

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

EZEKIEL

*He trusted in the Lord,
and the Lord gave him strength,
courage, and faithfulness.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

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NAVPRESS 

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Ezekiel

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Along with all the volumes in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies, this guide to Ezekiel shares common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding, plus a thirst to return to Ezekiel throughout your life.
2. To give you study patterns and skills that help you explore every part of the Bible.
3. To offer you historical background, word definitions, and explanation notes to aid your study.
4. To help you grasp as a whole the message of Ezekiel.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

As you begin

This guide includes twelve lessons that will take you chapter by chapter through all of Ezekiel. Each lesson is designed to take from one to two hours of preparation to complete on your own. To benefit most from this time, here's a good way to begin your work on each lesson:

1. Pray for God's help to keep you mentally alert and spiritually sensitive.
2. Read attentively the entire passage mentioned in the lesson's title. (You may want to read the passage from two or more Bible versions—perhaps at least once from a more literal translation such as the New International Version, English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, or New King James Version and perhaps once more in a paraphrase such as *The Message* or the New Living Translation.) Do your reading in an environment that's as free as possible from distractions. Allow your mind and heart to meditate on the words you encounter—words that are God's personal gift to you and to all His people.

After reading the passage, you're ready to dive into the numbered questions in this guide that make up the main portion of each lesson. Each of

these questions is followed by blank space for writing your answers. (This act of writing your answers helps clarify your thinking and stimulates your mental engagement with the passage as well as your later recall.) Use extra paper or a notebook if the space for recording your answers seems too cramped. Continue through the questions in numbered order. If any question seems too difficult or unclear, just skip it and go on to the next.

Each of these questions will typically direct you back to Ezekiel to look again at a certain portion of the assigned passage for that lesson. (At this point, be sure to use a more literal Bible translation rather than a paraphrase.)

As you look closer at a passage, it's helpful to approach it in this progression:

Observe. What does the passage actually *say*? Ask God to help you see it clearly. Notice everything that's there.

Interpret. What does the passage *mean*? Ask God to help you understand. And remember that any passage's meaning is fundamentally determined by its *context*. So stay alert to all you'll see about the setting and background of Ezekiel, and keep thinking of this book as a whole while you proceed through it chapter by chapter. You'll be progressively building up your insights and familiarity with what it's all about.

Apply. Keep asking yourself, *How does this truth affect my life?* (Pray for God's help as you examine yourself in light of that truth and in light of His purpose for each passage.)

Try to consciously follow all three of these steps as you shape your written answer to each question in the lesson.

The extras

In addition to the regular numbered questions you see in this guide, each lesson also offers several "optional" questions or suggestions that appear in the margins. All of these will appear under one of three headings:

Optional Application. These are suggested options for application. Consider these with prayerful sensitivity to the Lord's guidance.

For Thought and Discussion. Many of these questions address various ethical issues and other biblical principles that lead to a wide range of implications. They tend to be particularly suited for group discussion.

For Further Study. These often include cross-references to other parts of the Bible that shed light on a topic in the lesson, plus questions that delve deeper into the passage.

(For additional help for more effective Bible study, refer to the "Study Aids" section starting on page 187.)

Changing your life

Don't let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as *God's Word* and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, "Lord, what do You want me to notice here?" "Father, why is this true?" "Lord, how does my life measure up to this?"

Let biblical truth sink into your inner convictions so you'll be increasingly able to act on this truth as a natural way of living.

At times, you may want to consider memorizing a certain verse or passage you come across in your study, one that particularly challenges or encourages you. To help with that, write down the words on a card to keep with you and set aside a few minutes each day to think about the passage. Recite it to yourself repeatedly, always thinking about its meaning. Return to it as often as you can, for a brief review. You'll soon find the words coming to mind spontaneously, and they'll begin to affect your motives and actions.

