



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Year Seven
Ezekiel Lessons
Part 1

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Lesson 1: Omnipresence and Omniscience (Ezekiel 1)

Primary Verse: “And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain... Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD...” (Ezekiel 1:26-28a)

Teaching Text: Ezekiel 1

Supporting Texts: Exodus 19:9,16-20; Exodus 20:1-6, Exodus 40:34-38

Living Creatures: It is hard to get beyond the appearance of these four creatures as they appear to be pregnant with symbolism and shrouded in mystery. Some have suggested the lion (wild animals), ox (domesticated animals), eagle (“water” creatures, see note below*), and human (the highest order of creatures) represent what ancient Israelites would have understood as the four main categories of creatures. Some argue each face is a characteristic: lion stands for royalty; ox for strength; eagle for compassion, and the human for intelligence or spirit. Whatever your interpretation is, it is crucial to recognize these creatures are just that - creatures. They serve their Creator Who is the true focus of the passage.

Wheels and Eyes: Though these words don’t often go *with* each other, in Ezekiel’s vision, they go *on* each other. The wheels are a special innovation that, no doubt, left the prophet in wonderment as there was no need for turning since the wheels could not only go forward and backward but also left to right (v. 17), in any of four directions. The wheels (or their rims) were covered with eyes. Though this may seem disturbing, it should fill us with comfort because the meaning here is clear: the wheels speak to unlimited mobility while the eyes speak of seeing. Contrary to the false religions of the day that were tied to regions and rituals, the God of Israel sees, knows, and goes far beyond even Solomon’s national borders.

Questions to Consider: Is there any practical significance to knowing dates of and the settings in which prophets received divine revelation? Why do the terms “likeness” and “appearance” occur so often? Do such terms indicate precision or approximation? How might these terms matter in light of the Second Commandment? How would the appearance of the rainbow serve to “balance” the vision of this awe-inspiring One on the throne? Why might this vision be *particularly* encouraging/surprising to exiles?

Challenging the Class: Ponder the significance of the storm imagery all over this chapter and is also common whenever God’s presence is made manifest. Aren’t you glad the God we meet in scripture is unimpeded by the things that tend to frighten us and cause us to alter our plans? Recall seasons of storm and strife in your life. Why not give God glory by sharing with someone (especially an unbeliever) how God was faithfully present in this time of trouble? Proclaiming the goodness of God and recognizing His glory is basic to Christian living.

*Ancient Near East literature in various cultures often paired fish and birds together. The Israelites were no different, consider how the habitats for both creatures were made on the same day and birds/fish are created the same day as well (Gen. 1:6-10 and 1:20-23).

Lesson 2: Faithful, but Fruitless? The Despised but Dignified Watchman (Ezekiel 2-3)

Primary Verse: “Behold I have made your face as hard as their faces and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. Like emery harder than flint have I made your forehead. Fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. Moreover, He said to me, ‘Son of Man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. And go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ whether they hear or refuse to hear.’” (Ezekiel 3:8-11)

Teaching Text: Ezekiel 2-3

Supporting Texts: Ezekiel 1; Exodus 5:1-6:13; 1 Kings 22:1-40; Proverbs 1:20-33, 12:1

“If a man offers correction without love, he is an abuser. But do not be deceived: a man who loves but never corrects is an abuser just the same.” – Author Unknown

The godless corners of culture in what we broadly call “Western culture” (the U.S., Canada, and Western Europe) have embraced and are now fully ensnared in relativism. Relativism is an approach or worldview that there are no absolute truths—nothing is truly right or truly wrong—but it depends on the circumstances and opinions of the persons who are in the situation. Founded on this idea, when a biblically-based statement is voiced against some sexual sin, for instance, the common reply of the unbeliever is, “Who are you to judge?” It is as if the unbeliever is unable to distinguish the individual Christian from the biblical position which pre-dates the Christian by centuries. Why? Because relativism generally affirms and centralizes authority in an individual and not in any objective source (like the Bible).

