow God's righteous requirements of holiness had been met. Somehow humanity had obtained purification from sin.

~Would you be able to explain to Ezekiel what had taken place to allow God's presence to live, unrestricted, with humanity? (Consider John 14:1-3, 23)

**For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."**

**2 Corinthians 6:16b (NIV)**



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## 5.5 The Name of That City

~Refresh yourself with Ezekiel 47:1-12.

Exploring the new city, it was impossible not to make comparisons to the old city and the temple in Jerusalem. Among other things missing in this new temple complex, there were no bronze wash basins. The huge bronze pool and the sinks for ritual cleansings that had stood in the old temple courtyard had not been upgraded. They were missing completely. In fact, the only bronze in this entire complex that Ezekiel had observed had been the bronze Man.

Although the washbasins and the bronze sea were missing, it wasn't that water was absent. Ezekiel observed a stream coming out from under the east door of the house. How odd. There must have been a water source overflowing somewhere inside the middle of the temple.

The trickle of water that had been coming out from under the east door of the house must have flowed through the temple courts. The water continued through the outer court and all the way out of the temple grounds. Outside the temple area, Ezekiel could follow the trickle of water downstream.

As the bronze Man led Ezekiel downstream, He measured one thousand cubits with the measuring cord in His hand. The trickle had swelled into water that came up to Ezekiel's ankles. He measured another thousand cubits downstream leading Ezekiel through water that came up to his knees. Another thousand cubits and the waters deepened again. The Man led Ezekiel through waters that rose to his waist. The swelling stream had become a mighty river. Another thousand cubits and Ezekiel could not have crossed the river. No one could cross such a mighty river. He would have had to swim.

The flow of water must have cooled and soothed Ezekiel's parched skin. If he floated along in the refreshing river, his body would be buoyed up. The current could carry him, and he could let his weight be pulled along without any effort. With the dust washed from his eyes, Ezekiel would be invigorated. This was no ordinary water, this was living water, healing water. It was flowing from the temple mountaintop to give life to the whole earth.

Climbing back up on the bank of the River of Life, Ezekiel could find deep rest. The Glory of the LORD was here to stay. There would be no more separation from God's presence. No more divine abandonment. No more sin. The healing waters may have dripped from his head and down his beard. If tears streamed down his face, it would be impossible to tell.

Ezekiel could lay aside his heavy prophet cloak, drenched from the river. He would not be needing that old cloak anymore. He was heading back into the temple to put on clean linen garments and get started on the priestly life he had longed for.

It was like the fifth day of creation. On the fifth day, before people had arrived, the waters had brought forth abundant life (Genesis 1:20-23). When Ezekiel had first seen the Glory of the LORD, back on a very different riverbank, it had also been the fifth day (Ezekiel 1:1-2). Back then, Ezekiel had sat by the Chebar River in Babylon, losing all hope that God had a plan. Here, he sat by the River of Life with God's magnificent plan unfolding before him.

As the Glory radiated from the temple Ezekiel must have felt the weight of his world lift. This new place held the promise of the ultimate plan, of Glory and of Life. It was like the original creation. Except this was the new creation. The fifth day of the original creation had come right before the final act of creation—the fifth day had held so much anticipation and promise. This preview he was getting was like the fifth day of the new creation—right before the final work was completed.

~What do you imagine Ezekiel's feelings are at this point, near the end of this final tour of God's Glory returning? Why do you think he felt this way?

The stream flowing from the temple was living water; it was impossible for this river not to support vibrant life. Schools of fish would thrive in these waters. Swarms of all kinds of living creatures would flourish here. There would be no more barrenness. Fishermen would be able to fish here always. It was just so vibrant with life. There would be no more hunger and no more thirst—no more deprivation.

On either side of the River of Life, were Trees of Life. Their leaves would never die, their fruit would never fail. They could never wither, nourished by living water. These trees would be for healing and sustaining. And remarkably, no one was guarding access to these Trees of Life as there had been when God's first paradise had been violated (Genesis 3:22). They would have continuous access to the healing power of the Trees of Life—there would be no more pain and no more death.

No Cherubim stood with a flaming sword, to guard the entrance to this magnificent place, as there had been in Eden long ago (Genesis 3:24). There was no longer a need to wield that sword because this was the new paradise of God that could never be violated. The Cherubim had returned to rest, not to wield a flaming sword. In this perfect place there could be no more sin and no more separation.

This whole mountaintop was the new garden sanctuary. Anyone who gained access to the city with its river and trees, would also have access to God's presence. Everyone who entered would be in the Most Holy Place—as though this was to be a whole kingdom full of priests. No more restrictions or exclusions.

It was so spacious and perfect in this new city, there was room for everyone. Inheritances were going to be distributed, and justice administered. Everyone would

have a portion (Ezekiel 45-48). There would be equity here forever—no more scarcity and no more oppression.

The Glory had arrived. There was still much of the city left to explore. It was so well defended with its thick walls and gateways. Ezekiel no longer needed to fear an enemy invasion—there would be no more exile. And yet, there were many gates to this glorious place, he was free to come and go—he would suffer no more captivity.

Everything about this place was so free, so fair, so abundant and so vibrant. This was only a vision, but it would happen soon. Ezekiel had been learning that some visions held more reality than even some experiences.

Ezekiel had known the devastating loss of God's presence once, but he would never have to feel that pain again. Others might call this wonderful new place the Celestial City or New Jerusalem or Mount Zion. That was fine, they could call it what they wanted to. Ezekiel knew what he was going to call the city.

**... and the name of that city from that time on shall be,**

**The \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_."**

**Ezekiel 48:35b (ESV)**



## 6.0 From That Time On (Listening Guide)

### Ezekiel 40-48 Our Future

The question should be: \_\_\_\_\_?

In Scripture, temples represent the \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>23</sup>

Hebrews 8:5

“Zadok” means \_\_\_\_\_.

### 1 Peter 2:9 A Chosen People-Nearness

1.As descendants of Zadok, we have a place

\_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 40:45-46, John 14:1-2

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>23</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 32-33.

## **A Royal Priesthood-Status**

2.As descendants of Zadok, we are

\_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 43:19, (Leviticus 8), John 15:3, Hebrews 10:19-22

## **A Holy Nation-Fellowship**

3.As descendants of Zadok, we are

\_\_\_\_\_.

Ezekiel 44:15, Hebrews 13:14-16

## **God's Special Possession-Reward**

4.As descendants of Zadok, we have

\_\_\_\_\_our full inheritance.

Ezekiel 48:11-12, 1 Corinthians 4:8a, Romans 8:32

From that time on \_\_\_\_\_.

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