For group study

Exploring Scripture together in a group is especially valuable for the encouragement, support, and accountability it provides as you seek to apply God's Word to your lives. Together you can listen jointly for God's guidance, pray for each other, help one another resist temptation, and share the spiritual principles you're learning to put into practice. Together you affirm that growing in faith, hope, and love is important and that you need each other in the process.

A group of four to ten people allows for the closest understanding of each other and the richest discussions in Bible study, but you can adapt this guide for groups of other sizes. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, and church classes. Both new and mature Christians will benefit from the guide, regardless of their previous experience in Bible study.

Aim for a positive atmosphere of acceptance, honesty, and openness. In your first meeting, explore candidly everyone's expectations and goals for your time together.

A typical schedule for group study is to take one lesson per week, but feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or omit some questions in a lesson if your preparation or discussion time is limited. (Group members can always study further on their own at a later time.)

When you come together, you probably won't have time to discuss all the questions in the lesson, so it's helpful for the leader to choose ahead of time the ones to be covered thoroughly. This is one of the main responsibilities a group leader typically assumes.

Each lesson in this guide ends with a section called "For the group." It gives advice for that particular lesson on how to focus the discussion, how to apply the lesson to daily life, and so on. Reading each lesson's "For the group" section ahead of time can help the leader be more effective in guiding the group.

You'll get the greatest benefit from your time together if each group member also prepares ahead of time by writing out his or her answers to each question in the lesson. The private reflection and prayer this preparation can stimulate will be especially important in helping everyone discern how God wants to apply each lesson to your daily lives.

There are many ways to structure the group meeting, and you may want to vary your routine occasionally to help keep things fresh.

Here are some of the elements you can consider including as you come together for each lesson:

Pray together. It's good to pause for prayer as you begin your time together as well as to incorporate a later more extensive time of prayer for each other, after you've had time to share personal needs and prayer requests (you may want to write these down in a notebook). When you begin with prayer, it's worthwhile and honoring to God to ask especially for His Holy Spirit's guidance of your time together.

Worship. Some groups like to sing together and worship God with prayers of praise.

Review. You may want to take time to discuss what difference the previous week's lesson has made in your lives as well as recall the major emphasis you discovered in the passage for that week.

Read the passage aloud. Once you're ready to focus attention together on the assigned Scripture passage in the week's lesson, read it aloud. (One person could do this, or the reading could be shared.)

Open up for questions. Allow time for group members to mention anything in the passage they may have particular questions about.

Summarize the passage. Have one or two people offer a summary of what the passage says.

Discuss. This will be the heart of your time together and will likely take the biggest portion of your time. Focus on the questions you see as the most important and most helpful. Allow and encourage everyone to be part of the discussion for each question. You may want to take written notes as the discussion proceeds. Ask follow-up questions to sharpen your attention and deepen your understanding of what you discuss. You may want to give special attention to the questions in the margins under the heading "For Thought and Discussion." Remember that sometimes these can be especially good for discussion, but be prepared for widely differing answers and opinions. As you hear each other, keep in mind each other's various backgrounds, personalities, and ways of thinking. You can practice godly discernment without ungodly judgment in your discussion.

Encourage further personal study. You can find more opportunities for exploring this lesson's themes and issues under the heading "For Further Study" in the margins throughout the lesson. You can also pursue some of these together during your group time.

Focus on application. Look especially at the "Optional Application" listed in the margins throughout the lesson. Keep encouraging one another in the continual work of adjusting your lives to the truths God gives in Scripture.

Summarize your discoveries. You may want to read aloud through the passage one last time together, using the opportunity to solidify your understanding and appreciation of it and clarify how the Lord is speaking to you through it.

Look ahead. Glance together at the headings and questions in the next lesson to see what's coming next.

Give thanks to God. It's good to end your time together by pausing to express gratitude to God for His Word and the work of His Spirit in your minds and hearts during your time together.

