



VISIONS of Glory

— THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL —

Introduction

"Don't take God's glory for granted."

This is the warning of Ezekiel's prophecy to God's people and to us today. Ezekiel brought God's words to his people while they were in exile in Babylon (593 BC). Although Israel had become a displaced people through the Babylonian conquest, Ezekiel warned that it was just the beginning – the worst was still yet to come.

Ezekiel's vivid visions and prophecies anticipated the lowest moment in Israel's history – culminating in the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of its temple (586 BC). The temple represented all of Israel's hopes where God had promised to dwell with his people, which would have been their source of life and blessing.

However, Israel had taken God's covenant promises for granted. They had desecrated his temple through idolatry and hardened their hearts against him in disobedience. As the result, God's glory was about to depart from their midst.

The first half of the book warns us that we have not fully appreciated the depth of our sin and our plight before a holy God. However, it is not all bad news. God's glory will not just come in judgement, but will also result in salvation. The second half of the book then casts our vision forward to the future restoration of God's people and the triumphant return of God's presence amongst them.

Messages of Judgment Against Israel			Messages of Hope For Israel		
The Call 1-3	Signs and Visions 4-11	Oracles of Judgment 12-24	Oracles against the Nations 25-32	The Restoration of Israel 33-39	The Reconstitution of Israel 40-48

Daniel I. Block: By the River Chebar: Historical, Literary, and Theological Studies in the Book of Ezekiel, p. 6

Ultimately, Ezekiel's message drives our hopes forward to the coming of Jesus Christ – the one who reveals God's glory (John 1:14). He is also the one who warned that our sin was so grievous that his body would be destroyed – like the temple in Jerusalem – and raised again in three days (John 2:19–22).

At the centre of the book of Ezekiel stands the centre of human history – a bloody wooden cross that simultaneously reveals the horror of our sin and the beauty of God's glory. The book, therefore, functions as an urgent call to repentance before God and a grand call to life with him.

Ezekiel: A Reading Guide

As we journey together through the book of Ezekiel over seven weeks, we have chosen some key passages for the sermons. In addition to these key passages, we will also be referring to some larger passages. We are inviting you to read them to help you immerse deeper into Ezekiel's world and understand his message better.

Our suggested reading guide is:

Week	Sermon title	Sermon passage	Larger passage
1 4 September	Glory Revealed	1:1–2:7	1:1–3:27
2 11 September	Glory Departs	8:1–18	8:1–11:25
3 18 September	Glory in Judgement	18:1–32	15:1–18:32
4 25 September	Glory amongst the Nations	28:1–19	25:1–32:32
5 2 October	Glory in Salvation	34:1–31	33:1–34:31
6 9 October	Glory in Life	37:1–14	36:16–37:28
7 16 October	Glory Returns	43:1–12	40:1–48:35

Study 1

Glory Revealed

Ezekiel 1:1–2:7

Context

By the banks of the Chebar River in Babylon, Ezekiel the priest stood amongst those exiled and displaced from their home. Five years before, the Babylonians – and their king Nebuchadnezzar – had exiled Judah’s king along with Ezekiel and several thousand Israelites.

These exiles would have experienced deep feelings of abandonment with serious questions about the presence of God. With this background, Ezekiel was about to receive one of the most complex visions of a throne, on which God sat in his glory. Immerse yourself in the description that follows.

Observation

Read Ezekiel 1:1–28

1. As you read this vivid description of God’s glory, write down one word you would use to describe it and share it with the group.

2. Ezekiel saw 'wheels within wheels' (verses 16–17). This was a vision of God's mobile chariot – a throne that could travel in any direction as led by God's spirit. Why would an exile in Babylon need to know that God reigned from a mobile throne?

Read Ezekiel 2:1–7

3. After encountering God's awesome glory, Ezekiel was commissioned by God as a prophet to his people. How are these people described?

Read Ezekiel 3:4–7

4. God already knew how his people would respond to Ezekiel's message. What does this suggest about the purpose of Ezekiel's ministry?

Meaning

5. These exiles questioned the existence and presence of their God. How would this vision speak into these doubts, including to us who are elect exiles (1 Peter 1:1–2)?

6. In what ways do you see Ezekiel's ministry reflected in Jesus' ministry?

Application

7. We have encountered God's glory (John 1:14). How does Ezekiel's response to God's glory (1:28) compare with your view of God? What would need to change about your understanding of God to produce this kind of worship?