The situation above is not surprising: the world is going to be “the world.” But what happens when the world’s thinking infiltrates the church? When preachers/teachers are no longer willing or able to correct members of their congregations, how will they effectively lead professing Christians to avoid sin and grow in holiness? The situation is equally horrifying when Christians fear warning fellow believers of sin for fear of being called out for being “judgmental.” When Christian parents fail to correct their children with scripture because they don’t want to appear hypocritical since, as children, they committed the same sins, we are officially in crisis. Why? Because when Christians can’t remember the Bible stands alone on its own authority and is useful for correction, who is left to proclaim the whole counsel of God?

Questions to Consider: How does Ezekiel’s call compare with Jeremiah’s call (Jeremiah 1)? What is the difference between the hardness of the Israelites and the hardness of Ezekiel in 2:3-8 and 3:7-9? Why do so many find correction so difficult to receive? Is the problem in the one who corrects or in the one receiving correction? Or both? Is studying examples of ignored prophets encouraging or depressing? Or both? How can a message so bitter be sweet (Ezekiel 3:1-3)? Why the command to “fill your belly?” How might a glance at passages about “honey” in scripture influence your understanding?

Challenging the Class: When was the last time you patiently, lovingly, but clearly and directly corrected a fellow Christ-follower who was in sin (speech, attitude, action, lack of action, or ignorance)? Because repentance is basic to the life of the believer, why not set an example of one who takes godly rebuke humbly and gives correction with sincere, Christ-exalting, concern for fellow sinners? You will need to be full of God’s word before you do!

Lesson 3: Strange, but Sanctified: The Watchman's Burden (Ezekiel 4-5)

Primary Verse: “And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and emmer, and put them into a single vessel and make your bread from them. During the number of days that you lie on your side, 390 days, you shall eat it. And your food that you shall eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day; from day to day you shall eat it. And water you shall drink by measure, the sixth part of a hin; from day to day you shall drink. And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung. Then I said, ‘Ah, Lord GOD!’” (Ezekiel 4:9-12; 14a)

Teaching Text: Ezekiel 3:22-27, Chapters 4-5

Supporting Texts: Ezekiel 3:12-17, Jeremiah 27, Hosea 1-3

God planted in Ezekiel a burden for His message and His people such that the prophet could not abandon the divine mission without contradicting himself: mind, body, and soul. But God is faithful! He shapes the burden for the back but also shapes the back of his servants for the burden.

– Ravi Zacharias

Playing with Legos: Ezekiel was commanded to either engrave or perhaps construct a replica of the city of Jerusalem. Why? So he could build a model siege wall against it. But that's not all. Also, Ezekiel had to create a series of battering rams all around the city of his hands in order to signify the destruction of the city his heart loved.

Laying Down on the Job: Consider what it must have been like for Ezekiel to lay on one side of his body—without moving (Ezekiel 4:8)—for 390 days. He must have faced a severe lack of comfort, bedsores, circulation problems, etc. Can you imagine being his wife or child? There's no mention of how Ezekiel provided for his family during this year on his side. What a price to pay to illustrate God's judgment!

Bad Haircuts and Early Balding: Frustration leads many to “pull hair out,” but Ezekiel's message required him to shave his hair off. Note the meticulous method involved in the shaving and the removal of the hair, not to mention the very odd substitute for a razor! Ezekiel's hair symbolizes the various ways God's judgment will fall upon His unfaithful covenant people. But this sign also contains a glimmer of hope because it reintroduces the remnant theme found in Elijah's day (1 Kings 19:18) and elsewhere.

How far are **you** willing to go in order to get God's message across to those who need to hear it?

Questions to Consider: How might Ezekiel's week at the Chebar canal have prepared for this dramatic aspect of his ministry? Why is Ezekiel commissioned to perform various signs to illustrate one basic event? Is the use of multiple signs in this case an efficient use of time/effort by our standards? Why or why not? When other prophets used these kinds of illustrations, were they successful by our standards? If so, which prophets succeeded and how? If not, why would God have Ezekiel use the same techniques? Are our standards for successful ministry the same as God's? Why or why not?

Challenging the Class: Daily reading and meditative in-take of scripture is basic to the Christian life. If the Word of God rarely comes out of you, maybe it's because it's rarely in you? “Let a man examine himself!” Do you need the encouragement of fellow Christians in this matter? “Ask and you shall receive!”