Get to know each other better. In early sessions together, you may want to spend time establishing trust, common ground, and a sense of each other's background and what each person hopes to gain from the study. This may help you later with honest discussion about how the Bible applies to each of you. Understanding each other better will make it easier to share about personal applications.

Keep these worthy guidelines in mind throughout your time together:

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

(HEBREWS 10:24)

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

(GALATIANS 6:2)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

(ROMANS 15:7)

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

God Responds to His People's Greatest Need

The book of Ezekiel is a book of extremes — scathing and stop-at-nothing in its portrayal of sin, yet vastly, soaringly gracious and positive in its offer of hope to all God's people. In it, God speaks to people whose lives were torn apart by their own and others' sins. Ezekiel pulls no punches in detailing what they were doing wrong, but he also portrays a God who is much, much bigger than His people's sins. This God promises to restore the nation not because the people will repent, but solely because He will offer them grace. He invites them to respond to that grace with repentance.

Background

Ezekiel lived “during a time of international upheaval.”¹ When Ezekiel was born, the Assyrian Empire controlled much of the Middle East. Then Assyria crumbled under the pressure of a rising power, Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was a seemingly unstoppable general. His territory soon included Ezekiel's country: Judah, part of the Promised Land and home to the Judeans or Jews.

In 597 BC, the king of Judah rebelled against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar squashed the revolt and took ten thousand Jews as exiles to Babylon. Among these exiles was Ezekiel, then in his twenties.

When the book of Ezekiel opens four years later (593 BC), Ezekiel is with the Jewish captives in Babylon. Most of their countrymen are still in Judah, now a vassal state under Babylon's control. The Jews both in exile and back home in Jerusalem hope that the Exile will soon end, that the captives will be able to go home, and that Jerusalem will be spared from any further warfare. False prophets both in exile and back home are encouraging these hopes. Ezekiel reveals that they are tragically mistaken but also points to a greater hope.

The timeline below highlights some of the major dates preceding and during the time of Ezekiel (some dates are approximate).

Assyria conquers Israel (the northern kingdom) and exiles the Israelite population.	722 BC
Assyria attacks Judah (the southern kingdom) and Jerusalem but is defeated through God's supernatural intervention (see Isaiah 36–37).	701
Estimated year of the birth of Ezekiel in Judea.	623
The Babylonians begin to conquer Assyrian territory.	616
Nineveh, Assyria's greatest city, falls to the Babylonians.	612
Judah's King Josiah is killed in the battle of Megiddo by Egyptian forces. The Egyptians dominate Judah, placing Jehoiakim on the throne.	609
Battle of Carchemish — Babylon defeats an alliance of Assyrians and Egyptians. Judah gives allegiance to the new power, Babylon. Some Judean nobles (including Daniel and his three friends) are taken captive to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar becomes king in Babylon.	605
Jehoiakim rebels against the Babylonians, but his revolt is crushed and he is killed. Jehoiachin becomes Judah's king, but he, too, resists Babylon and seeks help from Egypt.	598
Nebuchadnezzar sends an armed force to deal with Jerusalem. Jehoiachin and about 10,000 Jews (including Ezekiel) are exiled to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar places Zedekiah on Judah's throne. Zedekiah submits to Babylon for about a decade. Then he, too, rebels.	597
Ezekiel's first vision and call from God (see Ezekiel 1–3).	593
Ezekiel transported by the Spirit to Jerusalem to view abominations in the temple (see Ezekiel 8:1).	592
God gives Ezekiel an oracle outlining Israel's evil history (see Ezekiel 20:1).	591
Zedekiah rebels, and the Babylonians lay siege to Jerusalem (see Ezekiel 24:1).	588
Ezekiel's oracles against Tyre and Egypt (see Ezekiel 26:1; 29:1; 30:20; 31:1).	587–586
Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians, and the city and temple are burned (see Ezekiel 33:21). Zedekiah is slain.	586

