

Visions of Glory

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Ezekiel

This inductive Bible study is designed for individual, small group, or classroom use. A leader's guide with full lesson plans and the answers to the Bible study questions is available from Regular Baptist Press. Order RBP0016 online at www.regularbaptistpress.org, e-mail orders@rbpstore.org, call toll-free 1-800-727-4440, or contact your distributor.

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The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

VISIONS OF GLORY: EZEKIEL

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Preface

For many, the book of Ezekiel is like a 5,000-piece puzzle. They might have all the pieces, but they've lost the lid of the box, which contains the picture of the puzzle. As they look at the pieces, they are baffled. How will they ever put the puzzle together?

You will find that the book is simply designed. The prophet Ezekiel was ministering to the Jewish exiles in Babylon while God was chastising His sinning people. Ezekiel ministered at the same time that Daniel began to serve King Nebuchadnezzar in the courts of Babylon and that Jeremiah spoke God's word in Jerusalem.

The word that Ezekiel spoke had a context. Part of the context was God's covenant with His people; the other part was the over 800 years of Hebrew history between the giving of the covenant and Ezekiel's ministry. These contexts will help us understand Ezekiel. They're like the missing box lid of the puzzle.

The time you spend in Ezekiel will enrich your spiritual life. The book will deeply impress upon you the seriousness of sin and God's judgment on those who persist in it. You will grow in your knowledge of God's glory as you see both His justice and His amazing grace clearly illustrated.

Lesson 1

Lord, I Want to Know You

Studying God's Word draws us closer to Him.

Overview of Ezekiel

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3).

This is going to hurt me more than it will hurt you."
"I am only doing this because I love you."

Perhaps your parents said these phrases or something similar to them right before they disciplined you. Maybe you have used these phrases too when you have had to discipline a child.

These phrases will probably be repeated in some form for generations to come, because children learn them during times of heightened awareness and then remember them when they go to discipline their children.

Disciplining should hurt both the person receiving it and the person giving it. As God dealt with His erring people, He disciplined them out of love as a means to restore them to Himself. He didn't enjoy disciplining them any more than a parent enjoys disciplining children.

Getting Started

1. When you were a child, how did you feel when your parents

repeatedly warned you about your behavior and then caught you in a major disobedience?

2. How do parents feel when they must discipline a disobedient child?

Searching the Scriptures

Knowing and obeying God was imperative for the Hebrews in Ezekiel's day, and it is still imperative for believers today. The book of Ezekiel reveals God to His people. In particular, the book covers three topics about God: God reveals Himself, God judges sin, and God restores His people.

3. What does it mean to "know" God?

4. Why do we need to know God fully?

God Revealed in His Word

Gaining a greater knowledge of our God should be a powerful motivation for studying Ezekiel. He reveals Himself in interesting ways through Ezekiel's messages.

5. Read Ezekiel 1:1–3. What do you learn about Ezekiel the man?

6. How did God reveal His word and will to Ezekiel?

The timing (the beginning of Ezekiel's priesthood), the place (in captivity in Babylon), and the means of God's revelation to Ezekiel (visions)—these three elements provide the keys to effectively study the book of Ezekiel.

As he began his book, Ezekiel left no room for questioning the source of his prophecy. In verse 1, Ezekiel unveiled his major theme: revealing God. In verse 3, he asserted that the hand of the Lord was upon him, and he revealed his authority to teach and preach. Ezekiel's words and actions resulted from God's work in his life. Ezekiel knew God personally.

7. How does personally knowing God affect you when you read the Bible, God's written revelation?

The Word of God is special revelation. It reveals God's person. The Word moves us beyond knowledge that God exists to knowledge of the God Who exists.

Now that the Scripture is complete, it is sufficient revelation for all the needs of our lives (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). We must simply obey the Word of God that we have received. We must go to the Word to learn about God.

God Revealed by His Word

The Bible is the written Word of God and the revelation of God. What does the Word—which reveals God—reveal *about* Him?

The Bible shows that God is the ruling God. When Ezekiel wrote that he was “among the captives [exiles] by the river of Chebar,” he revealed how God was working out His plan to purify Israel. God's people should have been in God's land, enjoying God's blessing. Instead, they were out of God's land, under God's judgment. This fact is essential to understanding the book of Ezekiel. How could such judgment take place? To find the answer, we must think through some central Old Testament truths.

8. Read Genesis 12:1–3. Identify the three elements of God’s covenant with Abraham.

The Old Testament details God’s work with His people in light of the Abrahamic Covenant. In fact, His program here on earth focuses on the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.

The book of Deuteronomy is the covenant that God made with Abraham’s descendants, the nation of Israel.

9. Read Deuteronomy 7:6–11. Identify Israel’s responsibility toward that covenant.

If Israel didn’t live up to her responsibility, God’s plan also included the possibility of terrible chastisement and judgment.

10. Read Exodus 20:1–3. What is the first of the Ten Commandments?

11. Why would God give that particular command?

12. Why is idolatry, or the worship of anyone or anything other than God, an offense to God?

13. How do you react when someone disobeys you?

14. Skim through Deuteronomy 28:15–25, 32–37 and identify some of the things God said would happen if Israel disobeyed Him.