8. When someone experiences intense suffering, they often ask "where is God?" as the Israelites did. How would you counsel someone asking similar questions?

Study 2

Glory Departs

Ezekiel 8:1–18

Context

God had saved Israel from slavery in Egypt and made a covenant with them to be their God – that they might be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Exodus 5:7 and 19:6). However, Israel broke the covenant (Deuteronomy 4: 17–18) by worshipping idols – provoking God’s judgement against them (2 Kings 22:16–17).

God then used the Babylonian king to judge Israel (2 Kings 24:3–4) in 597 BC when the Babylonians plundered Judah and exiled its people to Babylon, including Ezekiel. However, God’s judgement was not yet complete. The worst – the fall of Jerusalem – was still yet to come.

As we saw in the last study, Ezekiel was a prophet in exile in Babylon. God called him to forewarn the Israelites that Jerusalem would fall as a result of God’s judgement on their sin. In this study, we will see how God transported Ezekiel in a vision to the temple in Jerusalem to show him Israel’s sin, as well as God’s judgement and glory.

Through the vivid imagery, God wanted Ezekiel (and us) to see and feel it. Let it build a picture in your mind and engage your emotions to feel the weight of sin, judgement and the glory of God.

1. Why was the temple in Jerusalem so significant? See 1 Kings 8:27–29.

Observation

Read Ezekiel 8:1–18 (close your eyes to picture it if you can!)

2. God took Ezekiel to various parts of the temple in Jerusalem and repeatedly asked him to 'see'. What did Ezekiel see? How did God respond? Base your answers on these verses:
 - a. verses 5 to 6
 - b. verses 9 to 12
 - c. verses 14 to 17

Read Ezekiel 9

3. God then showed Ezekiel his judgement in the vision. What did it look like? How does that make you feel?

Study 3

Glory in Judgement

Ezekiel 18:1–32

Context

In our last study, we built a picture of God's temple and engaged our emotions to feel the weight of sin, judgement and the glory of God. In this study, we will see that God's word came to Ezekiel again for him to speak to the exiled people of Israel.

God wanted to address the Israelites' claim that the reason for their circumstances was because of sin that had occurred in previous generations (both corporately and individually) – not anything that they themselves had done wrong.

Observation

Read Ezekiel 18:1–20

1. What was common and different among the three generations of the grandfather, father and son?

Read Ezekiel 18:21–32

2. What distinguishes the wicked-turned-righteous person (verses 21–23 and 27–28) from the righteous-turned-wicked person (verses 24 and 26)?

3. God described to Israel how his judgement was inescapable. What did he call the people to do in response, and for what result (verses 30–31)?

Meaning

God concluded his response to Israel's proverb by stating that he had no pleasure in the death of anyone (verse 32). He also promised to remember his original covenant with Israel and establish an everlasting covenant with those who had sinned against him (16:60–63).

4. How has God revealed to us that he can remain just (18:25) when he responds to our sin? See Romans 3:21–26.

Application

5. In what practical ways can you encourage yourself and your life group to repent?

6. What opportunities do you have to share the good news of Jesus in everyday conversations about judgement and justice in our world?

Study 4

Glory amongst the Nations

Ezekiel 28:1–19

Context

Chapters 25 to 32 in the book of Ezekiel contain a series of oracles against seven nations surrounding Israel, specifically:

- Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia (25:1–17)
- Tyre (26:1–28:19)
- Sidon (28:20–23)
- Egypt (29:1–32:32)

These oracles against the nations were also a message of hope for Israel. The address to Israel (28:24–26) pronounces hope that God himself would once again regather Israel and fulfil his promise to Jacob (verse 25) and security after God executed judgement against Israel's neighbouring enemies (verse 26). What was the purpose? So that the Israelites would know he was the Lord their God.

This study zooms into the oracles against Tyre in three sections:

- Charges against Tyre for desiring to take the place of Jerusalem as God's city (26:11–21)
- Lamentation on Tyre's past glory and present loss (27:1–36)
- Charges against Tyre's ruler for desiring to be God (28:1–19)

Observation

1. What charges (28:1–5) and consequences (28:6–10) were pronounced against the Prince of Tyre?
2. How does this lamentation show God’s involvement in the rise (28:11–15) and fall (28:16–19) of the King of Tyre?
3. Why would God want Israel to hear his pronouncements of judgement against these nations (28:25–26)?

Meaning

4. The phrase “then they will know that I am the Lord” occurs 18 times in this section. What does this indicate about God’s purpose for his judgement on the nations?