Ezekiel's lament over Pharaoh (see Ezekiel 32:1,17).	585
Ezekiel's vision of the future temple and holy city (see Ezekiel 40:1).	573
Ezekiel given a later oracle concerning Nebuchadnezzar, Egypt, and Tyre (see Ezekiel 29:17).	571

Structure and arrangement

We can outline the book of Ezekiel like this:

- (I) Chapters 1–24. Ezekiel is called to be a prophet. He offers words and signs of judgment from God against His people.
- (II) Chapters 25–32. God speaks of judgment against Israel's neighbors.
- (III) Chapters 33–48. Ezekiel learns of the final fall of Jerusalem, the fulfillment of the judgment he predicted. He now sees past that judgment and offers teaching and encouragement for God's people regarding their future. The final chapters of this encouragement (chapters 40–48) are an extended vision from God of a new temple, a new city, and a new land of Israel.

Like other Old Testament prophetic books, such as Isaiah, the book moves generally from judgment against the prophet's own nation, to judgment against other nations, to future blessings for those who believe in God. Within each section of the book, the visions and oracles are not collected in a linear or chronological order. Each section is more like an album of separate photos than like a continuous video.

Ezekiel the man

When the book opens, Ezekiel is thirty years old, married, a homeowner, and brought up to be a priest. He is just starting his priestly ministry, although because he is more than a thousand miles from the temple in Jerusalem, he can't do the main job of a priest: offer sacrifices. At this turning point in his life, God calls him to be a prophet.

He is roughly the same age as Daniel. Years ago, back in Jerusalem, he probably heard the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah is still speaking to the Jews in Judah when Ezekiel takes up the same calling to the Jews in exile.

Being God's prophet proves to be a grueling job. God asks Ezekiel not just to speak for Him, but to act out God's terrible messages in ways that are sometimes degrading and sometimes heartbreaking. The Jews don't want to hear what Ezekiel has to say, and he bears in silence the knowledge that his beloved Jerusalem is going to be turned to rubble. God even asks him not to openly grieve the death of his wife so that he can share God's sorrow in the

death of the nation that was God's bride.

Ezekiel is consistently obedient to God through all of this, while also transparently revealing his reactions, emotions, and questions. His dependent trust in the Lord gives him strength, fearlessness, and faithfulness.

1. *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), introduction to Ezekiel: "Background."

EZEKIEL 1-3

Encountering God and His Call

1. One of the best guidelines for getting the most from Ezekiel is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, words which Paul wrote with the Old Testament first in view. He said that *all* Scripture is of great benefit to (a) teach us, (b) rebuke us, (c) correct us, and (d) train us in righteousness. Paul added that these Scriptures completely equip the person of God “for every good work.” As you think seriously about those guidelines, in which of these areas do you especially want to experience the usefulness of Ezekiel? Express your desire in a written prayer to God.

2. In Jeremiah 23:29, God says that His Word is “like fire” and “like a hammer.” He can use the Scriptures to burn away unclean thoughts and desires in our hearts. He can also use Scripture, with hammer-like hardness, to crush and crumble our spiritual hardness. From your study of Ezekiel, how do you most want to see the fire-and-hammer power of God’s Word at work in your own life? Again, express this longing in a written prayer to God.

Optional

Application: After His resurrection, when Jesus was explaining Old Testament passages to His disciples, we read that He “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Ask God to do that kind of work in your mind as you study Ezekiel so that you’re released and free to learn everything here He wants you to learn — and so that you can become as bold and worshipful and faithful as those early disciples of Jesus. Express this desire to Him in prayer.

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3. Think about these words of Paul to his younger helper Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). As you study God’s word of truth in Ezekiel, He calls you to be a “worker.” It takes *work* — concentration and perseverance — to fully appropriate God’s blessings for us in this book. Express here your commitment before God to work diligently in this study of Ezekiel.

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4. Glance ahead through the pages of Ezekiel. If your Bible has headings added into the text, scan these headings as you turn the pages. What overall impressions of this book do you gain?