Lesson 4: When the Façade Fades: The Horror of False Worship (Ezekiel 8-10)

Primary Verse: “Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, lift up your eyes now toward the north.’ So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. And he said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see still greater abominations.’” (Ezekiel 8:5-6)

Teaching Text: Ezekiel 8-10

Supporting Texts: Exodus 32, Jeremiah 7, Ezekiel 6-7

There are few concurrent chapters of the Bible more disturbing than Ezekiel 8-10. Flagrant disregard for God in His house is hard for any believer to swallow. How could things in Judah have gotten so bad that worship looked this way? Again, it is one thing for the pretense of right worship to go on in the temple while secretly attending to idolatrous urges in private. For sure, there is some of that in the vision as well. However, if Ezekiel had not seen it in a vision to relate to the reader, how many would have ever imagined the worship of a false god in the temple of the true and living God? John Calvin, a great expositor of scripture, reflected on the matter like this,

“The greater dishonor done to God was in the turning of their backs on the sanctuary. They could have polluted themselves with such defilements at home in secret. But instead, they came voluntarily into the temple as if they wanted to challenge God openly and violently. Now, when they turn their back, this is not merely a repugnant denial but an outrageous contempt of God. As if they had said that God is unworthy of their respect.”

The two chief consequences to what is seen in Ezekiel 8 are plain in Ezekiel 9 and 10. God marks out, for destruction, men from all over the city except those who have a mark identifying them as those who did not partake in false worship but grieved over it. In chapter 10, the glory of the Lord departs. The simplicity of the punishments, however, does not diminish the profound tragedy of love for God gone cold and covenant with Him broken with prejudice. God’s holiness demands justice.

Questions to Consider: Carefully examine Exodus 32:4-5 when answering the following question. How does the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32 relate to Ezekiel’s vision of corrupted temple worship? Why did Israel/Judah imagine they could fuse the worship of multiple deities (synergism) despite the obvious prohibitions in the Book of the Law? Are there hints in the chapters that answer the previous question? What else do you know about human nature that might apply in this case? Ezekiel 8:17 makes a connection between abominable worship in the temple and violence in the land. How would you explain that connection to someone denying there’s any relationship between the two?

Challenging the Class: There’s a time to blend and there’s a time to separate. But we are never to blend what God tells us to separate nor are we to separate what God calls us to blend. Love for God is meant to blend with love for our neighbor, but even there, there is a proper order (Mark 12:28-34). However, worshipping God is never to be blended with reverence for anything else no matter how innocently we do it. Nationality, culture, history, ancestry/descendants, church leaders, etc. are all gifts from God, but we must never make these gifts rivals by how highly we regard them. *Exclusive* loyalty to God is basic to the faith.

Learning God's Lessons

"Yet I will leave some of you alive. When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive" (vv. 8–9a).

- Ezekiel 6

Ezekiel 6 shines a ray of hope for the old covenant community for the first time in the prophet's book. In Ezekiel 1–5, we hear the sounds of doom, predictions of starvation, destruction, and death for the ancient Jews. Today's passage, however, reveals that they would learn God's lessons about idolatry in the experience of exile.

The chapter does not begin positively—Ezekiel addresses the "mountains of Israel" and speaks of such things as dead bodies in the Holy Land and the cities being laid waste (vv. 1–7). Since mountains are one of the dominant geographical features of Canaan, commentators believe Ezekiel addresses the entire people of God, both Israel in the north and Judah in the south, even though at the time of his prophecy, the northern kingdom had been gone for more than a century. That Ezekiel addresses the whole country reflects the prophetic insistence that though Israel and Judah were divided during the era of the writing prophets, the people were still one and that there would be a reunion of north and south in the post-exilic restoration (Jer. 3:15–18; Ezek. 37:15–28). In any case, Ezekiel is clear that the whole land was polluted by idolatry, and so the whole land needed to be purified, including the Holy City of Jerusalem.

After Jerusalem's destruction and Judah's exile, Ezekiel foresees that those who escape with their lives will realize the error of their ways, see how they have offended the Lord, and regard themselves as "loathsome in their own sight." This is a picture of the repentance that would come as the Jews were forced to live "among the nations" (Ezek. 6:8–9). The exile would prove that Yahweh is Lord indeed, and the people would learn the lesson that God never speaks in vain and that He keeps His promises to judge the impenitent as well as His promises to bless the faithful (v. 10). When the Lord enacted the covenant curses, the people would know Him as their only Savior and God.