The first of the Ten Commandments tells of the uniqueness and singularity of God. He is the only God, and therefore He must be the sole object of worship (Deut. 5:6–8). Idolatry amounts to rejection of God. It allows another to be in His rightful place. For such foolish disobedience, God promised to chastise His people (Deut. 28:15–68).

The Bible also shows that God would graciously turn from judgment and restore His people when they repented. However, stiff-necked resistance to God would bring about the worst chastisement—captivity in a foreign land. The ten tribes that made up the Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been scattered in God’s judgment (2 Kings 17:7–23).

15. If you had lived in the Southern Kingdom, would the captivity of the Northern Kingdom have taught you anything? If so, what? Why?

16. Why is it so hard for us to obey God’s commands, especially when we see the consequences of others’ disobedience?

The Southern Kingdom, Judah, had not learned from the chastisement of the Northern Kingdom. Their sins brought them to captivity too (2 Kings 25). Thus we find Ezekiel in exile among them in Babylon by the Chebar River.

The only God—Who has revealed Himself in His Word—had fulfilled His Word by judging His people. His judgment was in accord with His Word, yet He did not abandon His people. He ministered His Word to them through His prophet. The God Who judges is also the God Who longs to restore His people if only they will submit to Him.

17. Do you agree that God always punishes sin? Why or why not?

The Sin of Judah

Although God judges sin, He is gracious and gives repeated warnings before He judges. Ezekiel recounted God's gracious work with sinners. He both spoke and exemplified God's word. Ezekiel himself was actually one of the communication tools that God used to present His love and grace to needy sinners.

The truth that we worship a God Who is willing to judge sin is sobering. On the one hand, God's judgment calls lost sinners to repent. On the other, it calls God's people to purity (1 Peter 4:17).

For those who have trusted Christ for salvation, God's judgment does not carry the threat of Hell. The believer's sins have been fully dealt with at the cross (Rom. 8:1). However, believers may be chastised by God for sin.

18. Read Hebrews 12:5–15. Why does God chasten His children?

19. How should a believer respond to God's chastening?

20. What is the goal of God's chastening?

21. What profit comes from this loving chastening?

Ezekiel was a righteous man, but he still had to live through the

judgment that God brought on the unbelieving nation. This judgment, though painful, drew him closer to God.

The Sin of the Nations

The nations around Israel knew about God because of their involvement with Israel. They should have submitted to Him, but they did not. Ezekiel preached God's plans for judgment on the nations, first on those closest to Judah and then on those at a distance.

In each case God revealed the nation's need to repent of specific sins. God knew the situation of each sinning group and called them to repentance based on their offenses.

Though sinners bear the responsibility for their behavior, Ezekiel revealed that the Devil is God's adversary and the moving force behind the nations who oppose God's plan. John recorded that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," or in the grip of the wicked one (1 John 5:19).

God Restores His People

Both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom succumbed to wickedness. Judgment followed. But Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel prophesied the promise of restoration based on God's unconditional covenant with Abraham. God will bring all the promises of the covenant to fulfillment in His way and in His time. Even though His people were in exile (1:1–3), He could present the promise of restoration to them.

When Israel comes to genuine spiritual life, she can be fully restored to the land and receive the promises of God's covenant. A rebuilt temple during Christ's Millennial Kingdom will provide a place for the people to offer memorial offerings to God. In this way they will celebrate and remember God's great work on their behalf.

Worship ought to be the result of a true knowledge of God. The "God-ward" focus of Israel's worship in the Millennium provides a thought-provoking example for the church. True worship turns attention from the individual and exalts in God.

Ezekiel's writing is part of God's plan to thoroughly furnish us unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:17). However, we are God's church, not Israel, so we must apply Ezekiel in a way that is consistent with our dispensation.

We can identify a number of similarities between our situation and Ezekiel's. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came to God by faith, just as we do. Their sins were washed away by the blood of Christ, just as ours are (Rom. 3:23–26). They lived with a goal of holiness and were sustained and guided by the Word of God. They enjoyed a rich spiritual life. In these and other ways, Israel's life parallels the church's life. However, similarity is not identity.

22. What are some obvious distinctions between Israel and the church?

The church is not Israel. It is made up of people living around the world from all nations and races. We do not share the genetic code of Abraham to tie us together. Instead, we are a part of the Body of Christ, related to the Head of the Body, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18–20).

The New Testament Scripture is our detailed plan for ministry in the Body while the Old Testament is both a guide and an encouragement. As we apply the book of Ezekiel to ourselves, we cannot join Israel in claiming the national promises, but we can grow in holiness.

We can learn the incomparability of God from the first three chapters, and God's judgment of sin should convict our hearts, identifying needs in our own lives. God's future restoration of Israel reveals that we have the opportunity of renewed fellowship with God on the personal level after we confess our sin.

Making It Personal

23. Will you commit to studying the book of Ezekiel regularly? If so, set an appointment and record it where you normally record your appointments.

24. Do you have any idols—things that replace God in your affections, time, spending, etc.? Confess your idolatry to God and ask Him to reveal Himself to you through Ezekiel in ways that will help you put Him first.

25. Memorize 2 Peter 1:3.