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5. Now go through the first three chapters of Ezekiel in one continuous read. Again, what overall impressions do you gain?

Begin your concentrated study with a careful verse-by-verse reading of Ezekiel, and use the following questions and notes to help you process your discoveries.

Ezekiel 1

In my thirtieth year (1:1). Young men descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses, were destined to be priests. Priests offered sacrifices at God's temple in Jerusalem, and they served in other leadership and teaching functions in the community as well. Young men were trained for this role, and then they took up their priestly duties at age thirty (see Numbers 4:3,23,30,39,43; 1 Chronicles 23:3). So Ezekiel received his first vision, commissioning him to be a prophet, in the year when he would have taken up his priestly duties if he had not been exiled from Jerusalem. He was unable to offer sacrifices in Jerusalem, but now he had another task from God. The timing of his calling underlines the book's "priestly atmosphere."¹

Visions of God (1:1). See also 8:3 and 40:2.

Understanding Visions in Scripture

Here are four principles for interpreting visions in the Bible:

1. Think of the images as you would think of figurative language. Don't take them literally. For example, when the psalmist says, "The Lord is my shepherd," he doesn't mean that he himself is literally a sheep. He means that God relates to him in some ways that are like the way a shepherd relates to a sheep. The "shepherd" image creates a powerful mental picture. In the same way, the living creatures with four faces and four wings in Ezekiel 1 create a powerful mental picture that shows us something about God, angels, and spiritual reality. God doesn't have a literal throne built of creatures and wheels. He

(continued on page 18)

For Further Study:

Explore other Scriptures where God appears in glorious visions. Ezekiel would have been familiar with them. See Exodus 19; 24:15-18; 29:42-46; 40:34-38; Numbers 9:15-23; 14:10; 16:19; 20:6; 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 5:14; Isaiah 6:3. What links do you see between those passages and Ezekiel's experience related in Ezekiel 1?

(continued from page 17)

appeared to Ezekiel like that in order to teach us something.

2. Try to understand the main idea and emotion the vision conveys. Don't get bogged down interpreting every detail.

3. Pay attention to the interpretation the text itself gives about the vision. The Bible text will often explain what the vision means. The explanation usually emphasizes the big picture, not the details.

4. Look for parallel Bible passages. The prophets often try to apply past Scriptures to their present reality. The prophets also have basically one shared message about judgment and redemption that they convey in their various voices.²

On the fifth of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin (1:2). July 593 BC.³ More than ten times, Ezekiel tells us the precise date on which he received a vision. No other prophet does this. He was aware of how his visions were relevant to precise events back in Jerusalem. The visions came between 593 and 573 BC. They cover the last seven years of Jerusalem's survival as a place of life and worship, and then the first thirteen years of the Jews' grief over Jerusalem's destruction.

6. a. In the opening chapter of Ezekiel, verse 1 and verses 2-3 to some degree appear to be two parallel statements reinforcing each other. What do we learn about Ezekiel here in 1:1-3?

- b. In what way did Ezekiel encounter or experience God?

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- c. How would you relate Ezekiel's phrase "I saw visions of God" in verse 1 with the phrase "the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel" in verse 3?
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The hand of the LORD was on him (1:3). A similar phrase is used repeatedly in passages describing Ezekiel's visions. See also 3:14,22; 8:1; 37:1; and 40:1.

7. Describe what Ezekiel sees first in 1:4.
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Four living creatures (1:5). These are later called "cherubim" (see Ezekiel 10:1-5,15,20). Cherubim guard God's holiness and enforce His judgment. For instance, when Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden, cherubim were sent to guard the way back to the Tree of Life (see Genesis 3:24).⁴ Ezekiel would have seen cherubim depicted in the Jerusalem temple (see Exodus 25-26; 36-37; 1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3).