Ezekiel enjoys vindication historically. After the people came back to their land, they did not worship false gods like they did prior to the exile. The Jewish community as a whole finally embraced the fierce monotheism of the Old Testament, and no longer tolerated the rank idolatry and worship at pagan high places like they did before they were expelled from Canaan. Still, as we will see in the months ahead, other problems proved that the people's post-exilic repentance was not as thorough as it should have been.

Coram Deo

The returned exiles, by and large, got rid of all overt idolatry in Canaan when they came back from Babylon. However, the later prophets and the New Testament show us that they did not go far enough, and groups such as the Pharisees had a relationship with God that was merely formal and not birthed by a love for the Lord in heart, soul, mind, and strength. The results of true repentance, however, are always a true, though imperfect, love of God from one's entire being.

Passages for Further Study

Luke 11:37–52

2 Corinthians 7

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True Vs. False Repentance

According to the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Louw & Nida) the word repentance means, *to change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness*. In repentance, a person is given a true sense of the heinous nature of sin and, hating it, they turn to God through Christ with the desire to part ways with it. It is a gift that God gives to us and true repentance leads to eternal life (2 Tim. 2:25).

The Bible does make it clear that not all repentance is genuine, though. Paul said to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11,

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point, you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

Based on this Scripture and others, here are some of the distinguishing characteristics between true and false repentance:

True repentance does not regret parting ways with sin; false repentance does.

Because God grants us a clear view of our sins in repentance, we don't regret the loss of them. False repentance is characterized by a continual longing for the "old life." Although a person may have made certain external changes in their life, their heart is continually drawn back to the sins they miss. Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:62).

Now, it's important to note that this doesn't mean we won't face old temptations as believers. There's a constant struggle between the old and the new man (Gal. 5:17), and this conflict is itself an indication that we have been enlightened by God to see our sin as something we must fight against. We don't always experience victory on the battlefield though, and often the Christian life can feel like a string of defeats. The good news is when we sin, we have an advocate before the Father pleading our case (1 Jn. 2:1), and as he grants us victory, we rejoice over the death of our sin, rather than mourning its loss.

True repentance hates sin; false repentance hates the consequences of sin.

True repentance is often characterized by a godly anger about the terrible nature of sin. This zealous indignation is concerned with God's glory and the flourishing of the image of God in humanity. False repentance is less concerned about the glory of God and more concerned with getting caught. This type of concern is what Paul calls "worldly grief." True repentance often takes the initiative in bringing sin into the light (through confession) since it hates the sin itself, not just its consequences. Jesus said, "For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God" (Jn. 3:20-21).

True repentance accepts godly counsel and accountability; false repentance avoids accountability.

It should not escape our notice that the Corinthians' "eagerness to clear themselves" resulted in honesty and accountability, such that the apostle Paul was able to write to them about the situation in question. The repentant person recognizes they aren't beyond falling and that they need to be vigilant so as not to give in to sinful temptations (1 Cor. 10:12). False repentance is often characterized by a resentment for authority and a confidence in one's own abilities to live a holy life. Sadly, this is often self-deception, and the real reason that the falsely repentant rejects accountability is because they don't yet want to abandon their sinful habit.

False repentance is scary because it can trick us into thinking we've truly repented when, in reality, we've only found more crafty ways to hold on to our sin. Do you constantly long for your sin? Do you love your sin more than Jesus and find yourself only hating its consequences? Do you avoid brothers and sisters who will be honest with you about your sin because you don't want to be held accountable? There is still hope for you.

Speaking of our Lord's promise to return and judge the world, Peter says, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). God doesn't want you to continue in worldly grief that ultimately leads to death; rather, his will is that you might experience the genuine repentance that leads to life.

If you've been "faking" it, pray for forgiveness, and ask that the Lord would give you a true sense of your sin so that you might part ways with it. Go to spiritually mature brothers or sisters within the church and embrace godly accountability. Turn to Jesus, the one who doesn't cast out those who go to him—see John 6:37—and is not willing that you should perish, but he is for your genuine repentance.

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