5. How does God's judgement on the nations anticipate the second coming of Christ?
See Revelation 11:15–18.

Application

6. How do we experience and resist the seduction of pride, wealth and power in our world today?
7. How does this passage deepen our understanding and heighten our appreciation for the rule of Christ over our world today?

Study 5

Glory in Salvation

Ezekiel 34:1–31

Context

Preceding our passage is chapter 33, which acts as the turning point in the book of Ezekiel. First, God called Ezekiel to be Israel's watchman – to warn the people of God's impending judgement, so they might repent from their wicked ways and live (33:1–20).

When Jerusalem subsequently fell, a surviving fugitive fled to the exiles and told Ezekiel of the tragedy that had befallen the city – just as God said it would (33:21–29). As if things could not get any worse, God also alerted Ezekiel to the complacent attitude his fellow exiles held towards Jerusalem's downfall – believing that they were outside the scope of God's judgement this time (33:30–33).

Against this backdrop of judgement, chapter 34 will assure us that God was not done with his people. In seeking to punish the greedy shepherds and proud sheep of Israel, God would also regather his lost and weak sheep back to the safety of his care.

Observation

1. Read Ezekiel 34:1–10. Who were the shepherds God was referring to? And what were God's charges against them?

2. How were God and the false shepherds different in their treatment of the Israelites (34:11–24)?

3. God was going to judge between “sheep and sheep” after speaking against the shepherds for abusing the sheep under their care (34:17–22). Why would God move from addressing the shepherds to the sheep?

Meaning

God’s covenant of peace was to be fulfilled after he had gathered his sheep under a Davidic shepherd, who would be the “prince among his flock” (34:23–31).

4. How did Jesus fulfil his role as the true shepherd (John 10:10–11)?

Study 6

Glory in Life

Ezekiel 37:1–14

Context

In our previous study, we saw God's promise to regather Israel's scattered sheep. In this study, we will see how God continued to act on behalf of his people by restoring Israel to himself (chapter 36 and 37). He promised that the people would not only be as numerous as sheep, but they would also truly love and obey God.

This promise, however, seemed impossible in light of Israel's condition at that time. The house of Israel had continued to defile the land and profane the name of the Lord (36:17). Because of this, Ezekiel was taken on yet another vision where God showed him (and us) how this promise was going to be made possible.

Observation

Read Ezekiel 37:1–10

1. If you were Ezekiel, how would you feel after receiving the vision (verses 1–3)?

2. What was Ezekiel's role in God's work of renewal (verses 4-10)?

Read Ezekiel 37:11-14

3. Despite the despair of the exiles (verse 11), how would the vision (verses 12-14) provide hope for the future?

Meaning

4. What was so significant about the breath of God (verses 5, 8-9)? See also Genesis 2:7.
5. What was God's ultimate purpose in salvation (36:22-23, 37:14)? What does this reveal about his character?

Study 7

Glory Returns

Ezekiel 43:1–12

Context

In our previous study, we saw God's promise to resurrect a spiritually dead Israel (chapter 37). In this study, we will witness a grand reversal. Ezekiel's final vision (chapter 40–48) was a contrast to the tragedy where God's glory left the temple (chapters 8–11). This time, Ezekiel saw an entirely new temple, which he described as a city (40:1).

We will see that God's glory was returning to the enormous new city-temple. Our eyes may glaze over the details in chapters 40–42, but it is important to see the temple as central to Israel's identity as God's people – a renewed temple means a renewed people.

Observation

Read Ezekiel 43:1–12

1. What was the significance of God's glory returning to the temple (verses 1–5)? How did it relate to Ezekiel's previous visions (verse 3)?

2. God promised that his people would no longer defile his holy name (verses 7–9). How would this be possible?

Read Ezekiel 43:23–27

3. Despite the renewed priesthood and worship, sacrifice was still necessary in the temple. What might this anticipate in the future? See Hebrews 9:11–14.

Read Ezekiel 47:1–12

4. Split into two groups to compare and contrast Ezekiel's vision of the temple with:
 - a. the description of the garden (Genesis 2:4–14) - *first group*
 - b. the description of the city (Revelation 22:1–5) - *second group*

Regroup and share your observation.

Meaning

5. Based on our observation in the previous four questions, what do you think Ezekiel's vision of the temple was describing?

Application

6. How has our journey together throughout the book of Ezekiel enriched your understanding and appreciation of God's glory?

7. How does a big vision of God's glory change the way we relate to the world around us?