8. What seem to be the most important features of the four living creatures that Ezekiel sees in 1:5-14?
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For Thought and Discussion:

If some Christians today were somehow allowed to see exactly what Ezekiel saw in chapter 1, what impact do you think it would likely have on them?

For Further Study:

Compare Ezekiel 1:4-5 with Psalm 18:9-14; 97:2; Nahum 1:3. What do you think the image of God riding on a storm is meant to convey about Him?

Wherever the spirit would go, they would go (1:12). In this context, a vision of God's glorious presence, the "spirit" is probably the Holy Spirit, God Himself.

9. What seem to be the most important features of the wheels that Ezekiel sees in 1:15-21?

10. a. In 1:22-25, what else does Ezekiel *see* in regard to the four living creatures?

b. What does Ezekiel *hear* in these verses?

11. What is most significant in what Ezekiel sees and hears in 1:26-28?

Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day (1:28). The rainbow was a symbol of hope, of God's mercy and faithfulness despite a storm of judgment (see Genesis 9:12-16). In the midst of this terrifying vision, there

is a glimmer of hope. God has a covenant with His people, and that covenant says He must judge sin. But He will not destroy His people completely.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD (1:28). The “glory” of the Lord was His radiant presence. In the days of Moses He manifested His glory in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This vision isn’t a face-to-face experience of the glory, but the appearance of its likeness — an echo of it — and even that is enough to flatten Ezekiel. The revelation of God’s glory is a theme running through this book.

I fell facedown (1:28). Terror and falling down are a common response to beholding the holy God (see Isaiah 6:1-5; Revelation 1:10-18). It’s right to be terrified of God’s judgment. Falling facedown also indicates humility — Ezekiel doesn’t obstinately resist the revelation, but takes a lowly posture.

A Movement-Filled Vision

Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne in the temple (see Isaiah 6:1-7). Ezekiel sees the Lord on a throne, but the throne is not in the temple. Here the Lord is not fixed in the place where the priests are used to serving Him, but out on the move in the land where He is sending His people into exile. As in the book of Job, He moves in a “windstorm” (Ezekiel 1:4; compare Job 38:1). He’s not asleep or tame or trapped in the building the priests control. He’s alive and dangerous. He is visiting His exiled people not to rescue them and make everything all right, but to give a warning that even more judgment is yet to come, because the people haven’t repented. In Ezekiel 10, the prophet will see another vision of God’s glory abandoning His temple altogether so that the Babylonians can smash it.

For Further Study:

In summarizing this vision recorded in Ezekiel 1, the prophet says, “This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (1:28). Compare this with how others in Scripture encountered God’s glory in these passages: Exodus 16:6-12; 19:16-25; 24:15-18; 33:18-23; 34:5-8; 40:34-38; Numbers 16:16-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Isaiah 6:1-7; Daniel 10:1-19; Revelation 4:1-11.

Optional

Application: With Ezekiel 1 in mind, what do you think God most wants you to understand about His glory — and to praise Him for? Offer Him that praise now.

Optional

Application: Review the specifics of Ezekiel’s call in chapters 2 and 3. How might these specifics relate to what God has called you to do?

12. Look back over Ezekiel’s vision in 1:4-28. In what specific ways does Ezekiel see motion here?

Ezekiel 2 and 3

13. Ezekiel’s call is presented to us in chapters 2 and 3. What specific things does God tell Ezekiel to *do* or to *not do*?

Son of man (2:1). God calls Ezekiel “son of man” more than ninety times. The title means “human” and emphasizes Ezekiel’s mere humanness — his frailty, mortality, lowliness — compared with God’s holy glory and the cherubims’ heavenly majesty. The title reminds Ezekiel that he is totally dependent on the Spirit’s power, that in his mere humanness alone he couldn’t hope to receive God’s message and deliver it with authority. When Jesus calls Himself “Son of Man” in the Gospels, the title retains some of this humility — the Son of God has laid aside His divine privileges, humbling Himself to become fully human. But Jesus’ use of the term owes more to Daniel 7:13-14, where the “one like a son of man” is given sovereign power and is served as Messiah.

14. a. In this lengthy passage on Ezekiel’s call (chapters 2 and 3), in what ways does God demonstrate His grace?

b. In what ways does He demonstrate His holiness in these two chapters?

I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation (2:3). Instead of calling them “my people,” the ones with whom He has a covenant, God calls them literally “sons of Israel,” the true heirs of a rebellious man. This is not a happy sign.

They are a rebellious people (2:5). In this passage (2:1–3:15) that presents Ezekiel’s call, Israel is called a “rebellious people” six times (in 2:5-8; 3:9; 3:26-27).

God often launched the ministries of Old Testament prophets with visions of His glory. These first visions stuck in their minds, and when they hit tough times, they drew strength from the memory. Today, too, we need to base our lives and ministries on a “divine confrontation,”⁵ an understanding or experience of God’s glory that is more than just intellectual. Only by knowing God’s magnificence at our core can we humbly serve Him through the ups and downs of life. We may not have a vision or an emotional experience, but we need the Holy Spirit

For Thought and Discussion: God sent Ezekiel to speak to an audience of rebels, and He warned His prophet not to be afraid or discouraged because of their opposition or lack of response. Does the need for such a warning indicate any weakness on Ezekiel’s part? Why or why not?

For Thought and Discussion: In what ways, if any, might God’s description of Israel as a “rebellious people” (2:5-8; 3:9; 3:26-27) be correctly applied to God’s people today?

Optional Application: In whatever God has called you to do, how has He let you know of any difficulties or hardships to expect?

For Thought and Discussion: Ezekiel was told to speak God’s message even if people closed their ears to his words (see 2:5). How does this relate and apply to those who are called to preach and teach God’s Word today?

Optional

Application: In what sense and to what degree have you experienced an encounter with God and His glory that has helped define your understanding of what He wants you to do with your life? What difference has this made?

For Further Study: Partaking of God’s Word, Ezekiel found it to be “as sweet as honey” (3:3). How does that relate to what is taught in these passages: Psalm 19:10; 119:103; Proverbs 16:24; 24:13-14; Jeremiah 15:16?

to stamp our hearts with a true awareness of God’s reality and His character.

“Son of man, eat this scroll. . . .” So I ate it (3:3). Throughout most of the vision, Ezekiel is just a spectator. In this moment he is told to act, and he acts. The scroll is God’s Word, and not a very tasty Word, but he obediently digests it so that he can later speak it to the exiles.

Ezekiel is consistently humble and obedient to God’s Word. God appears and he falls on his face. God speaks and he listens. God tells him to stand and he stands. He is able to obey — to stand and hear God — only because the Spirit enables him. He will be able to speak to the exiles because the Spirit will empower him. When the vision is over, he sits for a week (see 3:15), unable to do anything without the Spirit.

“More than any other prophet, Ezekiel is a prophet of the Spirit. . . . Ezekiel not only spoke of the power of the Spirit; he embodied the Spirit’s power in his own person.”⁶

15. How would you summarize and explain Ezekiel’s response to his calling, as we see it recorded in 3:14-15?

The strong hand of the LORD on me (3:14). See also 3:22. Recall the similar wording in 1:3.

Bitterness (3:14). Anguish, distress. It gives Ezekiel no pleasure to convey the Word he's been given.

I came to the exiles. . . . I sat among them (3:15). He doesn't stand above or apart from the exiles. He doesn't speak from some safe, comfortable place. He shares the devastation of all they've lost and all they fear to lose.

16. When the Lord made Ezekiel a “watchman” for Israel, what significant responsibilities did this bring, according to 3:16-21?

Watchman (3:17). A sentry who stands on the city wall, watching for dangers from outside or inside, so that he can warn the citizens.

Get up and go out to the plain (3:22). Or, “Arise, go out into the valley” (ESV) — the broad river valley between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in what is now Iraq. The vision of dry bones (see 37:1) will take place here.⁷

17. In 3:22-27 . . .

a. What does the Lord ask Ezekiel to do?

b. What does the Lord say will happen to Ezekiel?

For Thought and Discussion: What do you think it means experientially for someone to sense, as Ezekiel did, “the strong hand of the LORD on me” (3:14)?

For Thought and Discussion: We read in 3:15 of Ezekiel's being overwhelmed for a week by what he had just seen and heard. What kinds of thoughts do you imagine were going through his mind?

For Thought and Discussion:

God made Ezekiel a watchman to give warning to His people. Does God give warnings to His people today? If so, how?

For Further Study:

Keeping in mind Ezekiel’s God-given role as a watchman, compare this to other prophets who served as watchmen. What else do you learn about the biblical concept of a watchman as seen in these passages: Isaiah 21:6-12; 62:6-7; Jeremiah 6:16-17; 31:5-6? Also, in the New Testament, how is this function served by church leaders, according to the instruction in Acts 20:28-31 and Hebrews 13:17?

c. How might these things deepen Ezekiel’s calling as God’s prophet and spokesman and his dependence on God?

I fell facedown. Then the Spirit . . . raised me to my feet (3:23-24). See Ezekiel’s similar experience seven days earlier in 1:28 and 2:1.

Ezekiel has not been shown the promise of judgment for his own curiosity. He has been sent on a mission of life and death. Those who hear him and repent will live; those who reject him will die. He isn’t responsible for results. He is responsible for obedience, for giving the warning, despite the price he may pay.

The Spirit . . . spoke to me and said: “Go, shut yourself inside your house. And you, son of man, they will tie with ropes. . . . I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth” (3:24-26). Ezekiel is going to be a living picture of the exiles’ captivity. His imprisonment will be self-inflicted (“Go, shut yourself”) and inflicted by others (“they will tie”) and caused by God (“I will make”). With all three of these causes at once, there will be no escape, no deciding to end it.⁸

You will be silent. . . . But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth (3:26-27). For seven and a half years, until the destruction of Jerusalem,

Ezekiel would be unable to speak — except on the handful of occasions when God gave him a message to deliver. His muteness would set him apart from the many prophets who spoke constantly, and it would make his rare speeches all the more dramatic in hopes of striking his hearers to the heart.

18. What would you select as the key verse or passage in Ezekiel 1–3—one that best captures or reflects the dynamics of what these chapters are all about?

19. List any lingering questions you have about Ezekiel 1–3.

For the group

(In your first meeting, it may be helpful to turn to the front of this book and review together “How to Use This Guide” starting on page 5.)

You may want to focus your discussion for lesson 1 especially on the following issues, themes, and concepts (which are recognized as major overall themes in Ezekiel). How are they further developed in chapters 1–3?

- God’s glory and sovereignty
- The depth of human sinfulness
- The certainty, nature, and purpose of God’s judgment against sin
- The nature of God’s covenant relationship with His people
- The promise of mercy and hope for the future

Optional

Application: Ezekiel 3 emphasizes the prophet’s dependence on God and His Spirit in order to accomplish what God called him to do. In a personally meaningful way, how would you express the same kind of need and dependence in your own life?

The following numbered questions in lesson 1 may stimulate your best and most helpful discussion: 4, 5, 11, 14, 16, 18, and 19.

Look also at the questions in the margins under the headings “For Thought and Discussion” and “Optional Application.”

1. Ralph H. Alexander, *Ezekiel*, vol. 6 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 754.
2. Based on Alexander, 756.
3. *ESV Study Bible*, introduction to Ezekiel: “Dates in Ezekiel.”
4. Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, in *The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 59.
5. Alexander, 760.
6. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, in the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 50.
7. *ESV Study Bible*, at Ezekiel 3:22-23.
8. Duguid, 80.